An Interview with
BOB
PERCHETTI

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
2011

Bob Perchetti
(Minnie Perchetti)
2008

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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.

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—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

Interview by Robert McCracken, talking to Bob Perchetti at the Clown Motel in Tonopah, Nevada, April 9, 16, 23, and 29, and May 19, 2010.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Bob, why don't we start with you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate and when and where you were born?

BP: My name is Robert Wayne Perchetti. I was born on July 21, 1938. My doctor was Dr. Craig. My good friend Mike Fitch lives in the old hospital building, which was the Miner's Hospital. I think that's on Central Street.

RM: I interviewed your mom the other day, but I'd like to go into family background with you, because your history is a stand-alone document, as is hers. So, for the purpose of this interview, please tell me your mother's name and some background on her.

BP: Well, my mother is Minnie May Boscovich, and she was later married in 1937 to my dad, Anthony Perchetti. She was born on June 26, 1920, on Magnolia Street in the old Boscovich home. She actually moved just ten feet in the last 90 years from my grandmother's house up to the house that she lives in now.

It's a historic family, Serbian Yugoslavian background. My grandmother had three sons, and her daughter was my mother Minnie. It's a wonderful story, because my grandmother Christina was such a unique lady. Like many of the Yugoslavian ladies that lived in Tonopah she was not educated in the English language. She came across through Ellis Island and crossed by rail to Reno.

My grandmother, of course, was a mail-order bride, which made her unique. She met her husband, Nick Boscovich, and got married on the same day that they met. Nick Boscovich worked in Silver Peak at the Mary Mine with her brother Steve, and he wanted a wife, and her brother said, "Well, I have the right one for you. My older sister Christina would be perfect." And it was like a marriage that should have happened, because they were a handsome couple, hardworking Yugoslavians.

The men worked at Silver Peak at the Mary Mine, and, of course, some of the Yugoslavians that worked there went south down to San Pedro, California. Some of them came to Tonopah and Goldfield and stayed working in the mines. My grandfather Nick, my mother's father, worked underground and died at the age of 46 from silicosis.

RM: Tell me a bit about your dad.

BP: My dad was born in Lehigh, Oklahoma, on March 11, 1911, which would make him 100 years old next March, if he was still alive. But he died at the young age of 62. He died on June 16, 1973. My dad had silicosis from working in the mines, and he also had sugar diabetes, and his heart finally gave in. He had a stroke about eight years before he died. My mother took care of him all that time.

RM: How did he end up in Tonopah?

BP: The Perchetti family lived in Lehigh, Oklahoma, and they were in the cattle business. They had a butcher shop, they had a slaughterhouse, and they had a farm; and they raised the cows. They went the whole process—there was no middle person. And they sold meat in the butcher shop. They got tired of that, and they heard about all the mining out west.

My dad split up with them and went to Saginaw, Michigan, for a short period of time during the Depression. He was a bellhop, making big money, just working for tips. Then he joined them in Kemmerer, Wyoming. They tried the coal mines in Diamondville and Kemmerer and Rock Springs, and then got back in the meat business in Frontier and Kemmerer, Wyoming. My uncle Don and my dad and my grandfather.

They got tired of that—they didn't like the coal mining—so they decided to go to Tonopah. This was about 1930— late '20s, early '30s. The mines were still operating in Tonopah at that time. My grandfather was getting pretty old, so he became a watchman at the Mizpah Mine. And my dad went underground and loved it. Kind of a funny story—when he was back in Saginaw, he had a lot of beautiful suits that he wore, and when he got out here and had to go to work, he didn't have any work clothes, so he wore those suits. Underground. Some of them are hanging down there yet.

RM: [Laughter] Some of them are still down there?

BP: My uncle George said that he got teased about it, so he left the suit jackets down there. He worked underground with some of the old miners like Jesus Martinez and Felix Traynor, and he learned the mining business. He was a born miner. He loved the silver mining. So he did that until they closed the mine. He was one of the last leasers, if not the last leaser, I believe, of the Tonopah mines. He always thought that he and Jesus were the last two leasers. Because they had a lot of silver ore blocked out ready to ship—to take out—and then it was shut down.

RM: In the Mizpah? So they shut down the hoist and everything? When did they shut it down?

BP: In the Mizpah, yes. They shut it all down so they couldn't do anything, and they were upset about that. I'm not sure about the date. My mother probably would know more, but I'm thinking it was somewhere around 1936 when they shut it down. I was born in Tonopah, but then my dad had a lease with the Pollin Brothers to go to work as a foreman in the mine out in Manhattan. So we all moved to Manhattan when I was a baby. We lived on Main Street. My mother and he were newlyweds, and he worked the White Caps Mine. He was the foreman there. He ran that mine for the Pollin Brothers. He made them a lot of money, made a lot of money. He was just working for top wages. Some of the miners were taking out in their pockets more than they were making.

RM: [Laughs] Probably true.

BP: That was true, yes. Curly Coombs used to tell me that my dad was very honest and would never take a thing. They tried to talk him into it, and he said no, he couldn't do it.

RM: There were some miners who wouldn't, but a lot of them did.

BP: A lot of them did.

RM: Curly told me a lot about high-grading and everything.

BP: A neat man. They worked together out there in the White Caps. He worked there for a year or two. He lived in a little paper-thin single-wall shack right on the main street there in Manhattan. I know my mother said that she used to sweep lizards off the walls all the time. It was a dirty, crusty place, but it was a cute little house for them, you know?

RM: How long were they in Manhattan?

BP: I'm thinking it was over a year. A year and a half, two years. Then they came back to Tonopah, and he started bartending. He wanted to mine some more—they had some leases. He started bartending, and then he and Bozo Boscovich, his brother-in-law, would go out to about four different places, and they leased. They went up to the Van Ness, which is up in Silver Creek. They went to the Ophir Canyon, and they lived in those cabins out there. I was a little boy and we would come out and see them.

He also leased down by Hawthorne. There was a silver property down there, and he went down and worked there. And my dad had a good friend by the name of P. J. McHugh. There was Catherine and Della McHugh, and Marie McHugh. They were all close friends.

My dad told me a story that, when he was leasing down there, P. J. came to visit him. So he thought, "Well, I'll cook him a real nice dinner." This was before he got married, this was when he just got back from Michigan; they had been underground. He hadn't been married yet. Patrick McHugh was a bartender his whole life and a real Irishman. So he went up there for dinner at this cabin. My dad was a pretty good cook, actually. And he cooked up this really nice dinner and made all these fancy biscuits. P. J. said, "You know Tony, you're a great cook. Those biscuits were wonderful. Where did you get the sesame seed?"

My dad said, "I don't have any sesame seeds." So they came to the conclusion those were rat turds. And P. J. started to get a little white in the eyes.

My dad says, "Oh, don't worry about it. You ate with butter, so. . . ." So that was cute.

P. J. came back and visited him two or three times. He was up there for about four months. Just before you get to Hawthorne, there's that one little place on the side, a silver mine on the right there, up at the top of the mountain.

RM: You can see it from the road?

BP: Yes. And he made one shipment out of there. He said he made wages; that's all he did. They thought they were going to get into some pretty good stuff.

RM: Did he usually break wages when he was leasing?

BP: Yes, he did, he and Bozo. Bozo was a brutal man and a great worker. And so was my dad. They worked in Van Ness and Ophir. When they were out at Ophir, they actually found some pretty good gold and silver. Two or three times they shipped out of Ophir, and they made some pretty good money out there. They made better than wages out there.

RM: Was that the same mine that Bob Wilson later had?

BP: Right. Right at the mouth of the canyon, there was a cabin where they stayed. And they found the new silver discovery up on the right-hand side. So they would walk up there every day. They finally put a road into it. It was a tough walk up the mountain. But those guys in those days, you know—that was a way of life. I mean, you didn't worry about it. If the mine was up there, you walked to it.

RM: That's right. They were tougher.

BP: Look at these old camp sites. Wherever you went. I mean, you wonder, how did these guys ever do that?

RM: How they got to work, let alone put in a shift.

BP: Exactly. Without the equipment. Some of those plants, like in Morey, were a long walk from where they stayed. They lived down in the camp, and then there was a four- or five-mile walk.

RM: Yes. Plus, it was hand steel. And mucking and everything.

BP: So my dad did some leasing, and then he worked as a bartender at the Tonopah Club. My dad was a good bartender and a good-looking guy. Carroll Humphrey was also a bartender, from Manhattan. Carroll and Elsie Humphrey. Carroll Humphrey was another neat guy. They were good friends. And of course there were guys like Andy and Tasker Eason, and those guys were all bartending in the Tonopah Club.

My dad always wore a white shirt and tie when he bartended. He had trouble learning all the drinks, but once he learned them, he remembered people's drinks. Anytime they came through the door, he knew exactly what they wanted, and as soon as they sat down, it was in front of them.

He said one day he was sitting there at the end of the bar. The Tonopah Club bar had a neat bar, about 60 feet long. It was a neat place. This good-looking guy came up to the bar, and he said, "Son, can a guy just go out here and tinker around and shoot a little bit and target practice?" Or "plink," he said. "Can a guy go plinking?" He didn't say "shooting," he said "plinking."

And my dad said, "Yeah, you can just go . . ." and he drew him a map and told him how to get behind T Mountain to where the old dump was. My dad said, "You know, I think I know

you. I just can't think of your name." He said, well, he was a big man. He was about six feet tall. My dad was only five six and a half.

And the guy reached over and shook his hand and said, "Gary Cooper." So he always remembered that. "Can a guy go out and plink?"

RM: It really was Gary Cooper?

BP: It was Gary Cooper, yes. Then he realized it was true, because once he looked at him—he had a cowboy hat on, he said—and when he looked at him, he realized it was Gary Cooper.

RM: I wonder what he was doing here in town?

BP: He told him he was just traveling through. He just wanted to get up into Nevada, and he was driving through. Now, this must have been about, I'm guessing about in the late '30s. Either right before my dad got married, or right after he got married.

He did that bartending, then he opened up a poker game in the Tonopah Club, and he did that all through the next 20 years. But he became a contractor, a roofing contractor. He learned it because, when they were tearing the World War II air base down he worked with a guy by the name of George Cory out there. George Cory was a contractor for Lancaster and had relatives here in Tonopah, the Lang family, Cecil and Zelinda. George taught him a lot about roofing. They tore a lot of those buildings down out at the airport after the war. Then my dad started up a roofing business.

RM: And they could make a living doing that at that time?

BP: Yes. He made a good living doing that. He never did lose his love for prospecting and mining. And every chance he got, he would go with Bozo and they'd go someplace and do a little leasing.

RM: What are some of the places they would go to?

BP: Around Tonopah, you mean?

RM: Well, there, or in whatever area they would go to.

BP: Actually, he didn't go too far. Well, they went up to Austin once. Oh, that's right, there was the only time we ever moved. There was a guy by the name of Fred Vollmer who was out at Silver Peak. He was a kind of mining promoter, but he had a lot of mining property. He liked my dad. He and my dad were good friends. He worked for Fred Vollmer out behind Goldfield, at Montezuma. He went to Montezuma and worked in that lead mine up there.

Then Fred called him one day and said, "I want you to go underground in Virginia City for me. But you'll have to live in Fernley. I have a home in Fernley." I must have been 11, 12 years old, so that must have been about 1949. So my mother and I went to Fernley, the only time we ever moved from Tonopah. And my dad worked up at Virginia City, underground up

there, for Fred, where he had this mine. We were there for one whole summer, plus I missed the first month and a half of school—the only time I ever missed school from the Tonopah schools. I went to school in Fernley. I think it was in the seventh grade or eighth grade. I remember I could not wait to get back to Tonopah. I loved Tonopah.

RM: What mine was he working in at Fernley?

BP: That I don't know. But my mother would know that. Fred had a lot of mines. He owned most of the Silver Peak mines.

Fred's a story in himself. He's the one that promoted the Max Baer fight with Eddie Murphy in Silver Peak. And Don Tomany was on the under card out there. Ed Tomany still has that poster of Max Baer when he fought Ed Murphy. Max Baer knocked him out. That's when Max was the world champion. Don Tomany had the under card. He was a young kid from Wisconsin, and he and my dad became great friends after that. Don told me that he was on the under card, and he won his fight. Ed Murphy was a big guy, six foot six, weighed 240 pounds He said Max Baer told Ed Murphy, "Let's give the public a little fight. Let's just don't get rambunctious." And he said Ed Murphy tried to pull a Sunday on him, so he hit him with everything he had. And that was all she wrote.

Don said, "He knocked Ed Murphy clear out of the ring." The fight was over.

RM: When was that fight? Do you know approximately?

BP: Don had just gotten out here, so I'm guessing that fight must have been around '45, '46, '47. Somewhere around there, because Silver Peak was booming then. They had to put a lot of money up. Silver Peak was one of the first great places that they had.

RM: It was a going place at that time.

BP: It was, yes. Fred had built a big house out there with a swimming pool and everything. He had made a lot of money in the mining business. And kind of unique, you know, real unique.

Fighting was real popular in Goldfield and Tonopah. They had fights in Reno, of course, but Vegas was not even on the scene. Tonopah was the popular place at that time. So my dad always was dabbling in the mining business. He loved the mining business.

He loved to hunt, and as I got older I loved to hunt. He taught me to love to hunt. We'd take long walks; he was a good walker. He'd bring back tons of rocks. [Laughs] One time he brought back some rock. It didn't look like much, and my dad said, "You know, this rock has got some high-grade something. I don't know what the hell it is, but it's not gold." But he had it assayed, and it was high-grade tungsten.

And a guy came to the house and said, "That is high-grade tungsten. If you have very much of that, you could make a lot of money with that." Because tungsten was really high then. "Do you think you could remember where?" [Laughter] We went to five or six different places looking—we remembered where we'd gone a few times, some of those places—and we never did find where he picked that up. But sometimes we'd get way up in there. Where he thought it was, and I agreed with him, was over there in Railroad Valley.

RM: Because there is tungsten over there.

BP: I think that's where it was.

RM: Terrells had a mine out there.

BP: We went up in those hills quite a bit. We killed a couple of bucks up there a couple of times. But he also spent a lot of time around Goldfield, all the way to Lida and Gold Point, and a lot of time out in Manhattan, on that range from Manhattan all the way to Jefferson. He used to go up there. He was prospecting up there all the time too, and looking. My dad was not afraid to grab a sack and a prospector's pick and do a ten-mile walk.

RM: Is that right?

BP: Yes, he was a good walker, but he liked to hunt because that gave him more incentive to walk, I think. He had three brother-in-laws, Marco Boscovich, George Boscovich, and Bozo. Bozo was married to Marguerite Clifford, so there was a tie-in there, because we used to go the ranch all the time. We spent a lot of time in the Kawich Mountains, too.

Breen Ranch is on the south end of the Kawich Mountains, facing the west. It's right past Golden Arrow, before you get to Silver Bow. We have a monument in a high meadow up there that we put up in 1973. A big monument. I had a marble plaque made for my father. It's about eight feet high, and it says, "In Memory of Tony Perchetti Who Loved to Hunt on This Mountain. 1973."

RM: That's great. That would have been in the country of the United Cattle and Packing?

BP: Yes. That's been out there 37 years.

RM: Is it accessible now?

BP: Oh, yes. It's right at the head of the meadow. There's a big meadow in Breen Ranch. You've got to be careful going around there that you don't get down on the bog area. Just follow the tire tracks. But right at the top of the meadow is the big monument we made out of rock, my brothers and I. We used to camp there all the time, and he loved that mountain.

RM: That probably was owned by O. K. Reed at one time, right?

BP: It was owned by O. K. Reed back in the '30s, for sure. They had a house there.

RM: I'm going to go out there and get a picture of the monument and put it in the book.

BP: Oh, yes, the monument. That's a beautiful meadow. That area right there was my dad's favorite. And he liked to go to Haws Canyon.

RM: That was the headquarters.

BP: That's where John Longstreet lived.

RM: That's right.

BP: In fact, let me tell you what I have. Out there at my ranch, I have a table, and I laminated some pictures on that table. There's a picture of John Longstreet and Louie Meyers. Louie's about this big. He was about seven or eight years old. John Longstreet has his arm in a sling, and he died right after that from blood poisoning. He got shot by the Cliffords. He used to come in and camp across the street from my grandmother Perchetti's house, on Magnolia Street. He'd spend four or five days. And he used to always buy candy for my dad.

He had his hair long, because his ears were cut short, but he would always take care of the kids. They all remembered him; my dad remembered him. They said he was real nice.

RM: He was gone by the time you were born, wasn't he?

BP: Well, actually, I think that was in the late '30s, early '40s when he used to come to town. He would always camp there. At that time, there was just one house over there, and there was a big empty lot there. He liked that lot, my grandmother said, because no one bothered him there. So he'd always spend, you know, three, four, or five days there. He put up a tent and would camp right there in the small tent. I wish we had pictures of that.

RM: Oh, yes. But you've got pictures of him?

BP: I have that picture of him laminated on the table out at the ranch, and the table kind of got in the weather. It's the only one I've ever seen of John Longstreet with Louie Meyers. Louie's the one that was murdered, you know?

RM: Murdered? I didn't know.

BP: Louie was murdered by Stick Davis's brother, Mike Shellenbarger. Remember they murdered the two old miners?

RM: No, I don't know that story.

BP: Now, that wasn't that long ago. That was in the '50s, I think. Mike Shellenbarger, a young kid about 17 years old, went in to rob them, which he did. Then he shot them both. He shot Phil Meyers, Louie Meyers, and a little tiny guy by the name of Frankie May. Frankie used to work for the Fallinis and the Sharps.

RM: Well, there were Mays at United Cattle, related to O. K. Reed's sister, I think.

BP: Right. Well, Frankie had a cabin, and Louie had a cabin. Louie had a brother by the name of Phil. My dad and I used to go down there. They were working with their dad out in Smoky Valley, right past Summit Canyon, in a place called Clay Canyon. They had a nice cabin there. My dad used to take samples to them, because he had a real good eye for that. I remember going up there. We took a lot of samples up there, and he looked at them and told us which ones he thought had some promise. That's where Louie and Phil were raised, but then they came to Tonopah.

RM: What was his name, the dad's name? Do you recall?

BP: No. I was just a kid then. I was about eight, nine, ten years old.

RM: Norman Coombs talked about the Meyers brothers. They were his tutors in learning the mining game.

BP: And Bobby Bottom. In fact, he left a lot of property to Bobby Bottom.

Anyway, I don't know where Phil was the night that they got murdered, but the Shellenbarger kid went in there and shot them both, Louie and Frank. And then he was arrested. He went to prison. Bill Beko got him out of prison and took him to his home, because he thought he could rehabilitate him. He took off and then ended up back in prison. I think he's still in prison. I'm guessing he's been in prison 30 years, at least. I recently heard he was out of prison, and living in Eureka with some Mennonites.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: This is an aside, but did you know a guy named Charlie Anderson, who shot a guy in the summer of ’57 when we were out at Reveille? Some guys were jumping his claim, and he told them to get off. They said, “You old son of a bitch,” and started to rough him up, so he just went over to his pickup and got a gun and killed one of them.

BP: I remember that story. I didn’t meet Charlie. But you know Solan and Starle stayed out there. They were up in Eden Creek.

RM: Eden Creek?

BP: Yes, Eden Creek. I loved the story that Starle told me about Solan. They weren’t doing very well, and Christmas was coming, so Starle said, “Well, I’m going to stay here and you guys, brothers, go to town.” They went to town. And Starle says, “I have this deer roast.” They used to shoot deer. They ate a lot of deer meat. And he said they had a gallon of dago red wine. So he said, “I wanted to save that for Christmas. I was going to have a big dinner.” He said there was some loco weed there—that you have to keep horses away from.

He said, “I thought I would see if I could take some of that loco weed, dry it out in the top of my shed, and then grind it up, and try to make a small cigar, or a couple of them. And try smoking it. Just give it a shot.”

He said he cooked this big venison roast, got a hot fire going. It was Christmas Eve, he said, and he had this venison roast, drank half a gallon of wine, and started smoking these little cigars. [Laughter] He said, “I woke up, and I was freezing cold, and the fire had gone out.” I think he must have had a radio or something, because somehow he found out that he had lost two days. He said it was, like, the 27th of December. He said, “I don’t know what happened to Christmas, but I remember one thing: I was hallucinating. I was seeing things I never saw in my whole life.”

I said, “Well, it’s a wonder you didn’t kill yourself. You could have killed yourself smoking loco weed cigars!”

RM: [Laughs] That’s a great story. This was up at Eden Creek?

BP: Up at Eden Creek. He said, “I told my brother what I did, and my brother says, ‘You are positively crazy.’ ” Starle was such a funny guy. I worked with him as a Nye County deputy sheriff down at Mercury. We worked together for about three years.

Starle stayed up there. They found some pretty good ore up there, by the way. They built that cabin there. Now Mickey, Miles and Roy Neighbors have the cabin. They’ve been using it. There’s gold there, but they’ve had a lot of issues with the BLM.

RM: When we were at Reveille, living at the Reveille Mill, they would come through, and we got to be pretty good friends with them.

BP: They were great. I loved Solan. Solan was funny. Such a dry sense of humor. He was a great guy, really a great guy.

RM: Any other stories?

BP: Starle got married. What was her name? I went to her funeral. She's buried up in Austin Cemetery right by the highway. They had this little house up there.

Starle told me that the three boys and the dad took off with a mule, and they went to the Test Site. Down all the way into the Test Site. [Laughs] This was way back before the Test Site was there. He said there was good prospecting all the way. He said, "We found numerous gold and silver prospects." They went all the way down to a place called Gold Reed on the Test Site. There's a big spring there, they said, and they brought back some samples, and then they never did pursue it. And he said there was enough gold just on the samples they brought back that showed it had a lot of promise there.

RM: Yes. There are some big deposits down there.

BP: There's a black mountain or something that they told me about. I was always interested in that, because they saw some bighorn sheep there, and I've always been a hunter. And they said, "Yeah, these big rams were right there on the side of this mountain. We found a spring back there, but it wasn't even documented on the map." They had all the maps.

Anyway, great guys. There are people like that who are just so unique. I loved to listen to stories that they used to tell me. They said on that trip—it was about a two, three week trip, just them and a mule—they saw a little bit of everything from wildlife to undocumented springs. They found deposits that they felt had a lot of promise, and they never did pursue it. I think they told people about it, but I don't think anybody had actually followed it up.

RM: This would have been pre-1950, before the Test Site?

BP: I'm guessing this was about in the middle '40s—somewhere in that neighborhood—because they said they were out of the service. They came back out. Solan was in the navy.

He had a lot of stories about the navy, his experiences in the navy. And he had a lot of stories about my Uncle Bozo. He and Bozo were good friends. He worked with Red Douglass, and Bozo worked with Red Douglass.

RM: That's where I first met Solan, working for Red Douglass.

BP: Both of them worked for Douglass as mechanics. And Bozo was so strong. You know, he was only five feet eleven, but he weighed 200 or 210 pounds. When he'd take a block out of an engine, he'd just reach down and pull it out by hand. He'd just lift it up.

Bozo had a temper, and he loved to party. In those days there was no television, you know, and every weekend they would go down and have a few cocktails, and then take the wife down dancing and that type of stuff. Bozo was such a funny guy. My grandmother used to tell me about Bozo. When my grandfather, Nick Boscovich died, Bozo was big enough at that time

that he was wearing bib overalls. When he was 14 years old he was almost fully grown. So he was already working. When my grandfather died, they had to quit school and go to work in the mines.

I was named after Bozo. His name was Robert. But Bozo was always full of mischief. He'd take a bottle of ketchup and a loaf of bread, and he'd climb up on the head frames going from the school, going to school. And he'd eat ketchup sandwiches, and then he'd spit and pee on the kids going to school.

Then the truant officer would come, and they'd take him off the head frame. [Laughs] And then they'd take him home, and his dad could not beat him. He tried that. It didn't work.

RM: He was too big?

BP: He was too big. Then when he got extra money he'd go to the Big Casino, which had 100 women under one roof.

RM: Is that true, 100?

BP: They say 100. I've never documented that, but there were a lot of women, for sure. You'd pay, like, ten cents a dance. And I guess they eventually got to the back room. But Bozo was so big that they didn't consider him a kid, so all his money went to the Big Casino.

RM: [Laughs]

BP: So my grandfather tied him to the bedstead. He tied his wrist to the bedstead, but he would figure out a way to get out of that. So then my grandfather said, "I can't handle this kid anymore." So he called the sheriff. The sheriff came and picked him up. He said, "Take him and lock him up. I can't control him. He's too big." So they took him to jail. It was like my grandma said, it was the sheriff that picked him up and took him to jail.

About 2:00 in the morning, there was a knock at the door, and here's the sheriff. He's got Bozo. Bozo got in the jail, took some tin cups, and went back and forth across the bars hour on hour. Every prisoner wanted to kill him. And so they had to take him back home. [Laughs] He says, "We can't handle him; we don't want the kid."

He did all kinds of things. I've heard so many stories about Bozo. He told me one time they all had little cars, Model As and Model Ts. He went to Goldfield for a dance, came back from Goldfield, and broke down, ran out of gas. So he started walking. It was a dirt road then. Here came a car, and he said, "Oh, man, I'm going to get a ride." This guy slowed down, and here was a kid with bib overalls about 15 years old. Looked mean. This guy stopped and looked at him and said, "I ain't giving him a ride." [Laughter]

So he said, "How about a ride?" But the guy went on into town. As soon as Bozo got to town, he said there was the car parked right by where the Best Western is. He walked into town, and there was the car there, and he said, "I was so pissed off." Solan was telling me this.

So I said, "What did he do? He had to do something to him. Did he flatten the tires?"

He said, "No, he just climbed in the front seat and took a big poo." [Laughter] He crapped in the front seat and went down the road.

Another great story about Bozo is he started courting Marguerite and Beanie Clifford—her name was Antoniazzi, her maiden name, but she was married to Joe Clifford. They wanted to go to an Elks dance in Hawthorne, so Marco said he would drive. Beanie would go along as a chaperone; Bozo and Marguerite would be in the back seat. Well, they went down there. Once Bozo started partying the party was on. So they kept trying to say, "Bozo, Bozo, let's go home, let's go home." They had to drive back to Tonopah. Marguerite was mad at Bozo. He was supposed to show a good impression to the mother, because he was courting her. Pretty soon they got tired of waiting for him, and they got ready to leave. They said, "Let's just load him up." Well, they tried to find him, and they couldn't find him. They looked for about an hour and a half, and they couldn't find him. So they took off and went to Tonopah and left him in Hawthorne.

The next morning Marco gets a phone call. "This is Bozo."

Marco says, "Where are you? Are you in Hawthorne? You want me to come and get you?"

He says, "No, no. You know, I climbed into your car last night and fell asleep in the back seat on the floor." He climbed into a car that looked just like Marco's. He woke up in a garage in Luning. [Laughter]

The guy never even knew he was back there. He passed out. He was full of booze. Passed out. He said, "I had a hell of a time getting out of this garage." So he got to a phone, and Marco had to go to Luning to pick him up. Bozo did things like that all the time. He was funny. Great guy. Great guy.

Tough mother, though, he was, when it came to fighting and stuff. He and my dad got in an argument one time. My dad wanted to actually swing at him, and he told my dad, "Tony, you either settle down, or if you don't settle down. . . ." He grabbed my dad, picked him up, and put him on top of the refrigerator. [Laughter] He said, "Stay up there or I'm going to kick the shit out of you."

RM: I didn't realize he was that strong.

BP: Oh, yes, he was really strong. Bozo was at an Elks dance one time. They used to have the Charity Ball on the second level of the Elks Lodge, which is the building where Western Auto is now. When I was a kid I used to go there. You have to go through two sets of landings to get upstairs, and then there's this great big dance hall and a big bar. And this guy pinched Marguerite on the butt.

Bozo caught him right there at the top of those steps. A big miner, a great big guy. He said something smart about Marguerite to Bozo, and Bozo hit him. He hit him so hard, he drove his teeth all through his lip. But he went down two landings of steps, all the way down. They said he knocked him out for about five hours. They thought he killed him. He was just tough.

RM: He must have packed a hell of a punch.

BP: Oh, yes, a hell of a punch. He would have been a good boxer. He liked to box. Buddy Traynor said he was the toughest guy he ever fought.

RM: Ever fought?

BP: Ever fought. But he said Bozo couldn't handle putting shorts on to fight. He was just too bashful. He said if he got mad he had to get out of the ring, so he just knocked him clear out of the ring when he tried to resist it. So he said, you know, "That was his last fight. He didn't want to fight any more, except for barroom brawls." Neat guy, though.
When we killed two bucks up on the top of the mountain, we'd go get Bozo. He'd pack one out at a time, the whole buck on his back, and then go get the other one. He did that a couple of times. He was quite a guy.
I had some really unique uncles. George was a wonderful guy, too.

RM: Tell me about him.

BP: Everybody loved George. George was a wonderful man. I bartended for him. George came back from the war and started leasing the Ace Club. They were going to buy the Ace Club. There were two or three guys that went together in there. First, he had a bar with Jimmy Clark. In fact, George was a good boxer, too. He fought a guy by the name of the Golden Boy from California. He was Art Aragon, I think. George was a real good-looking guy, and he had the Mizpah Bar, along with Jimmy Clark. He and Jimmy had the bar, and Bob Williams had the gaming. This boxer was the middleweight champion. Ring magazine had the story. My mother might have the issue. His wife came up to get a divorce, back when you had to stay six weeks to get a divorce.

Well, she stayed at the Mizpah. She'd go to the Mizpah Bar to have a few cocktails. She was a beautiful girl, and before you know it she and George were together. The Golden Boy heard about it, so he came up there and confronted George. They confronted him on the fifth floor, where she was staying. He was in the room with her, and the two guys started fighting, and they fought from the fifth floor all the way down to the first floor. And the last thing he noticed, he knocked George down, and George was lying there. So he went back up to the fifth floor, the way he tells the story in Ring magazine. They asked him who was the toughest fighter he ever had, and he said, "It was a Yugoslavian guy in Tonopah, Nevada. I hit him with everything I had for an hour and a half."

And he said, "He hit me with everything he had. My face was swollen up. I finally beat him. I got to the room, and there was a knock on the door." And it was George. He said, "This fight's not over." So they started again. The whole story is in Ring magazine. We had a copy of that Ring magazine. Danny Skanovsky had a copy of that.

RM: I wonder what year that was in the magazine.

BP: If you look it up, he was called the Golden Boy. The California Golden Boy. I think his name was Art Aragon. He was the middleweight champion.

RM: I kind of remember that name. That rings a bell.

BP: And I'm guessing it was in the '50s, because they ran that bar for quite a while.

RM: Now, where was the bar?

BP: The bar was sitting right where you used to check in at the Mizpah, where the front desk is. In those days, you walked in the main lobby where the main doors are, and there was a bar down to the left there.

It was a really nice bar, and they had a 21 game in there. He and Jim bartended. And then in those days they had all those young gals like Milka Beko and Olga Beko and all those gals. Leona Barbarielt. They would all go out on Friday night, and they'd all go singing. They had a great group of people that kind of traveled around, I remember.

Then George went from there over to the Ace Club. They bought the Ace Club.

RM: Oh, he owned the Ace Club? And when would that have been?

BP: That happened in—let me think now—that would have been in the late '50s and early '60s. I was a bartender for George.

RM: I used to drink in the Ace Club. That would have been then.

BP: He had a good bar there then. They bought it from George Barra, he and Louie Rivera. We have pictures of that. Him and Louie Rivera and Don Tomany.

So George ran that bar, but he was drinking then, too. He'd call me and say, "Can you come down for a little while?"

And I'd say, "Yeah, but, George, I've got to go to school tomorrow." He was letting me bartend when I was just out of high school, and even before I was out of high school. I'd go in there for half an hour, and he'd go downstairs. He had a place downstairs where it was cool, and he'd go down there and take a nap. So I'd have to go down there about 10:00, after I'd been there four hours, and get his butt out so I could go home. Then I ran the bar for him for a while there.

A great story: I'll never forget this cowboy. He had worked for O. K. Reed at one time. What was his name? Wes Blair. He and George were always pulling tricks on each other. And George told me that this guy came in, and he was carrying a suitcase. They started drinking and arguing and doing the same thing they always did, arm wrestling. A couple of times they had fought, and George jumped over the bar. George could jump over that bar like that and hit somebody. He was tough. His hands were all broken up. So they started drinking, and then George said, "Hey wait, wait, you left your suitcase. You got your suitcase here."

He said, "No, I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you I brought that for you." Wes said, "Well, have one more drink." Because they finally made up. They had got in a little argument and almost got into a fist fight. He had been there a couple of hours. So the cowboy left and went back out to the O. K. Reed ranch. I think that was where he was living, Wes Blair was.

George had a whole bar full of people. He snapped open the suitcase, and out came a live bobcat. [Laughs] It took one leap onto his shoulder, and from the shoulder onto the top of the bar, and it sat there and hissed at him. He said, "I'm going to kill that son of a gun next time I see him."

RM: What a story!

BP: There were four or five guys that ran together. Jim Morrow was the manager of the Nevada State Bank; Larry was also a bank manager. And George. Let's see, who else was it? They were always pulling tricks on George, and they were always having parties.

George passed out one night. They had this all planned, and they got in trouble for it. They grabbed George, and they took him to the mortuary. They laid him out on a slab there. They took his clothes off, laid him out on the slab. [Laughter] A guy by the name of William Logan was the mortician.

RM: That was up here at the mortuary, right by the post office?

BP: That's when it was there, yes. They had a key to get in there or something. So they got in, laid George out, put him on the slab, and then they went back down to the bar and started drinking again. I'm not sure exactly how it happened—if Logan had come in there later that evening—but Logan ended up delivering him back to the bar and really chewed everybody's ass out really bad. He just started chewing asses out. "You guys ought to be ashamed of yourself to do something like that." George woke up, and I'm sure he had all these things go through his mind, like what the hell happened? [Laughter]

So the first thing he did was he hauled off and belted Jim Morrow in the chops. He was really upset. He was really upset.

RM: He got up and went back to the bar?

BP: Well, Logan took him back to the bar. Logan went in there and chewed everybody out for pulling this prank, and they were trying to make it into a big joke. George didn't think it was funny. Neither did Logan. [Laughter] But I'm sure he got even with them. I remember one night when I had the bar, and George took off.

RM: Now, this is still at the Ace Club, right?

BP: This is the Ace Club. And there was a woman by the name of DeCarbonel.

RM: Oh, DeCarbonel. The husband was a mining engineer.

BP: Engineer, right. And his wife's name was Betty. They both had problems with drinking. They were both alcoholics. Nice people, had nice kids. Bill DeCarbonel, the one son, lived at my mother's, and she fed him dinner a lot of the time. He never forgot that and he stops and sees my mother every chance he gets.

Well, I closed the bar up, and I got a call about three hours after I went to bed. There's a lady on the phone. I knew Betty was in there when I left, but I thought she had left. And she said, "Bobby."

I said, "Yeah, is that you, Betty?"

She said, “Bobby. You locked me in the Ace Club.”

I said, “Betty, I closed up at 10:00 or 11:00. It’s 3:00 in the morning. What are you doing?” [RM laughs]

She said, “Well, I was in the bathroom, and you locked me in here.” Then she said, “Bobby, I think you ought to come give me a ride home, because this is like a kid in a candy store, Bobby.” She had all these bottles of whiskey lined up in front of her, and she kind of had a taste of everything. So I went down and gave her a ride home.

She didn’t call me the first half hour. She waited about a half hour. It was so funny: “Bobby, you’ve got to come get me.” So she was enjoying herself.

But my three uncles were great guys. When my grandfather died, Marco and Bozo quit school; George and my mother stayed in school. And they took odd jobs. They started delivering milk. They got up at 3:00 in the morning. I’m not sure if it was the Quases or before the Quases, but there was a family that went to Reno and opened up a milk business in Reno. So they started working for them.

Every morning they’d deliver the milk. In those days, you took the milk and put a quart on the doorstep. They’d take turns driving the car. But Bozo was the same old Bozo. He was driving, and Marco would hold onto the fender. Bozo would pass him the bottle, and Marco would run over and put it on the doorstep. Well, they were going down there, and Bozo saw a light pole coming up. [Laughs] So, he just couldn’t resist. He gave the bottle of milk to Marco, and Marco started to step off, and the light pole hit him right in the face. It just wiped him out and almost killed him. Bozo had like a devil mentality.

Wally Bird was delivering telegrams in those days. The kids did all kinds of jobs. In those days, you delivered telegrams all over town. Well, Bozo was sitting at the Butler Theater steps, and here came Wally Bird. Wally was kind of a good boy, you know? He never got in trouble. Bozo just grabbed Wally and knocked him down and took all the telegrams, tore them in half, and threw them in the air.

So he went to jail, again. Bozo was the devil, I’ll tell you. He was unbelievable. He was the devil. The kids used to all go out and gather up burros. And they decided to have a brand made, so they could brand the burros. They had never tried that before. They caught these burros. They put this hot brand in the fire, and they were going to try to hold on to the head and brand them.

Well, Danny Skanovsky was a fair-haired boy and was a good boxer. Danny comes up and says, “Hey, I want to do that with you guys.”

So Bozo said, “Yeah, brand that burro.” He put that hot brand right in his hand.

Danny said, “It burnt right into the skin, so I couldn’t even get if off.”

Bozo was always in trouble. Always in trouble. My mother will tell you. He just never stopped doing crazy things.

RM: I never would have suspected that.

BP: He was so quiet. When I was a kid he used to make us kids gather around when we were getting ready to go fishing. He’d take those big old long earthworms, and he’d put them in his mouth. And their little old heads would stick out. [Laughter] He was just something. He was a funny guy. And his son, Terry, was just like that.

Anyway, those were things I did when I was a kid. I mean, those were some of the stories you might be able to use someday. Bozo never stopped doing things like that. I loved to listen to his stories, and we used to always gather around him, as kids. He was always funny.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Do you remember any other stories from the old days?

BP: I got out of school, graduated, in ’56. I started about 1944 or so. I was born in ’38, so I must have started school about then. I know Mrs. Curieux was my first grade teacher, and she taught my mother, too.

She lived right across the street from the convention center. And then Mrs. Slavin was my second grade teacher. No, she was my eighth grade teacher. Miss Falvey was my second grade teacher, and Miss Mullins was my third grade teacher. Betty Roberts was my fourth grade teacher, Anne Tomany was my fifth grade teacher, Ray Tennant was my sixth grade teacher, and Mrs. Slavin taught us in seventh and eighth grade.

RM: That was Ed’s wife?

BP: No, no. No, Mrs. Slavin was not. Ed’s wife was Helen. She was part of the O. K. Reed family, right?

RM: Yes.

BP: Helen was. She was a neat lady. I liked Ed Slavin. Ed Slavin had a lot of stories. Did you ever have an interview with him?

RM: Yes, I did an interview with him, and he told stories. Any more stories on the Boscoviches?

BP: The Boscovich brothers? Well, stories never end with them. I mean, when you grow up with a family like that. You know, the whole thing about the Yugoslavians was that all they cared about was having good food on the table every day. That’s how my grandfather Nick was. As long as they had food on the table, that was the most important thing.

So I remember, I was just the oldest of the group. I’m going to be 72. So when I was a kid growing up, I stayed with my grandmother Baba. Our house was next door, but because I was the oldest, I slept at my grandmother’s every night. That was kind of a tradition, that the oldest sons, or whoever, would stay with the grandmother. So I’d be in the house. She was a wonderful, wonderful cook, and we had wonderful dinners. Bozo and George would dance. You know, some of the old Yugoslavian dances they’d have? She’d cook a pig, and she was always cooking special dishes, Yugoslavian dishes. Stuffed cabbage. I used to call it Bohunk macaroni. And she had her own garden. She raised all of her own lettuce. Homemade bread and salads.

RM: The garden was in back, right?

BP: In the back of the house, yes.

RM: Do you remember keeping the goats?

BP: Yes, she had goats. And she had a smokehouse. She would kill pigs, and they'd hang the meat at the smokehouse, smoke her meat. She'd make goat cheese all the time. We always had goat cheese. That was always wonderful.

RM: It was a close-knit community, wasn't it?

BP: Oh, yes. And during Serbian Christmas there would be groups of about 20 to 30 people that would go from Serbian house to Serbian house. They would have wine, and they'd eat apple strudel or roustala. But they'd also have a little snack of something special. It seemed like every Yugoslavian woman had something she cooked that was special. My grandmother would make those stuffed cabbages. They were so delicious.

RM: What were they stuffed with?

BP: Just regular hamburger, and then they spiced it up and wrapped it in the cabbage leaves. Absolutely delicious. That was a tradition, to go to the Bekos, the Banoviches, the Boscoviches, the Skanovskys. There were about five different houses.

RM: There was Kayo Lydon and her family.

BP: Kayo Lydon was a Banovich. The Banoviches lived just down the street two doors. Dave Banovich, Miruna Banovich. I would go down there and have breakfast. She had turkeys, and we'd have turkey eggs. It was one turkey egg. Tim Lydon and I ran together, and we were always in mischief. Ms. Banovich would cook me an egg. She had coffee, and she would hardly ever dump the coffee. She would just add grounds and water to it, and it would be just like mud. She always insisted you have a cup of coffee, and we'd have an egg, and she usually had some cut-up potatoes. I remember Tim and I, when she'd turn her back, would take the coffee and dump it in her plants. Pretty soon she was saying, "I don't know what's wrong with these plants, they're all dying." [Laughter]

And she carried a big old pistol, a big old gray pistol. Up in her cupboard. I held Tim on my shoulders, and he got up there. We knew about the pistol. Well, we didn't realize that she would leave it loaded; all you had to do was just pull the trigger. So Tim pulled the trigger and blew up the ketchup and mustard and pickles and everything. [Laughter] She was out in the garden, and she came through the door. Boy, we got scared. We landed on the floor, and she was hitting us with a broom.

I'll tell you a story about George and Jim Clark.

RM: Now, this is George Boscovich?

BP: George Boscovich. He stayed with my grandmother, and he would bring home people from the bar. When they closed up, whoever was in the bar, he'd say, "Do you want to come home and eat breakfast?" George would eat all the leftovers that my grandmother had. He loved boiled potato sandwiches. [Laughs] But he would come home, and most of the time when

he came home Jim Clark would come too. They had a big bedroom there, and he used to sleep in there with George and then go home the next morning.

I was staying with Baba in the other room. George got home about 2:00 in the morning, and I could hear him in there laughing. They were drunk, having a good time. Well, my grandmother had a big old cat, a Persian cat. Every time you'd open the refrigerator door the cat kept trying to get in the refrigerator. I found out later, George said, "Well, you want something in there?" So he threw the cat in the refrigerator, shut the door, and later he went to bed.

I usually got up with my grandmother about 5:00. She usually got up about 5:00 or 5:30. So about 6:00 I hear my grandmother. She's in there, and she's hitting George with the broom. [Laughter] And Jimmy Clark. And I go in the kitchen, and she's got the oven on. She's got newspapers on the oven, and she's got the cat lying on the newspapers. It was probably right close to death, almost frozen. And she's got the cat lying on the newspapers.

RM: Trying to warm him up.

BP: And then she started talking in Serbian, Yugoslavian. Then she'd jump up and go over and hit George with a broom again. [Laughter] "You cussina!" (a Serbian word meaning son of a bitch"). She'd hit him with the broom again. He almost killed her cat. They were funny guys.

RM: Did all of the Yugoslavians have a sense of humor like that, with practical jokes and everything?

BP: They did, yes. They always had a sense of humor. They were always that way, always fun to be around. They liked to drink wine; they liked to tell stories. Neat people. All good people, hardworking people. They didn't have much to work for except what they drank and ate.

Every dime that my grandfather got over and above the cost of living for the house, he'd put into stock. And they lost it. He never did make it. They always thought they were going to make it big by buying stock. A lot of miners spent their money on stock.

RM: Were they buying mining stock?

BP: My mother had a bunch of mining stock, after my grandmother died. She gave it to a guy by the name of Nick Barbanich, and Nick said, "Let me look at it, and I'll find out if it's worth anything." They had a lot of stock that my grandfather had accumulated. There was a big trunk that had some valuables in it, and the stock was in there. Nick told her that none of it was worth anything, but then she found out later through someone else that the stock might have been worth some money.

RM: And he just said it was not.

BP: He said it wasn't, and she still, to this day, believes that he took her money. And I think he did, too. When Nick died, he left Leona a million dollars in cash, and I think he was accumulating a lot of money. Pete Knight told me that. He said, "I couldn't believe it, when I did

the estate, that he left a million dollars to Leona," plus a lot of other stuff. That was Nick Barbanich. Leroy David's sister Leona was married to Nick.

RM: About the Bekos: they were Yugoslavian?

BP: They were Yugoslavian. They had the exact same type of lifestyle. They had five daughters and two sons—Bob; Bill; Tom's still alive; Rose is still alive; Olga, Milka and Rose. I think there are just five of them now. So Milka and Olga are gone.

RM: What were the parent's names?

BP: Salvito and Pete, Pete Beko.

RM: Was he a miner?

BP: He was a miner, and then he started delivering produce and had a mail run to Manhattan and Round Mountain. And he put Bill through school doing it. Bill was a big man, you know. He played for the University of Nevada, football and basketball. He was almost six foot six, and he weighed about 260 when he died. I think in his playing days he wasn't that big. He was thinner, but he was tall. He was always tall.

RM: What do you recall about him? He was an important person in the county and a power house politically, wasn't he?

BP: Oh, yes. Politically, he was the Number One. He was the power.

He was a good friend of mine from the day I was going to school. I became good friends with him, and he took me under his arm. I joined the Sigma Nu house at the University of Nevada.

He's the one that was my sponsor. I lived in the Sigma Nu house, 1035 Ralston Street, in 1958. Nice, great guy. To me he was a great, great guy. He had a beautiful black Cadillac convertible, and he just said, "You got your driver's license?" He gave me the Cadillac to use for all my dates when I wanted to go.

RM: No kidding. Here in town or up there?

BP: Here in town, not there. After that, we became good friends. We did a lot of hunting together.

My dad and Bill were good hunters. We hunted together. We were always great friends. Up till the time he died, we had coffee every morning.

RM: He got my dad and me our jobs down at Mercury. And he was really good to my daughter. He set up a little scholarship for her down at UNLV.

BP: Yes, he was a great guy. I liked your dad. Your dad was a big man. I mean he was strong, too.

RM: He was, yes. He was very strong.

BP: Especially in his younger days.

RM: He had been a professional wrestler and football player.

BP: I know that. He told me about that. I spent some time with your dad, because I was a laborer in the Laborer's Union. And we worked a little bit together.

RM: Down at Mercury or out here?

BP: Out here. Not a lot of the time, but we actually did get to know each other.

RM: What do you recall about him?

BP: Your dad? Not too much, expect for the fact that I remember we rode the bus together and we talked a few times. He knew the Terrells, I remember that. But he was a good worker. They always wanted him to work. He wasn't afraid to work at all. You know I don't remember a real lot about him.

RM: He had thick cauliflower ears till the day he died, from wrestling.

BP: He told me about his wrestling. Not a lot about it, but he told me about that. I always used to marvel at guys that were big.

RM: Well, you're big.

BP: Well, yes, but I mean nothing like these guys like Bozo and like him.

No, we had a lot of great guys. We used to play pinochle when I first got out of school. Nick Banovich, Felix Traynor, Don Tomany, and my dad played. And my dad had the game there at the Tonopah Club. He kept a low-ball game there, a poker game. I would help him at night. I'd deal.

He had his regular table. He would fix his table up, and it was real nice, and we'd take a rake-off. And he made pretty good money doing that.

RM: Do you have any Beko stories or accounts of things that you might recall about him? I tried to do an interview with him, and he wouldn't do it.

BP: I always felt that Bill was really unhappy with the town of Tonopah. One time his daughter and his wife wanted to give him a birthday party. They were going to try and do a

surprise, and he heard about it. He canceled it. He said, "I'm not going to have those son of a bitches coming and wishing me a happy birthday when I know underneath . . ."

RM: Oh, that maybe they didn't like him?

BP: He always felt that he was disliked by some people because he was a good district attorney. And, boy, if you got on the wrong side of him, which some people did, he would follow it all the way through.

RM: That's right. But if you were on the right side, man, you had a champion in your corner. I think it was my dad who said that he heard him tell a guy one time, "If you ever kill that son of a bitch, make sure you do it in Nye County." [Laughs]

BP: There were guys like Plankinton and those people that he went after. He wouldn't let up on those guys. He had no use for them.

But, you know, I was in his office one time when three people came up from Reno and Vegas, and they wanted him to run for governor. They said, "You are positively the best candidate in the state to run for governor. We want you to consider it. We don't care if you take in one vote in Tonopah, you're going to win. If you'll get out and really work hard and make a good effort, you'll be our next governor." It was because of his intelligence, his personality, his charisma. He was a good speaker.

And he said, "There's no sense in me giving you an answer. The answer is no." He said, "I agree with you. I think I would have a chance." Because Bill Raggio wanted him to run, too. And he said, "No, I'm happy right here. My son and my daughter are in school, and I like my office, my job." So he never would run.

RM: But he must have been loved by a lot of people in town.

BP: He was loved by a lot of people, but there were a few people that bad-mouthed him a little bit over certain cases, because he was pretty strict on the bench. And there are always those people. He just felt that, you know, that you can't be loved by all. And it's not going to happen when you're in that position.

RM: When you're in politics.

BP: When you're in politics. But as far as a man goes? Shit, I respected him completely

RM: Oh, me too.

BP: I would do anything for that man. He was a great, great guy. We had so much fun. And he had a great sense of humor. We went duck hunting; we went archery hunting. Bruno Skanovsky, who was a good friend of his, and Ira Jacobson, and my father and I, and Bill used to go out a lot together. And he was a fun guy to be around. We had a cabin out there in Little Fish Lake Valley. He was always a good cook.

He liked to eat too, by the way. He was a big eater. But he was a fun guy. And I'd always go to his house. Every year. I looked forward about three times a year to having Tom and Jerrys. He'd make the homemade Tom and Jerrys. It was a lot of fun.

His wife Dorothy was a great host and a sweet lady. And she was very, very beautiful when they first got married. Everybody thought that maybe he had married kind of beneath him a little bit, or something of that nature, but I never felt that way. I always thought they were a good pair. And he loved Dorothy. He did. I thought that was a good thing, because they had some rough times, like every couple. They finally got to a point where they leveled out.

RM: Another character that I'm really fascinated by, and would like to know more about, is Bill Thomas. Did you know him at all? Do you have any stories or stories you heard about him or anything? I wanted to do a little book on him at one time, and I talked to Ed Slavin about it, but Ed said, "You're too late. There's just not enough people around that really remember him."

BP: I didn't actually know Bill Thomas, but my mother remembers him. He actually became the oldest sheriff in the United States. In office, to hold office.

RM: That's right. Almost 50 years.

BP: He started out on horseback, as a sheriff on horseback, and ended up with a vehicle.

RM: Yes. And never carried a gun.

BP: He never carried a gun, yes. You know, one deputy got murdered by a prisoner up there in the courthouse.

RM: In the courthouse? When was that? Was that a long time ago or during Thomas's time?

BP: It was during Thomas's time. I'm thinking it was in the '50s.

I remember being a paper boy when I was about nine or ten years old. We had an extra come out because a prostitute got murdered right behind where the Pocket Park is now. A guy killed her, and then he took off and went to Smoky Valley. He was seen in Carvers, and he went up there by Louie Meyer's, the cabin I was telling you about. They captured him there. I don't think they killed him, though. No, they captured him. And he went to prison.

So they came out with a newspaper, and my parents came looking for me. I was selling newspapers. I sold a hundred and some newspapers. They had a little thing at the paper office there. They gave me a little special plaque. I sold 100 and some newspapers on that day. [Laughs] I covered the town. I went to every bar in town 20 times. I had more money than I knew what to do with. I had more money there in the bank than I do now.

I was a go-getter as a kid selling newspapers. I was selling newspapers, selling bottles. I was always out making bucks, making money.

RM: Was the Big Casino gone in your earliest memory?

BP: Yes, it was gone. But Taxine's was there then.

RM: You mean the red light district?

BP: Yes, the red light district.
I had three dollar customers from my newspaper. Taxine was one, my uncle George was one, and Bob—what was his name? His wife. They all gave me a dollar.

RM: A buck for your paper?

BP: For my paper, yes. And then I had a bunch of ladies. Mrs. Clark, Jimmy Clark's mother, was one. I had to sit down and eat two cookies and drink milk at three different ladies' houses. [Laughter] By the time I got home, I never ate dinner. Mrs. McHugh, Mrs. Clark, and Mrs. Maynor I had cookies and milk, and they would talk to me, and I'd tell them everything I knew that week. Then I'd go down and take care of my other customers.

RM: Was there a regular red light district there at that time?

BP: Yes, there was. There were about four houses right there. But Taxine had the nicest house, and I would go in there. I was always real shy in those days. She would pay me for my newspaper. And the girls knew I was coming. I think it was on Friday afternoons. So they would wait for me, because they'd start teasing me a little bit so I'd turn red. [Laughs] They always embarrassed me. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

RM: [Laughs] What do you recall about Taxine?

BP: Taxine was a nice lady. Bobbie Duncan was a nice lady. She was a good friend of mine, too.

RM: Mine, too.

BP: And I loved Bobbie Duncan. I used to go see Bobbie every holiday, and I took her gifts. At Bobbie's Buckeye. We used to go up there when we were teenagers and sit on the couch. We never had enough money to do anything. Bobbie would let us sit there. And she knew eventually we were going to someday . . .

RM: Sure, you'd be a customer.

BP: But there was a guy by the name of Robert Bird who was coming there, and he would go in.

RM: Bob Bird? The butcher at the Bird Market?

BP: Yes, the big heavy one. Well, he would go into Bobbie's. There was a picture on the wall there, and we put a peephole in there. [Laughs]

RM: So you saw what went on there?

BP: So we could watch Bob Bird through the peep hole.

RM: And it was quite a show, wasn't it?

BP: It was a show. He weighed about 400 pounds.

RM: Yes. I've talked to girls who were there.

BP: Did you know Wellington Rogers?

RM: Yes.

BP: He used to work for the Campbells, John Campbell and his dad . He had a cabin on the Campbell property. He and Roger Nicely went up there one day, got drunk, backed out, and backed, I believe it was through the mine shaft. They went down the mine shaft about 20 to 30 feet.

The car's sitting up like this. No one knew what happened to them, because they didn't show up at home. Never got hurt at all. He just went down there and got wedged.

RM: And no way to get out.

BP: No way to get out. So they just sat there and decided to wait until someone came looking for them.

They finally figured it out, checking with Bobbie. Bobbie said, "Well, yeah, they were here. They left about 10:00."

And they said, "Well, they never arrived home." They didn't see any tracks or anything. They weren't paying any attention. So then they went over there and looked. There was a shaft over there, about in the front of the dump, and they went back into that shaft. I think probably the top of the car was only 10, 12 feet down.

RM: That's a deep shaft, too, if I remember right.

BP: If they had hit it square, it would have been all over.

RM: How did they get them out?

BP: They brought them out with a tow truck. And I always thought to myself, boy, they've got to be careful. We all went up there to watch. If they were to get that car moving and go further down. . . . But they hooked on to it and got it out of there.

RM: About when was that?

BP: I'm guessing somewhere around 1954 or '55, '56.

When they first moved that house up there, there was a cop by the name of Don Duncan. We were told not to go in there. And he drove up one day. At that time she had the house up on blocks, and she hadn't put it on a foundation or anything yet. We took off running and ran out the back door and about got killed, all of us. There was a drop about six or eight feet down to the ground. It was funny.

RM: My dad remodeled that place, and I worked there one summer till I got a job out on the flats. He built the bar there.

BP: She was a wonderful gal.

RM: Oh, I loved her.

BP: Did you read the article Joe Richards wrote about Bobbie? Joe Richards had a big, real nice article about her and Bill Hines.

RM: Oh, really. How long ago was it?

BP: About a year ago. Do you get ahold of the paper down there? It's his editorial.

RM: Okay. I would like that.

BP: In fact, I wrote a letter to him, and then I never did send it to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Bob, do you have anything topmost on your mind that you wanted to say?

BP: Not really. As you know, I've been a resident of Tonopah my entire life. I was born on July 21, 1938, at the old Miners Hospital. Went through elementary school and high school in Tonopah, went to the University of Nevada for a couple of years. So I have good memories of growing up in Tonopah.

RM: Tell me about growing up here. What was it like?

BP: I was growing up in a little house of my mother's on Magnolia Street. And most of my school life I stayed with my grandmother, who lived ten feet from her house, because I was the oldest son. A kind of tradition with Yugoslavians is that the oldest son, when there was a widowed grandmother, would always stay with her. So that was a good experience for me, because my grandmother was such a unique woman. I was skinny like a rail—not very big—but it wasn't because of the food. The food was wonderful at her house. She was always cooking special lunches and dinners, and for every celebration we had large dinners at her house.

But I enjoyed growing up and school in Tonopah. I went to the old school that sits on Bryan Avenue by Barsanti Park. My whole life, growing up, I was a dedicated athlete. I loved basketball. We didn't have football in those days, but we did have basketball. So basketball was my whole life. I would run to school as fast as I could go every morning and get there a half hour before school started. I would pound the basketball with a bunch of other guys on the tennis court. And at lunch hour I would run home and have a quick lunch. It was quite a ways, about a half mile or more—probably a little bit more than that. Then I'd get back so I could have 15 minutes of basketball during lunch hour, and then I would run and do the same thing after school. And before I did my chores I would play a little basketball.

Then I would go home. I always had chores. We had a wood stove, and so I'd keep the wood chopped. My dad and mother raised chickens and some pigs. So I always was doing chores, either cleaning the chicken coop or chopping wood. And that was just a way of life. I mean, that was the way things were done.

I didn't get in too much trouble when I was younger. When I did get in trouble, my dad would ground me from the theater. If I didn't have my wood chopped, I couldn't go to the theater. Well, my mother is a big softy for us boys. She would go out and chop my wood. [RM laughs] Part of my wood. I chopped as much as I could, but I would go to the theater. And it is really funny—my dad had silicosis, and he coughed. At the old Butler Theater he would always stand in the back, because he smoked, and he would cough. I would get in the inside and watch the movie. But my problem was I never got to see the last five minutes of any movie, because I had to get out of the theater and go back home before he could drive home.

RM: Oh, he didn't know that you were down there.

BP: But I always knew where he was, because he was always coughing. So if I was in the theater, he never knew it until later on. Five minutes before the movie got out, I could take off.

Probably that's why I became a runner. [Laughter] I would zip home as fast as I could, and my mom would know I was coming. Sometimes I would just barely beat him, because he would just drive from the theater to the house. He'd ground us from doing this or that or whatever. My dad was pretty strict, but he loved us. He would go out in the country and hunt and fish. So we grew up every weekend going fishing or hunting.

RM: Where did you go to fish and hunt?

BP: When I was real small we always went to Barley Creek and Mosquito Creek and Meadow Canyon. Those were the main canyons. We went to Peavine once in a while, but those were the three canyons, mainly Barley Creek. Barley Creek had wonderful fishing, and they had beaver dams there. They also had rattlesnakes. My dad hated rattlesnakes. A couple of times we got out of the truck to go fishing, and we killed a rattlesnake between the truck and the creek. And we would just pack everything up and go somewhere else. [Laughter]

My dad had a reputation of raising a family on wild game, and once in a while he would poach a deer. We were out in the summertime. We'd shoot one deer, and then we ate a lot of deer meat. My mother could really cook deer chops, really delicious. So I always told people that I was raised by a son of a poacher. [RM laughs] We hunted a lot in Kawich Range.

RM: Whereabouts in the Kawich?

BP: Mostly Haws Canyon.

RM: No kidding. That was good hunting over there?

BP: Haws Canyon was good hunting; the deer were fat. In fact, that one time I mentioned to you before that he shot two bucks way up high, he shot one, and then he thought it got back up and took off. So he shot again, and he ended up shooting two bucks. We went back to Stone Cabin Ranch and got my Uncle Bozo. Bozo went out there and packed each one off. He was so mad he packed the first one off all the way to the truck without putting it down. He went back after the other one—these were 195-pound bucks. He was unbelievable when it came to that.

But my dad also did a lot of prospecting.

I mean, basketball was my life, but sometimes I'd have to work on roofs because he became a roofing contractor. I helped him. Sometimes a half hour before the game I was still on the roof, and then I'd come down and play a full game of basketball. He was from the old school. He and my mother were the oldest, and she even helped on the roofs. We used to tab the roofs and do things like that.

RM: What does "tab" mean?

BP: Lift each shingle up and put a tab of tar under the shingle. Then you'd hit the top of it—you'd tab every single shingle, because of the wind, the Tonopah winds.

But we'd do a lot of prospecting. My dad—every place we went where there was fishing or hunting or just out prospecting, we had a lot of fun doing that. One time we went to a place

called White Rock Canyon, which is south of Barley Creek. There's Barley Creek and then Elkhorn and then White Rock and then Willow Creek.

My dad was a coffee drinker. Whenever we stopped and made camp we were going to shoot a deer if we got a chance. Whenever we'd make camp we would build a little rock closure to heat coffee, and he'd make coffee no matter where he was.

We went to White Rock, and it was raining at the top of the canyon. Dad says, "Well if we move this way we're in trouble. We're going to have to load everything up and put it back in the truck." At that time, I think, he had a '53 Ford pickup, red, and it had a canvas top over it like a tarp over the top, like a little shell on the back. Well, we were sitting there having coffee and a sandwich. We kept hearing this noise, and we had no idea. All of a sudden, we looked up the wash, and here came a wall of water about six feet high and about 25 feet across. It had been raining up at the top of the canyon, and it got rolling. We didn't realize it. We just knew it was really black at the top of the canyon.

I'll never forget—I grabbed my binoculars, and we grabbed a couple of things, but we lost half our camp. All our food. I grabbed the coffee pot, and we got up on the back, because we were right down by the bottom of the ditch. So the next few hours we went down following the water, and we picked up a few things.

RM: Did it take out your car?

BP: No, no. The car was far enough up the hill. It took out all of our camp, though. We were going to spend the night if we had to. We took everything out of the camper. It was really funny, because you just don't think about that. I mean, my dad thought about it, I think, but all of a sudden here's this wall of water coming down the hill.

RM: Terrifying.

BP: So we saw the wall of water coming. There wasn't one drop in that little tiny draw. Just a wash with some rocks and sand, and then this wall of water that's as tall as me and 20 feet across. It washed out the road that we came in on. So that was an experience. And it happened to us a couple of times. One time we were in Lone Mountain.

RM: Now, what canyon was the first one?

BP: I think it was called White Rock Canyon, which is south of Barley Creek. It's right next to Willow Creek and Elkhorn.

RM: The west side or east side of the Toquimas?

BP: No, it's on Table Mountain—Table Mountain where it comes down to Barley Creek. Is that called the Monitor Range?

RM: Yes.

BP: On the west side, though.

RM: West side of the Monitor. Okay.

BP: We always hunted everything—sage hen and chukar and deer.

RM: Was everything abundant—sage and deer and so forth?

BP: Everything was abundant; everything.

RM: When was this, in the ’50s?

BP: This would have been in about the late ’40s. I was about 10 to 11 years old. I was born in ’38, so I would say it was the late ’40s, maybe ’50, ’51.

RM: You had started to tell about Lone Mountain.

BP: Yes, Lone Mountain. We used to go over there, and we knew a man by the name of Bombassie who had a wife, Edna, who was a good artist. He had four children also. John came from Switzerland. Before he came here he had never killed an animal, so he made a deal with my dad— he would buy the tag, my dad would shoot it, and John would pack it out. He was a little man; he only weighed about 150 pounds at the most.

He was very wiry and learned how to mine underground.

He would cut a crook in a tree and tie the deer to the crook. Then he would put the branch or the trunk of the tree across his shoulders and drag that deer out that way. It’s a hard way to do it.

Dad shot deer for him until he taught him how to shoot.

John Bombassie would go up to Lone Mountain with us, and he would have Edna, his wife, line up a series of washtubs. He would tell her to give him about 30 minutes, and he would go up the mountain. At the end of 30 minutes she would start beating on these washtubs with a club or a piece of wire. It would make a lot of racket. John was up the mountain—about 30 minutes up the mountain—and pretty soon these bighorn sheep would start peeking up over the edge of the cliffs. That’s how he shot his bighorn sheep. He was already up there amongst them, you know. They are a very curious animal. I always thought that was kind of neat. We could take binoculars, and, if you looked up there, John would be right up there with them. Pretty soon you’d hear a boom. John would kill one. He didn’t care about the horns; he just liked the meat.

RM: Is it good?

BP: Yes, it actually is good, especially in the summer. When they start rutting it’s pretty tough. But I learned that mountain. That mountain is a very unique mountain.

RM: Oh, I love that mountain.

BP: And I've been all over that mountain. I used to have them drop me off on one side, and they'd pick me up on the other side. A long walk.

There are a couple of canyons, like Sheep Canyon, that have creeks. We used to find oxen shoes in there; they used to have oxen in there. And all these sheep in there. And there's a big grove of cottonwood trees up there that people don't know about.

RM: Now, this would be—what—northeast? The mountain goes northeast to southwest. Would that be right?

BP: Northeast, yes.

RM: I study it when I'm going through there. It's a complex mountain, not a simple one.

BP: I was told that during the heyday in Tonopah there were a lot of bootleggers out there. They used to make their own whiskey out there. If you go up there today you can see a couple of cabins where they had their piping.

RM: Do you remember the canyons? Did they have names?

BP: One was called Bosco Canyon. I think there's a canyon called Bootlegger. There are some unique canyons —Sheep Canyon, of course—and on the backside there are some tunnels. Anyway, that was a unique mountain. My boys and I have been all over that mountain. I used to take my boys up there just to look at the sheep. When my kids were little—we're talking about 30 years ago—there were sheep all over up there.

RM: Doris Clifford told me that she got a sheep up there. That must have been 20 years ago or so.

BP: I killed my first ram there, my first tag. Bert Carder and I. Bert got one up there, too. My brother got his somewhere around there.

RM: Have you ever been on top?

BP: Oh, yes. I found the most beautiful suntanned purple bottle up there, about halfway up the mountain under a big pine tree. When I cleaned it up, I couldn't believe how pretty it was. It had some embossing on it—a whiskey bottle. Got it all packed in my packsack and took it off the mountain, got home, washed it up, and dropped it on the floor. I was so upset. That was about 1980.

RM: If you go on the west side of the mountain, as you look up, there are a couple of bumps up there. Partway up.

BP: Yes, that's called Alpine.

RM: My dad and I hiked up there one time. You know, we were just curious.

BP: The sheep will actually go right there. That's where the sheep are. A couple of the mineshafts up there have ore cars in them. It was nice that they had ore cars.

RM: They had ore sacks on the dump. We were wondering, "Is this is any good?"

BP: There's some turquoise up there, but I think it was mainly gold and silver.

RM: Do you know when the Alpine was active? Has it been active in your lifetime?

BP: No, no. It's older than that. I was up there a lot with my dad and by myself from the '40s on, and sometimes before that.

That big storm that hit there about 25, 30 years ago hit right on top of the mountain. It was just like you took a small building and dropped a big tankful of water on it. It was really a storm, because it went through Millers after it hit that mountain. There were a couple of canyons up there, really deep, and there were sheep that were 15 feet from the canyon floor, hanging on trees. They'd drowned. It took boulders big as cars down that wash. There were some cabins up there on the north side, and it took those cabins out. They'd been there forever. I'm guessing Alpine was really active mainly in the '20s or '30s. That was a really unique mountain.

There was a guy by the name of Mike that lived there. Did I tell you about him?

RM: No, tell me about him.

BP: We called him Shithouse Mike. He had a camp made out of pieces of tin and cardboard, halfway between Little Mountain and Tonopah. He would come halfway. I'm not sure how far it is—20 miles, maybe? He'd spend the winter and spend the rest of the year in town. I never did hear him speak. He would mumble things; he was kind of a mute. He'd go over to the Butler Theater, to the steps, and we kids would all gather around. He'd take handfuls of dimes and throw them to all the kids. We would all scramble for them.

RM: That was a lot of money then.

BP: I'm talking about maybe a hundred dimes every time he came to town, at least.

RM: How was he making a living?

BP: I have no idea.

RM: Was he carrying ore, or finding gold?

BP: I don't know. This would have been in the late '40s, early '50s when he was doing this, when I knew him. Kind of a unique guy.

RM: But his cabin was on the mountain?

BP: He had a beautiful cabin on the mountain. He had a garden and an apple orchard, and he had a big deep spring up there that he'd pack water from. At one time he had a car, because there was a car in the garage there.

RM: How far up the mountain was his cabin?

BP: It was right in the middle of the mountain, on this side. It's still there.

RM: That high? It's still there?

BP: It's not that high; it's in the foothills. But you have to go up in the canyon. I went up there back when John Bombassie and I used to go and try to get the sheep. I went up there one time with some high school kids. We went up there looking around, because we figured he had a lot of money someplace. But someone had just ripped everything apart. Went through the bottom of the floor, looking for it. They probably found it. There were rumors that he had it. But I always wondered where he got all the dimes. I never did ever see him go into a casino or a bank or anything.

RM: Did he have diggings out there?

BP: Yes, he had diggings.

RM: And maybe he was taking something out.

BP: I think he was a pretty good mechanic, because he had stuff on a workbench out there by the garage, and the stuff was laid out on it like he'd been working on it. It was almost like he knew. I never heard him speak.

RM: How'd he get the name Shithouse?

BP: We kids gave him that. [Laughter] I'm not really sure why.

There was a painter across from my mother's house by the name of John Desmond who liked to get drunk, and when he got drunk he would holler at us kids. One time we hit a baseball into his yard, and John Desmond grabbed the baseball and threw it in his outhouse. [Laughter] We were really mad, because in those days we didn't have another ball. So we said, "Thank you. We're going to get even." He would scream at us and swear. He was a paperhanger and a pretty good painter. He painted for my grandmother. So that night we got on the mine dump. We had this planned—we'd meet on top of the mine dump across from his house. And we took turns throwing rocks on top of his roof for hour after hour. [Laughs]

I was always scared of him, too. When he got drunk he got mean, but he was a nice guy otherwise. He'd always go down to my grandmother's for a little toddy. My grandmother would give him a shot of brandy. She always carried brandy and red wine.

RM: So you never got your ball back.

BP: Never got the ball back.

We had a bunch of kids from the neighborhood. Tim Lydon, Jim Bombassei, Junior McGinnis. We were a typical little town. In those days the town's population was down, income was down. I remember my dad bought a couple houses for, like, $500, $800 that he was going to rent out. Actually, he did. When I was in high school there were, I think, 80 kids in the entire high school. We had 16 or 18 in our senior class, which was a big class, because we had a lot of kids from Goldfield.

RM: What other kids stand out in your mind from those days?

BP: Well, Bombassie. Tim Lydon. Junior McGinnis. Pete Tillman stands out, because he lived with his grandmother. She lived right behind where that little dollar store is right now. We used to run together, and we were always mean to the littler kids, like my brother. We were big guys, and we ran the gang. My brother used to follow us all the time. I remember one time we tied a rope on his ankles to hoist him up. We put the rope over a rafter in the garage, hung him up, and then dropped him into a barrel. Then we sat there and pounded the barrel.

We were mean. Pete had an older brother by the name of Jerry Tillman. The three of us were up on the mine dump—the mine that was up there behind the courthouse—and there was a shaft there. Jerry said, "I want you to stay here, because I want to climb down the shaft. So stay here in case I fall or something." He hadn't gone four rungs on that ladder when it disintegrated, and he fell. We could hear him falling for about 30 feet at least. But he was conscious, and we called to him, "Jerry, Jerry, Jerry! Are you okay? Are you okay?"

He said, "Yeah. I'm hurt, though."

I'll never forget—speed came in, because I ran from there. Pete was shorter than me. I ran from there to his grandmother's house and said, "Jerry fell down the shaft." They got ahold of the sheriff's office. They went up there, and we went up there with them, and they sent someone down the shaft on a pulley. Jerry broke his arm and got skinned up pretty bad, but he lived through it. There were always things like that happening, it seemed like.

I got into the newspaper business, and that's where I started selling papers. And I had more money in the bank then. I had $300 or $400 or something. [Laughter] And I used to take the wagon and go out in the old dump and pick up bottles to sell.

RM: Could you pick them up in those days? You didn't have to dig for them?

BP: No, they were on top of the ground.

RM: Did you kids play around in mines much, in the old workings?

BP: Yes. Nothing like the Metscher boys, though. The Metschers did a lot of that; they went underground a lot. There was a mine out behind the Oddie Mountain.

When I got to high school, Tim Lydon and a kid by the name of Alan Boswell went down to Kretschmers' distributing plant, which is right where El Marques is now. They were pretty smart. They took a window out of the backside—took it all the way out—and then they could go inside. The beer was stacked up from there to the front. So they were taking beer off the backside of the stack and packing out four and five and ten cases in a night. I never did go with them when they went there, because Tim's dad was chief of police—Freck Lydon. Tim was kind of—and there's no doubt about it—Tim was the devil.

He and Alan took all of that beer, and then we put it behind the mine shaft behind Oddie. We built a platform on a winch, and there was ice cold water down there. And we would drop it down there about 50 feet, into that water. We had a small platform about four by four. We put rails on it. We'd put, like, 20 cases of beer in that and take it down. Then they'd raise that up and pack the beer over to Alan Boswell's house, because Alan's mother and father went on a three-month vacation. So when you went down to that house, you'd walk in the door, and there was beer on both sides of the hallway, all the way through the house, stacked up.

Everything was going well, of course, until the word got out. Then the cops made a big bust on the house. Luckily, I wasn't there that night, but Tim and Alan Boswell went to jail, and Tim got in big, big trouble. To stay out of jail, he had to start working every night to pay back all the beer from the Kretschmer family. They had Kretschmer and 7-Up Distributing. Where the El Marques restaurant is now.

Tim was always in trouble with his dad. He was always in trouble. It seemed like it. But he was a great athlete, too. He was a great basketball player.

There were about 15 to 20 kids in every class, 80 kids in the whole high school. Elementary school had a couple of hundred. We did a lot of midnight runs to the old school. We had a way of sneaking in upstairs, and we'd take our girlfriends in there. We'd do all kinds of things, have dances and stuff, and they didn't know we were doing this—until we got caught.

RM: Who were some of the girls you grew up with?

BP: I grew up with some real neat girls. Ruth Ann Marty, Mary Louise Sorhouet, Francie Breen, Mary Ann Czarevitch, Leila Wolfe, Deanna Daniels, Lois Antoniazzi. I went with Leila in high school; we were boyfriend and girlfriend. You could almost name every girl in school.

In those days they still had Block T initiation. Block T was a group of lettermen, and you had to go through initiation. Well, in those days they also paddled you, too. They would hit you hard.

RM: So it was a tough initiation.

BP: Oh, it was tough, yes. We had kids that actually quit, and that's what finally ended it, because the kids finally couldn't take it.

I mean, they would do things like—out in front of the school they'd build a big bonfire. They'd have a branding iron there with a big T on it, and they'd get that red hot. They'd put it up to the sky, and it was dark, and here's this red hot iron thing. And then they'd make you

drop your drawers. Two guys would run out with a bucket full of ice cold water, and they'd put the branding iron in that ice cold water. Well, they would hold your arms—and you were scrambling for your life trying to get away from them—and they'd hit you with that ice cold branding iron, and you thought you were burnt for good. It was ice cold, but you thought you were burnt. They would blindfold you before they did it.

And a couple of other things they did: they'd take you to the sewer ponds down in Lambertucci, and they'd blindfold you. They'd go through so much effort to play tricks on us. There was a pond in there of clean water. They'd turn you around three or four times and walk you into the sewer pond. Supposedly. You'd actually walk into clean water, but you thought you were in the sewer pond, because you could smell it right there.

Then we'd go with the cheerleaders to the cemetery. We'd take our sleeping bags and spend the night there till daylight. That was the last thing you had to do—sleep in the cemetery—and we usually had all the guys and the cheerleaders with us. We would spend the night, and then we all went and had breakfast.

They took some of the poor old cheerleaders to Bobbie Duncan's. The girls were blindfolded, and they'd sit them on the sofa and not tell them where they were. And here were all these girls at the Bobbie's Buckeye. They would take their blindfolds off, and they were sitting on this sofa with a bunch of dirty old men in the room. Poor Mary Louise Sorhouet was a virgin and, you know, she was very innocent and naive. We thought she was going to pass out. [Laughter] She was so upset. She was hollering and calling them names. She went back home and quit the Block T right there that night. They gave her a Block T letter anyway.

They would do all these things to go through the Block T initiation.

But we didn't have a lot of girls in school, and there weren't female athletics in those days. So they went through their lists of cheerleaders and homecoming queens and things like that. But you've got to remember, we didn't have television here until 1956. So all the years we went through high school, from '52 to '56, there was no TV.

RM: You made your own fun.

BP: So we had Butler Theater, and we had things we did at the school. Everybody got very involved in activities. And, of course, athletics were my whole life. I played basketball, and we won the state championship when I was a sophomore. I played first string on that team. In my junior year we came in runners-up, and in my senior year we came in runners-up again. So, we had three great teams.

RM: Who else was on the team?

BP: The team. I have a lot of pictures of that. Tony Limon, Terry Terras, Tim Lydon, Larry Hough, Jack Manhire, Greg Pavlich, John Bombassei, and Danny Robb. Those four persons are all dead now. They were on the team. We had Danny Pease, Ray Kretschmer, Bill Kretschmer—that was pretty much the team. All three years—well, four years—we had great teams. But those three especially were the best three years that they ever saw in Tonopah. They have not won the state championship since then, 1954. So we've gone 56 years now without winning one.

RM: Was the team well-supported by the town?

BP: Can't believe it. We used to play in that little gym at the high school, and the place was packed. Our big event—our fundraiser for the year—was the carnival. They held the carnival in the gym there. That was a big thing to us. And we did have a parade for the homecoming queen. Other than that there was really not a lot for us kids to do, so we were very involved in athletics.

Of course, the whole town supported us. When we went to the state championship and played in the championship game—I have a picture of the crowd that was there and there must have been 300, 400, 500 people from Tonopah that followed us. They used to follow our games. There were always some mothers, like Kayo Lydon, Tim Lydon's mother, and Roy Wolfe, that were really on the line. Also Bruno Skanovsky. I don't know how many times they got kicked out of the gymnasium because they were so boisterous. Kayo, especially, was. Other towns were that way too. I'll never forget—I was playing Gabbs one time, and I stole the ball and took off for the basket, and all of a sudden the lights went out. This mother tackled me. She tackled me to the floor. [Laughter] I didn't know what happened. She came out of nowhere to make a great tackle.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Speaking of Kayo, she told me that her husband, Freck, the sheriff, had been a boxer.

BP: Yes, he had been. In fact, you could tell by his nose and his ears. He had cauliflower ears. He boxed under the name of Freck Lydon, but he had another nickname too. He was a good boxer, I understand.

The chief of police was Alibi Honeycutt. There was an officer by the name of McNerney. He was unbelievable, this guy. He was a great athlete in his day. I'll think about his name here in a minute. If you were out of line he would just take his club out and belt you. I saw him do that to a couple of kids who talked back to him. He'd just whack them with his club.

Of course, we had the cathouses downtown in those days, too. We had a place called the Trees, which was right in back of the parking lot of the Banc Club. That's where Bobbie Duncan got started. She had her house there first, and then she moved up on the hill. When she bought the Buckeye Mine she moved that house up there. It was up on blocks until finally she hired a contractor to put it down.

But this place was called the Trees, and it sat right over there. Now, that was when I was in school, so it must have been about 1953. She had the Trees. That's before she went up on the hill.

RM: And what was it like, the Trees?

BP: It was nice. The house that was used as a brothel is still sitting there.

RM: The one behind the Banc Club?

BP: Yes, north of the Banc Club. It's got a big yard. A woman by the name of Wanda lives there now. That was called the Trees.

RM: That would be so cool, to have an old brothel like that.

BP: The boys, especially us, the big-deal Block T members, would go there. We'd sit there, and on some occasions Bobbie would give us coffee. But we were always the big Block T members, you know, the lettermen's club. So we always thought we were privileged, but we really weren't.

RM: But you had pretty high status in town, I imagine.

BP: We did. And it was a big deal going over there; we all went over there. I was never a beer drinker, ever, even in school. I would never drink in school, because I was an athlete. When Tim and those guys were drinking, I never did. We had some crazy things happen. All of us kids would take rides out hunting, and a couple of times we turned over in the woods on the way to Manhattan. Tim was always involved. Tim was always driving.

He was always in trouble. Half the time I got in trouble just because I associated with him. Like I told you, one time he got up on my shoulders and pulled the trigger on his grandmother's gun and blew the whole cupboard apart.

But nobody ever locked their houses in Tonopah in those days. We had one kid in town by the name of Ronnie Swafford who was really a bad kid, a bad seed. He came here from Tennessee, and he was mean. His uncle's name was Clyde Newman.

RM: Oh, I knew Clyde.

BP: But Ronnie was always mean. He was always stealing—robbing places and stealing from kids. One time I saw him knock Jimmy Wolfe down and start putting the boots to him. I ran as fast as I could to his dad's house, and when we got back Jimmy was bleeding from his mouth and nose. It's a wonder Ronnie didn't kill him, because he started kicking him. If you ever talk to Jimmy, he will tell you the story about how he got stomped on the way coming from school because he said something to Ronnie Swafford's girlfriend. Ronnie was a bad actor.

My dad used to buy a lot of fireworks, and then we'd have a big Fourth of July with bombs and bottle rockets. Ronnie Swafford broke into the shed where we had them, and he had a whole back seat full of them. I'm talking about a couple of hundred dollars' worth of firecrackers. I understand he went back to Tennessee and threw firecrackers at cars and things all the way. He got in big trouble over it.

RM: But that's not Clyde Newman's son, who was killed in Vietnam, right?

BP: No, that's John Newman. There were four brothers in that family. His dad had retired, but his uncles were all out here, and Ronnie stayed with his uncles. But there was a guy by the name of Ralph Swafford here for years. He had a jewelry store in the basement of the Belvada, and he had a house that burnt down. Ralph became a Lion's Club member.

RM: Have those relationships endured to the extent that the kids you grew up with are still here?

BP: I just spent ten days in the hospital, and I had phone calls, I swear, from half of my class from 1956. They called me, you know. "How are you doing?" And some of the basketball players. Those friendships, I think, are fairly long-lasting. I feel the same way about them. If one of them got sick, I'd call them. Francine and Terry Terras and Tony Limon and Tim Lydon all called, so that was nice.

RM: People now don't have that, because they live in the big cities.

BP: It's different, yes. You never had the same lifestyle or life that we had. No television. All the telephones were the crank type on the wall. I was a paper boy from the second grade until the eighth grade. I don't care if I was eight years old or 14 years old, those women—I'll never forget all those wonderful women—would have cookies and milk for me.

RM: You mean at the red light district, or all over town?

BP: All over town. Red light district, yes. Well, those are all fond memories.

I have great memories of my grandmother's parties. In those days my uncles had all just got back from the war. They were all working and had jobs. They had great parties, with Yugoslavian dancing and food. So it was a fun life.

I had some other aunts and uncles that I'd visit in the summertime. In the late '40s I'd go to Henderson and spend two weeks or a month with my Uncle Don, my dad's brother. I'd go to Reno and spend a week or two with my Uncle Marco and my Aunt Jean. Jean's still alive—she's 98 now. Those were great times. And getting out of Tonopah. The first time I ever went south was to see my Aunt Florence, who was married to Bob Revert, Sr.

RM: Oh, right, Art Revert's brother.

BP: I had never seen that much grass in my life.

Aunt Florence was a great woman. She was really nice to me. She was married to a GI from Texas in 1942, during the war. When I was six—it would have been 1944—I would stay with her, and we'd go out to the airbase. There were 6,000 or 8,000 soldiers there, and she'd take me to movies out there and then to the PX to get ice cream. We'd go to the movies there because he was a GI, and she had full privileges there. And I'd go out there to play basketball in the big gymnasium. That was a great time, just going out there. That was nice and fun to do that. And then my aunt and my Grandmother Perchetti lived on California Street, East California. Grandmother Perchetti was a nurse at the hospital.

I saw my grandfather die. All of us kids were looking through the window, so close. He was lying there, and everybody was around him, and I watched him pass away. I must have been about seven or eight years old.

RM: Where did he pass away?

BP: Back at Magnolia Street, in his home. He had five girls and two sons. His wife, my Grandmother Marie, became a nurse at General Hospital. She got run over there, crossing the road. A car hit her, but she was fine. She didn't get hurt real bad. We had always had things like that happen.

RM: Norman Coombs told me that there were a couple of places where the old miners with consumption would go to die, and he said that they were happy places. They weren't sad, you know, with everybody all depressed. Instead, the guys were laughing.

BP: That was before my time, but I did hear about that. And there was a place like that. I know that there was one old bar downtown, down there somewhere where that Silver Strike is now. I used to go in there and sell papers. There was a small bar there, and there used to be a lot of old-timers who'd go down there. They would sit there every day, and they were all sick. I think that could have been one of the spots. This was when I was six or seven—1945, '46, about that time.

RM: And they used to die like flies, didn't they?

BP: Yes, that's right; that's what I understand.
So, I enjoyed my life as a teenager and went off to college and then played for Jake Lawlor at UNR.

RM: Basketball, right?

BP: Earned my letter in my freshman year in track and basketball.

RM: Wow. So, you were fast?

BP: Yes. In fact, I broke the mile record in Tonopah in 1955—I ran a 4:48. That was fast then. Broke the record. Believe it or not, that record stood for 26 years, and my son broke it.

RM: So, it runs in the family, then?

BP: Yes, he was a good runner. All the time that I was raising my boys—one of them is 43 now, and one is 41—we hunted, we fished, and I taught them to run. I used to go out and say, "Okay, you guys, you've got to get in shape, and you've got to run this." We used to run during Butler Days, because there was a 10K and a 2-mile. I would turn them loose at the edge of town, and they'd run to Sportsman Park, which was 15 miles. And I'd pick them up.

RM: They must have been good. So, that's your son Mike?

BP: That's Mike.

RM: My daughter, Bambi, went to school with him.

BP: Mike's now a veterinarian. He's a doctor in Elko. I taught them how to run, and they loved to hunt and fish.

RM: Do you still run?

BP: No, I gave up running. I ran in college—the half-mile.

BP: Mrs. Porter was a piano teacher that lived right behind the Lydon residence, and she had a son by the name of George that got killed. He used to take the dogs for a ride every night. A guy by the name of Bill Hargrove was driving, like, 80, 90 miles an hour, out towards the airport. He lost control and hit and killed George and the dogs, killed Don Brawley's brother. He was in a coma for a short period and then he died, actually. Two or three people died.

There was a place called the Skunk Dive, with Charlie Stewart. Charlie Stewart was a black man. There were only three black people in Tonopah. We used to go on in the Skunk Dive. This was between 1951 and '56. That was a popular time. We went there every Friday night; there was no television. There was a shoeshine stand, and these big Block T members, juniors and seniors, in high school. We'd go down there and have our shoes shined and listen to Gillette Friday night fights. Every Friday night they'd have the fights.

RM: On the radio.

BP: On the radio. And that's also where we learned how to play cards. We played panguini in there, and we played poker. Charlie Stewart was a neat old guy.

RM: Yes, he was.

BP: In fact, I own his house now. The one he owned. He had a green visor that he'd put down. He'd sit back there by that stove and put his visor down and nap, and we kids would come in. We'd look and see, and if he was sitting in that chair we'd go ahead and start playing slots. Nickels. And we knew if we won, he would come right out of that chair and say, "You kids aren't allowed." So, what you had to do, if you happened to win, you had to grab your money and run, as much as you could get in your hands. [Laughter] He had a cane; I don't think I ever saw him hit anybody with it, but he would come flying at you with it. So we'd go over there on a big Friday night, when we weren't playing basketball.

And then we'd go next door, either to Wardles or the Corner Store, and have a lemon coke. Sometimes we'd go to Reischke's, too, and have a lemon coke. Fresh lemon. Mrs. Reischke was a character. There was no town that had characters like these people.

RM: Tell me about them.

BP: Mrs. Reischke had a great big Roman nose, and she drank brandy. And her nose was red; it always looked like Rudolph. She was a Jewish lady, and she had a daughter by the name of Erma, who was a great photographer. Her pictures are still all over Tonopah. Erma Reischke.

RM: I wonder where there is an archive of those, so I could see them.

BP: Oh, I have a bunch of her pictures. The museum has a lot of them. Mrs. Reischke had the little rundown store. She was so funny. She would break down a pack of gum, and sell you one stick for a penny. So, we'd sit over there and have a lemon coke with her. She had a lady who worked for her, who lived up there on Florence Avenue, right where Dave Hage lives right now. I always thought to myself, "I wonder what she pays her," because it couldn't have been very much.

Solan said he used to go in there and buy his Camel cigarettes from her. She was just a little old bent-over lady with a hump on her back and this great big nose, and her hair was always wadded up. And he said that one day when he bought some Camel cigarettes from her, Mrs. Reischke started singing, "The camels are coming, tra-la, tra-la" [to the tune of "The

Campbells Are Coming"]. He said he broke out laughing. He couldn't help it. But those are some of the stories. We had such unique characters on Main Street.

RM: What was her daughter like? Your mother talked a little bit about her.

BP: She wasn't real beautiful, and she was never married, at least not until she left Tonopah, maybe. She loved my uncle George; had a mad crush on my uncle George. George knew it. He would kiss her on the cheek, and she would just get all flustered. She loved George. But she was a good photographer. She had her own darkroom, and she did all her own developing. For anything that happened in Tonopah from, I would say, about 1948 to 1968, she took every photograph for every single event. Everything that happened. And there's a lot of stuff at the museum. I have a box of photographs at my house. I just took a bunch out of there and gave them to my daughter, because we're planning this ninetieth birthday party for my mother.

She was one of those unique characters. As you went down the street, we had other characters besides Charlie Stewart.

Funny story: I played pan—knew how to play panguini. My dad came in one day. He said, "Don't let me catch you in here. I don't want you to be a gambler; I don't want you to gamble."

RM: He said it to you?

BP: Yes, not to play pan. So I always had my eye out. It was like the theater; I always had to beat him home. My dad was strict, and he told me not to play pan. I wasn't supposed to play pan. Well, I couldn't stand it; I had to play pan. So he taught me how to play. One day I was playing pan, and, out of nowhere, my dad's hands were on my neck. He picked me up out of the chair. I always felt that the root of all embarrassment is to get spanked in front of your fellow pan players. [Laughter] So, he spanked my butt all the way out the door, and I didn't go back for at least a week.

Anyway, Charlie was such a character. He drank brandy, and he always had a snifter full of brandy. Charlie was a big man. He must have weighed close to 200 pounds.

He and Milton Russell were in the Tonopah Club. Milton Russell was the owner of the Tonopah Club. He was tall, lanky. For some reason—I don't know why—they hated each other. I don't know why, but something happened in the past. Charlie Stewart got drunk one night and went down and called Milton out. Milton came out in front of the Tonopah Club, and they had a fist fight that wouldn't quit. All of us kids were out there watching. Milton was a big tough guy, but Charlie held his own. He didn't get the best of Milton, and Milton didn't get the best of him, but I'll guarantee you they were hurting.

RM: I wonder what the problem had been.

BP: Ask Dan Skanovsky. A lot of those guys were rounders in those days.

When I got a little bit older my dad had the poker games in the Tonopah Club, and I used to help him deal. He had a low-ball game there, and it was good for him, because he made a good rake-off and made good money. There were guys like Jimmy Clark and Bob Williams and

Danny Skanovsky and Andy Fabbi. We had so many characters. Andy was into either drugs or marijuana very bad. There were so many characters in those days.

RM: One more thing about the Reischkes—did Mr. Reischke live out at his mine or something?

BP: He didn't live at his mine. He had a big house. If you look at the old pictures of Tonopah—especially the ones that show the town of Tonopah from 1905—if you look out there just about where the Silver Queen Mine is, there's a big three-story house. I was told that was the Reischke house. He must have died before I came into this thing. I heard that he had a mine, yes. He was always trying to make his fortune.

RM: I had already heard that they were out in the town of Reveille, in the Reveille Range. Not at the Reveille Mill, but in the town.

BP: They were; I know that. I've heard that before. When I was growing up, that little store was their whole life. They lived there in the back of the store.

RM: They did?

BP: Yes. But I was told that great big house up on the hill was theirs also.

RM: I wonder where they got the money to build that.

BP: I have no idea. It's probably a story in itself—the Reischke family, that is. I doubt that there's anybody that even knows.

Well, Ray Tennant knows something. He's been around, you know, for 94 years.

RM: He's still here?

BP: Oh, yes.

RM: Maybe I should do an interview with him.

BP: Oh, it would be a wonderful interview, if he'd do it. He's amazing. He has a good memory. He started teaching in Silver Peak. In fact, when Max Baer fought Eddie Murphy, he was there that day, at the fight.

There was another guy, Alfred Guintini, who was a shoemaker, and he was from Italy. His shop was beautiful. He did a lot of artwork himself. It was right where the alley is between the Mizpah and the Fun Palace. There was an alley right there. It was right next to Central Market, on the left side of the Central Market, when the Clyde Marty family had Central Market. The prettiest girl in school was Ruth Ann Marty, and Clyde was her dad. Clyde and her grandfather owned Central Market. On the right side was Bird's Market. That's when Wally's dad and Robert Bird were alive.

RM: Now there's the Mizpah there, and then a parking lot, and then the Fun Palace.

BP: Part of the Mizpah was Bird's Market.

RM: I didn't know that.

BP: Get some pictures, and you'll see. Then they moved up to the new store, where the bookstore is. All the time I was growing up, they were down there by Central Market. Alfred Guintini had the shoe shop, and he would sing all the time. He was funny. He had a great voice but would usually sing in Italian since they were opera songs.

The other character was Toni Buffum—Tokyo Toni.

RM: Oh, I knew Toni. Let's talk about her. I loved her.

BP: I got to know Toni pretty well, when she opened up the skating rink at the old Airdome.

RM: She opened the skating rink at the Airdome? Tell me all about it.

BP: This was right after World War II, in the '50s. She'd just gotten her Geronimo, her jeep, back from the Philippines, and she got back here. She was taking care of her mother then, and, you know, she had a bar downtown. The Coors Bar, that was her bar. Toni was built like a brick. She was a real pretty lady. She had the Coors Bar, and then right after that she opened the skating rink at the Airdrome. In fact, the coffee pot that's in the convention center is the one that she gave me when I opened it up. The big brown one we used to use. That came from her. She was a character. I was one of the few people that got to go to her house and talk to her, and I got her mail for her. Right after that she became a union rep.

RM: Yes, I wouldn't have made it through school without Toni. She used to get me jobs. We were good friends.

BP: Oh yes, she was the union rep for the Laborers' Union. She had a million stories. She loved the GIs. She sent dollar bills to I don't know how many GIs every Christmas and birthdays and any special occasions. A dollar bill in most of the envelopes. What a neat lady.

When they had the dedication, we had a big thing at the convention center for World War II vets. They came from around the world; their planes had crashed during World War II. There were a lot of those vets that came here. I picked her up and took her to that party. She didn't want to go. I said "Toni, I'm going to sit here on your step until you say you're going to go, because there are so many people there that you are going to love meeting." She met these guys from World War II that were in the Philippines and Guadalcanal and all. They were all there. They had come back for this reunion. We did tours out there where the planes had gone down, and she just absolutely loved it.

She told me one time, "You know, when I was driving up this mountain from Millers, I looked at those mountains [the San Antonio mountains], and I fell in love with those

mountains. I drove into the Mizpah garage and stopped at the pump." This is right after World War II. She said, "I stopped at this pump, and a good-looking guy came up and said his name was Lee Henderson. I was fit to kill because I was all dressed up." In fact, she showed me a picture of what she looked like.

RM: She was good-looking, wasn't she?

BP: She was a good-looking woman; like I said, she was built, too. So Lee put the move on her right away, wanted to know what she was doing there. And she said, "Is there a house of ill repute here?"

And he said, "Yeah, there is."

She said, "Well, you know what? I think I'm going to stick around here a little while and make a few dollars." She says she went up and got hired. She says she hadn't gotten her foot through the door, and Lee was her first customer. [Laughter] She said, "We were lovers for quite a while."

RM: On the side, right? Or as a customer?

BP: Just in the house. No, he was married; he had a wife and daughter. [Laughter]

Now, the Big Casino was across the street there at that time. My Uncle Bozo, I told you, used to go there and spend every dime that he could make. And she said, "You know, I stayed there and worked, and I learned to love Tonopah and those mountains. That was my sign, those mountains." From Saint Anthony, she said. "That was my sign."

RM: Saint Antonio, maybe? Oh, my God, what a story.

BP: "That was a sign that told me that I needed to stay here."

RM: What joint did she go to work in? Do you remember?

BP: No, I don't know that.

RM: Was Bobbie at the Trees by then? Was this before that?

BP: This must have been about '46, '47, somewhere around there. No, there were houses where Taxine is, all the way down that street behind the Pocket Park. There were little houses all the way down.

RM: The first street off of Main Street.

BP: Yes. You turn up Knapp Avenue, and at the first turn to the left there were houses all the way up to Taxine's. Taxine's was up about where the Elk's Lodge is. Bruno Skanovsky used to tell me that he'd go to Taxine's all the time. He says that they had an Indian girl by the name of Annie Pony, that weighed about 300 pounds. And if they never had enough money to go to

Taxine's, they'd go find Annie Pony. It was, like, a nickel or a quarter. She was a great big heavy-set girl. An Indian girl. Annie Pony.

Anyway, that's where the houses were. I think Toni went to the Coors Bar. That was her first job.

RM: You mean as a prostitute?

BP: No, as a non-prostitute. She decided not to be a prostitute anymore. And she bought that little house up there, the little house on Water Street. And her mother lived in the house next door. She took care of her mother.

RM: Did Toni grow up in Tonopah?

BP: No, she came right after the war.

RM: What was her mother doing here?

BP: You know, I'm not really sure. Zach and his wife might know something. The house was left to him. His wife works at the newspaper office.

Anyway, when Toni's mother died, she kept her mother's house up for quite a few years afterwards. She'd go in and clean it and dust it. I know that when I was growing up they tipped over her toilet. Or did they steal her toilet? I think they stole her toilet. It was still in use, she was using it. And she wrote a big letter to the newspaper about the thieves that stole her toilet. She embarrassed them so much in the newspaper, with her letter, that they brought the toilet back.

RM: What a story. I'd like to get that letter. Do you remember when it was?

BP: It was long ago. She wrote the letter to the editor about stealing her toilet, about how someone could do something like that. She wrote a wonderful letter. She embarrassed them. I heard it that it was Mary and Dick Tisue who stole the toilet. I heard that, but I don't know.

RM: And they brought it back. That is one of the best stories I've ever heard.

BP: It was, like, 30 years ago, or back in the '70s.

RM: I'm going to try to find it.

BP: Maybe the '70s or '60s. That would be a story in itself.

RM: She told me about being hired by Randolph Hearst at the Hearst Castle, to come up there and entertain his friends and everything.

BP: Well, I can believe that. She was a neat lady.

RM: She was wonderful.

BP: That time when I took her to the dinner she was all dolled up. I took her in my truck, and we went to all those different crash sites. She got out and put roses on all those crash sites. She was one of a kind. I have a picture of her someplace.

RM: She was a good-looking woman, even in her later years.

BP: Don Tomany was in love with her, too. She had an affair with Don Tomany. George told me one time he was in the bar, and Toni and Don had slipped out the back door. Ann, Don's wife, came through the door looking for him. George said, "I was scared to death that Ann was going to catch them, find them." He sent Ann down to another bar, and, boy, he ran up there as fast as he could. [Laughter] That's funny. So, those were characters.

Alfred Guintini, the shoemaker—I started to say he used to sing.

RM: You're the first person who has been able to tell me anything about Toni.

BP: Yes, I loved Toni. I used to help her clean up the convention center, back when it used to be a skating rink. I used to help her do that. When I became a laborer with the Laborers' Union, she was in the Carpenters' and Laborers' Union Hall. She put me down at Mercury the first time. She had the hall there. She and Seyler Ryan and Solan Terrell were great friends.

In fact, you know, I think she told me she had left some of the things she had to the veterans and to Solan. She told me that, but there was never a will that was ever found. She wanted the vets to have everything. That's the way it should have been, but things happen. It wasn't my business.

RM: Tell me about the Airdome and her skating rink.

BP: The skating rink was neat. At that time she had the Airdome. Teddy Limon started a boxing club for us kids, and he was teaching everybody how to box. We used the side room and the stage for that. And Toni was running the Airdome. You'd go in, and you could rent a pair of roller skates. On the great center floor, she had the big high ceilings. It was completely like it is now, for the convention center.

RM: Where was the Airdome?

BP: The convention center. The convention center is the Airdome. They just remodeled it.

RM: I didn't know that.

BP: Oh, yes, except it didn't have any front on it. There was no block on the front. For a while there was a building next door that we had a museum in.

RM: Yes, I remember that, Pete Peterson used to be in there.

BP: Exactly. Pete Peterson, another neat guy.

BP: And that's where they had all the functions during World War II. They had them in there, but it was a different building then. It had the big open rafters, and metal grids across there. And, of course, they enclosed all that when they spent the 100-and-something thousand in 1966 to remodel it for a convention center. It was the '50s, I think, when she had the Airdome.

RM: And it was a roller skating rink. Was it successful for her?

BP: No.

RM: There weren't enough kids, were there?

BP: The kids that were there spent a lot of time down there.

RM: I had thought the Airdome was a block further from the post office. But I don't really know. We came to town in '54.

BP: Well, look at the pictures. You'll see the pictures. They took that building and restored it and made it into the convention center. A contractor out of Twins Fall, Idaho, did the job.

RM: How long did she have the skating rink there?

BP: It was a short time.

RM: You worked for her there?

BP: I worked for her. I helped her clean up. She'd pay me a few dollars once in a while. I just helped her because I liked Toni. Everybody loved Toni. I mean, as kids, we liked her because she took us under her wing, and she would have hot chocolate and cookies. Before that, I think she had the Coors Bar. She went from the Coors Bar to the Airdome to the convention center to the union hall. She stayed in the union hall a long time.

RM: She got me through college. I don't think I would have made it without her. And she helped my dad and me get on down at the Test Site, like you. She and Bill Beko.

BP: Yes, great people. Great gal. She belonged her whole life to the military. I'm watching this thing on TV now, a miniseries called "Pacific." I don't know if you've seen it.

RM: Yes.

BP: Every time I watch that, I think of Toni.

I don't know if this is true, but one time I said to Toni, "Tell me something from all the things you saw happen in the Far East during the war. What stands out in your mind more than anything else?"

She said, "Probably the night I slept with General MacArthur." [Laughter] And she never did say it didn't happen.

RM: After all, she was his aide or his driver or something, wasn't she?

BP: I'm sure she was a prostitute before she went in the service. She went in late, because she was in Tonopah before she went to war.

She went to the war from Tonopah. She actually joined in her forties. Is that right? I think it is. She was like 40 years old, and she wanted to go over there.

RM: You know, I believe your story, because she wasn't a bullshitter as far as I knew.

BP: I thought maybe she'd say, "Well, I saw this happen, or that happen, or a truck blew up or whatever." No, "I slept with." To this day I believe that. She never regretted it.

RM: I believe her.

BP: And I said, "You know, you have a lot of nice memories."

She said, "Yeah, that's why I brought Geronimo home, so I could remember all those things."

RM: I tried to get her to do an oral history. She wouldn't do it.

BP: She's the type of person that wouldn't talk. She had big boobs, but that's because she had a big heart. She had to have some place to put it.

RM: Yes, there was a big heart under there. And she liked men.

BP: And men liked her. And that's a true story.

Every day that she went uptown she would dress up. She was always dressed a little bit nicer. She would always dress up, and sometimes she'd wear a hat, a nice classic hat.

RM: Yes. Nice hats.

BP: One of a kind.

RM: Do you know anything about her before she joined the army?

BP: I'd love to see somebody like that have a movie made about her.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: Bob, last time we talked about growing up here in Tonopah, and I really enjoyed it. That was great information. Do you have any other thoughts on that, or anything else you'd like to mention?

BP: Well, I was trying to think of where we broke off the other day. Growing up in Tonopah was positively an experience, mainly because there was no television in Tonopah. So, as kids, we had to go out and find things to do to entertain ourselves.

We didn't get TV in Tonopah until October of 1956. I was a senior in high school. I'll never forget it, because I had a sprained ankle from playing basketball. We wanted to watch the World Series. A fellow by the name of Pickles brought a television to Tonopah. He could only pick it up in a tunnel, which was east of Tonopah, up by the Chinese laundry. We all went up there, and I had to go up the hill on crutches. They carried me down, but I went up on crutches. We got in the back of this tunnel, and we watched the World Series. It was the whole basketball team. Plus, Joe Friel came with us, and the coach. I was trying to remember who the coach was. But it was 1956. I remember that.

RM: That was probably the first broadcast picked up for Tonopah, right?

BP: The first one picked up for Tonopah, yes. It was in a little tunnel on the way to the Chinese laundry, up on the side of a hill. He could pick it up and have a real clear picture there.

RM: I wonder why he picked it up in a tunnel.

BP: I just remember we were in a tunnel. I was up there on the old trail on crutches. Why, I don't know. He had equipment back in there, for one thing. Mr. Pickles had a home right in front of Campbell and Kelly's foundry. Ed Lee went to work for him, and Ed ended up actually running the TV company after that. They went around door to door, because they had to put up so much money. My dad was a stockholder. They went around to different businesses and businesspeople. They had to put up, like, $140. That was quite a bit of money in those days.

RM: To get TV to the houses?

BP: To form the corporation. To have enough money for Pickles to come in and do all this. But when they sold it, everybody got dividends, and they got their checks back, which was good.

RM: When did it become available to most people in town? Do you have any recollection?

BP: I don't remember, but I think it wasn't too long after that. Just early in the spring of the next year, if I remember right. Yes, I think it was right in the early spring of the next year when we had television available. Of course everybody was crazy about it; they loved TV.

But it made a difference in the lifestyle of people who lived here.

My parents would go out once in a while, on Friday, and they'd go dancing. There was a place called the Sump, and I remember, when I was just a little boy, I used to go there with my dad and mother. I used to sit on the steps, and they would dance, and they'd take me with them. I was only about five, six, seven years old, and I'd be down there at 9:00, 10:00 at night, and they'd be dancing. The place was really something.

RM: Where was it located?

BP: Right in the basement of the Tonopah Club. It was a neat place. They had big dances down there, and they had cocktail tables around there. Of course, they got used to me going down and watching my dad and my mother.

Also, my mother always said I loved movies from the day I was old enough. I was still in diapers when I started watching my first movies at the Butler Theater. And she says I still to this day—and she's right—still to this day love movies. She would take me to the movies down there, and she says even as a baby I'd sit there and watch them.

RM: Is that right?

BP: So much interest, like I was really understanding what was going on, yes. So it was kind of neat, growing up. The other day I covered all of that, because we talked about—when I was a teenager—the houses of ill repute. And growing up as a paperboy. The one thing I was going to mention to you that I thought was kind of unique is basketball. Basketball was a big thing in Tonopah when I was growing up, when I got into high school. And of course my sophomore year, I made the team, and I actually—because a teammate, John Bombassei, was sick—even made first string as a sophomore. And we were in the state championship that year.

And I remember that there was a movie that was on TV for years about an Indiana town. They took a small group of people—they only had a little tiny town—and won the state championship. I think it was in Indiana or Illinois.

Honest to God, we played in that little gym at the high school, and we were treated by the local people like heroes. Swear to God. We had a great record—like, three losses and 25 wins. It was a good team, a really good team. Well, it was the best team in the state.

I remember something that happened. The local people, like Dave Banovich, who was our highway patrolman, and Roy Wolfe and Bruno Skanovsky and these different people would follow us. I remember when I was, I think, a junior. We had a great team that year, too. We finished state runner up. I needed to get a driver's license because I had turned 16. I went up to Dave. At that time the highway patrolmen did the whole thing. He did the driver's license. I was kind of concerned, because I didn't study the test, and at that time you had to pass, like, 70 percent of the test. I didn't study, and I walked up and said, "Dave, I just turned 16, and I want a driver's license." I said, "I turned 16 in July," and this was, like, October, when we started playing basketball.

And Dave said, "Sit down here. Give me your birthday and stuff." I didn't take a test. I didn't have to take a written test or driving test. He just gave me a license. [Laughter]

RM: That's the way they were in those days.

BP: He gave me a license. He said, "You know, that was a hell of a game you played last night." [Laughter] You know, it was kind of like Gene Hackman, when he played in that movie, when he finally got the confidence of people. The kids were heroes, of course. That was a farm community, and they were following them. The same thing happened with us—wherever we went we had a string of cars that would follow the bus. They would watch the game and come back. We would go all the way to places like Eureka and Austin and Gabbs. And these were the local games.

I'll never forget—we beat Eureka in Eureka. In fact, the year we were sophomores we beat Eureka five times, and every game, I swear, was within five points. I remember the whole stands emptied. We almost had as many people watching the game from Tonopah as Eureka had. I'll never forget that. Pauline and Ed Siri —all the fans—got in a big fight. They all came out of the stands.

But it was that way in those days, and you were just treated almost like royalty. For a small town, for a high school kid, if you were good at basketball, good at track, whatever, the local people—the businesspeople that had a little income and stuff—no matter where you went, it seemed like they were buying you Cokes, they were treating you to a piece of pie at the Tonopah Club, things like that. I was always well received because of my sports.

RM: Did that adulation carry over at all, after you got out of school?

BP: Yes, it did. It actually carried over. I went to college and played for Jake Lawlor one year at UNR. I sat out a year, too, and I caught hell from everybody. "Why aren't you going to college? Why aren't you playing basketball? Why aren't you doing this?" I actually didn't have a scholarship. I had a scholarship to Compton Junior College in California, but I was scared to go there. I was a Tonopah boy that wanted to go to Reno only. So I waited and saved the money, and I went to Reno. I only went for a year and half. I earned my letter at the University of Nevada in basketball and track, which was nice. I was a walk-on for Jake Lawlor at UNR, but I made the team. Jake Lawlor came down and spoke to us when we had our annual banquet at the local gymnasium. He gave praise to a lot of us players from Tonopah—of the way we played and the dedication and the fact that we played defense. He was impressed with that.

So, it was a different world, growing up. You know, sometimes you see some of these old movies with teenagers and sports and girlfriends and that type of thing. It was like that. It was like—what's the name—Small Town U.S.A. The soda fountain. A lot of fun. And, of course, my summers were with my dad, working.

RM: Working on the roofing?

BP: Working on the roofing, yes. Working on the roofing till I was a senior in high school.

RM: There's something I've wondered about. Maybe you could shed some light on it. I've noticed that a lot of the kids that go to school in Tonopah do well out in the world. A high proportion are very successful. What can you tell me about that?

BP: When I was growing up, I was always proud of the fact that I knew people like John and Charles Cavanaugh, and people who left Tonopah and went to Reno and did so well.

Of course, Bill Beko was my idol, my god. I loved Bill Beko. Bill Beko treated me like a son. He had a son late in life, and Tommy was a great kid. When he first got married to Dorothy he was always having me to dinner, always having us up there. When we got out of school, Bill and Emerson Titlow were close to our town team. We had a great town team for about two to three years, and he coached our town team. They took us to I don't know how many tournaments, a lot of tournaments. He and Emerson Titlow coached us for two to three years, and we had great teams then. We won a lot of tournaments. We won a tournament in Fallon, we won in Eureka, we won one probably two or three times in Bishop. I was most valuable player in two of the tournaments in Bishop. Great guys. When the tournament was over they took us to dinner. Spent the night there. Bill and Emerson paid for that out of their own pockets. We were all town team guys, and we were, like, 19, 20 years old. Even when I was going to college I still played on the town team.

Played with an Indian team and went across the United States, the Western states. I played under the name of Bobby Pine Tree.

RM: You did?

BP: Yes. I picked a name out. Actually, I looked more Indian than half the Indians on the team. We played in Utah, Wyoming, Colorado.

RM: Was it an Indian league?

BP: No, we just went around to different reservations and tribes. The Indians I played with were from Bishop and Ely and Duckwater. They just asked me to join. And, like I say, I was a lot darker than some of them were. So I played under the name of Bobby Pine Tree. The only problem was that I was never a drinker, and they drank a lot of beer. But they were tough ball players, and we played for about ten straight days. Sometimes two games a day. It was crazy.

RM: What was the name of your team?

BP: They went under the name of some sponsor they had out of Ely. But it was kind of crazy. I can't remember now—it must have been when I was about 21. We traveled for about 12 days. They had some money from the tribe. They had somebody who called ahead and made the games. We played, like, 15 games in 10 days. We lost, I think, only one game. We had a tough team. It was tough, but it was a lot of fun.

There were some guys by the name of Spoonhunter on them. Out of Bishop. They were tall, real light-colored Indians. They were tall, like, 6 foot 3 or 6 foot 4, which was unusual. Very thin and very athletic. They were really tough. I was a point guard. By the time we finished playing on that little run, we were really a good team. We should have played some AAA ball.

Anyway, those were memories of growing up in Tonopah. I was trying to think, after you left here the other day, of some of the things we did through the years of growing up. When I think about it now it was fun and innocent. We did a lot of things, but it would be pretty boring

to kids nowadays. They would never understand. They play video games and text each other on the phone.

RM: We were doing things.

BP: We were doing things, yes. Playing basketball. When the sun went down we'd go play kickball. We'd play kick the can actually.

In fact, I used to get on with the Terrell girls. Helen Terrell had three daughters. The Dyers had two daughters. They all lived down there on Magnolia Street below my mother's house, and we would play kick the can until their parents came looking for them. Here on the north end of Tonopah we had these big rubber gun fights. And this was in our teenage years, too. Rubber gun fights, where we'd actually have special rubber guns. We'd hand-sand them down, and they'd shoot inner tubes from tires. They'd shoot, like, 30–40 feet, and when they'd hit you they'd sting.

RM: These were strips of inner tube?

BP: Exactly.

RM: Well, I think the kids back then would look at the kids now and think that their lives are boring. Just sitting around playing video games.

BP: Yes. You don't see them going into the tennis courts like we used to do. I mean you couldn't even get a place in the tennis court. We were so busy at lunch hour and stuff, the old tennis court at the old school up there was just packed. Of course, then we got into high school, and then we got into girls, too, and that made a difference. Then we were picking the girl up, taking her back to school, or to school. That always happened.

RM: When I went to high school in Wheeling we had something called "cruising." We would drive up and down the street, pick up the girls, and go make out. Did you guys do that here?

BP: The same exact thing.

RM: And, you know, you could have made a date with them at school, but we picked them up on the street.

BP: And they'd walk on the street just hoping to get picked up.

RM: That's right. Where was lover's lane here?

BP: A couple of places. One place was out by the bridge, on the way out to the airport. Two miles out, there's a bridge that goes there. When you turn right there's a little road that goes down to the right, and it goes back in the hills right there. You could get up there, back up where you could see the highway and see that road if anybody was coming. [Laughter]

RM: What was that place called? Did it have a name?

BP: No, it really didn't have a name. I don't think it did. There's a place now the kids go, out here on Dynamite Road, by the Chinese laundry. They have a place back there that's kind of out of sight. The only problem is that there is only one road into it and one road out. When the cops get out there and bust them . . . [Laughter]

You know, I told you that we had this beer that was stolen from the distributing, and we had it in a shaft back there, but that was in my junior, senior year. I never did get into drinking, because I was really a devoted athlete. I could never drink, and to this day I still can't drink beer. One beer in the summertime is about all I can handle. That's all I cared for . . . it was nice because it was cold. When we got into junior and senior year we did a lot of going out and a lot of fishing. Whoever had a car.

And, God, I remember I bought Howard O'Brien's little 1953 Chevy. It was low-mileage, in perfect shape, and I couldn't wait to get that car. I told the guys I ran with—Don Brawley and Jack Wardle and Bob Sorenson and Tim Lydon—I said, "This car can really go cruising up and down the road. Enjoy this car, because I'm not taking this off the highway. So don't even ask me to take it hunting, or deer hunting." A week later I was on top of Six Mile. [Laughter] How I ever got up there I don't know—got on top of Six Mile with our girlfriends, all up there deer hunting, sitting in there freezing to death. We were all freezing to death.

But we had a lot of fun in those days. Going out and camping. Did a lot of things. Always got in trouble. Never in trouble for doing anything except messing around. I'll never forget, I was taking Jack Wardle on a hunting trip. We used to sit on the hood, and then if a bird jumped up you could shoot right from the hood. We were up in Pine Creek, I think, or Peavine. But we came to this creek, and I said, "Watch this." And I threw the brakes on. I had an old Buick then. Wardle went flying off the hood into the creek, face first, soaking wet. The problem is, when he went over the hood, the cheek of his butt caught the hood ornament. He ripped it open, and he was bleeding, too.

RM: It ripped his butt?

BP: Oh, God, I mean, chunks of fat hanging down. We rushed him to the hospital, and we ran into Ed Siri. Instead of just telling Ed what happened, someone said, "Yeah, Perchetti shot Jack by mistake, by accident." It looked like a gunshot wound. It had a hole in it. We got a sheet wrapped around, it was all bloody. And we finally had to tell him the truth: that didn't happen. We got him all stitched up, and he was ready to kill me. A lot of things like that. But it was a way of life, and that continued for many years after that. We finally became drinking age. Places like the Pastime Club and the Ace Club. I had my first bar when I was 20 years old.

RM: Tell me about that.

BP: I lied about my age. A guy by the name of Ed Marfisi had the Tonopah Club; he leased the Tonopah Club. And I was working at the Test Site as a laborer. I asked Ed if I could lease the Pink Elephant Room. There was a place called the Pink Elephant Room in the Tonopah Club.

And there was a guy in town by the name of Huey Paris who was a bartender. I told Huey, I said, "I'm going to lease this bar. I've got enough money saved, and I'm going to lease it from Ed. Ed's giving me a great deal, and I need you to work in there."

He said, "I can work weekends, but I can't work weeknights. You've got to stay and close up." Well, I leased that bar for a year, and when I turned 21 we had a big 21st birthday party. Don Galvin came in and said, "What's this bullshit that it's supposed to be your party, your birthday party? You've been running this bar for a year." [Laughter] Only in Tonopah things like that happened. I ran that bar for almost nine months, actually, without being 21. That was funny.

But Ed Marfisi had this bar, and he was a little tiny Italian guy from Elko, and he had a wife. Actually he worked in Reno. He worked in Reno at the casinos up there, but he was from Elko originally. He and his wife—neither one of them was over five feet tall. Little tiny people. They ran that place and did a great job, and I leased that bar from them. I had a great bar there.

At the age of 21—that was about three years after TV started—we still had the great parties. I remember people coming down and partying all night long in that bar. We had a piano, and Roy Moore would play the music. Sometimes we'd have Rosie Herrera and Mary Ann Czarevitch. Mary played with him, and Rosie played guitar. Somebody by the name of Russ was playing guitar. And we had a drummer. We had a pretty good little band. After that, they went down and played for me down at the Pastime Club.

We had great dances. I remember one Easter when all the ladies, like Dolores Robb and Milka Beko and Rose Skanovsky, were all down there singing. It was on Easter night, and we were going down the yellow line at 6:00 in the morning singing "Easter Parade." I'll never forget that. Everybody had been up all night, and we all went and had breakfast. Those were the good days.

Those days disappeared, and for at least ten years after that I had a lot bars downtown, having a lot of fun. In the time when I was down there in those early years I got married and ended up having three kids. My marriage lasted for 16 years, and I got a divorce. But those were good years.

Of course, my mother and dad were still in the same house, doing the same thing, doing the roofing business, and we still all hunted together, my brothers and sisters and I. We were all six years apart.

RM: You mean a total of six years between all of you?

BP: No, it was six years, six years, and six years. Between five and six. So I was 17 years old when my brother Nick was born. I took him around like he was my own kid when I was 18. Shared him in high school, like he was a little mascot. He went with me everywhere. And Buddy is 66. I'm going to be 72. Rita—same thing—Rita is about 60 now. And Nick is about 54. They didn't have very good planning when they had us, because they were raising kids for 24 years. So that wasn't very good.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BP: I was trying to think, after you were here the last time, of some of the things I was mentioning to you, like Tokyo Toni and some of the great characters we had in Tonopah. And I think we pretty well covered those.

RM: How about Bobbie Duncan, her history? What is your recollection?

BP: Well, we used to call her Ma Duncan, because she treated everybody like we were her sons. She not only was nice to us, she would give us money, or loan us money if we wanted to borrow a dollar. Sometimes when we'd go up on a holiday, we'd go up in the morning and have coffee in the back with her.

RM: At the Buckeye?

BP: At the Buckeye. She usually had a cook that was hired to feed her and the girls. And then she always had, like, pies and cakes. She usually had a cook that did that.

She was a sweet, sweet lady. As you know, she and Bill Hines—I don't think they were ever married, but they could have been. But they both kept their separate names. Bobbie was one of those people that could be right out of the movies. I mean, she was the perfect madam. She never got out of line. Anybody got out of line at her place, they would run out the door. Never solicited, never let her girls go downtown. She went down to take the girls to the doctor or to go get groceries. They usually went with her to get the mail. She always made them act like ladies. She was just the perfect madam to run a cat house in a small town. No one ever bothered her. When you wanted a special donation for whatever it was, whether it was school or the Elks or the Masonic Lodge or the Lions or the Rotary, when you went to Bobbie there was always money. She took care of everybody. She always did. Usually the biggest donation you got from a business was from Bobbie. And she always used to say, "Put this down. You don't have to tell anybody that I gave $50 or something." She didn't want any notoriety whatsoever. She wanted to keep her place as quiet as could be.

And that's the way to be. There were three or four women in town that were married to local businesspeople or elected officials, and that had been prostitutes in the past.

RM: Sure, not even off the line.

BP: Yes, not off the line, exactly. It's like when Tokyo Toni came off the line, and she became the same kind of thing as Bobbie. The women of Tonopah accepted Bobbie and Tokyo Toni. I remember Bob Marker's wife, Merle. They lived right where Cow County Title is now. They were all very respected by the women, never looked down on. Cleve Barras's wife was a prostitute, and I think there were probably a lot more. But those are the ones that come to the top of my head. And they were always treated really well. Bobbie didn't go to public functions, but the rest of them went to different functions. They always kept a low profile, the way it should be, and no one ever disrespected them when they saw them, which I think was good.

Anyway, Bobbie Duncan. When they had the party for her when she retired, the whole place filled up with people. It was really a nice party.

RM: At the convention center? I think I was there.

BP: Yes, the convention center. We gave her roses. Remember I told you she had a place called the Trees? It was the Banc Club first. I'm not sure where she came from, if she came from Las Vegas or where. But that was the first place that I met her. And then she bought that Buckeye Bar, or Buckeye Mine dump, and put the house on top of the mine dump. Maybe I told you, it was up on blocks when they first got it there. She let us kids sit on the couch. The chief of police was Alibi Honeycutt, and another cop used to come there, but they used to tell us that we couldn't hang there. Every time when we'd see them, they'd always drive around and make a circle up there to check up. And when they'd come up there and make a circle, you'd see the kids breaking out the back door. [Laughter] One time Bobbie hid me under the bar when he came in. And she said, "I'm not doing that again. That's the last time. I'm not hiding you kids. You guys, you're on your own."

RM: I remember the old bar, which looked out the window there. The bar looked out to the west, and they had the parlor there with Playboy centerfolds. It had such atmosphere.

BP: The one room right above the couch there—we used to sit in the parlor. We put a hole in the wall so we could look into the girl's room. That's where we used to watch Robert Bird.

RM: One time, my dad, with one of the girls, listened to what he was doing next door. She said, "You got to hear this." [Laughter]

BP: They had a bunch of guys that were real regulars up there too. Wellington Rogers.

RM: Now, Wellington Rogers married a girl off the line.

BP: She was off the line. There was another friend of mine—actually, I knew the girl. She married a kid by the name of Larry Everton. A real beautiful girl. I'm trying to remember her name. Little blonde gal. I believe she was only, like, 23 years old. She married Larry Everton from Tonopah, who was in my class. Then they moved up to Carlin—went to go work for the goldmines up there. But his sister, Vi Everton, was married to Mickey Merlino. That was Mickey's first wife. They had a son by the name of Mike. He's still going strong. Some other local guys married girls from Bobbie's or they were going together and no one ever cared; they loved each other and they didn't care.

RM: There was no discrimination. It was really neat.

BP: It was kind of neat. They became part of the community, everything from becoming sorority girls to bowling. There was a bowling team. The other gal's name was Jamie Kent, that

girl who married Larry Everton. I was kind of dating her. She was a cutie. I'd sneak into her bedroom window at Bobbie's house. She bought me a brand new deer rifle.

RM: No kidding. What a story. You would sneak in?

BP: I would sneak in after they closed. I would park down below . . .

RM: . . . and walk up the dump. Oh, what a story, Bob.

BP: She wanted me to marry her, and we hadn't gone together that long, but it didn't happen. Larry ended up asking her, and she married him. She used to send me letters from Carlin, and I told her, I said, "You can't do that anymore. You're married, and it's going to lead to no good." Maybe this is kind of secretive stuff.

RM: We can always delete it.

BP: I was out of high school then, just barely out of high school. About 1958. Yes. But the town was busy then, too, and things were happening.

RM: Was the acceptance of girls off the line the same in Beatty, as far as you know?

BP: Good question. I think they might have been, yes. I think they were pretty similar, these two towns. Hawthorne had houses in those days that moved downtown but they were brought there mostly just because of the military. I remember going down there and playing softball. Where the softball field was, if you hit a long fly ball you'd almost run into the house, in centerfield there. We had a guy by the name of Bill Rabb with us. He was coaching us, and all of a sudden the coach disappeared. We had to go fetch him out of the cat house to go home that night. He was a bartender here in town.

That was the other thing. When I got a little older, where I started having bars, I had a series of great bartenders. They were real characters. A guy by the name of Jake. And P. J. McHugh that was another one who was bartending for me at the Ace Club. And then Huey Paris bartended for me in the Pink Elephant Room. And Jake Herr. He was the guy that worked in the Ace Club. And I had a guy by the name of Kelly—Kelly Two. His name was John Kelly—Kelly John Kelly—and we called him Kelly Kelly. These were all crazy bartenders. They worked for me. Most of them. And I had women. Tinkerbelle worked for me—Wes Fleetwood's wife—and I had a ton of girls. I was running the Tonopah Club for a while there. Between the Tonopah Club and the Ace Club and the Pastime Club and the bowling alley—I ran the bowling alley—one time I had four bars going at once. So I was a busy, busy guy. And that's what destroyed my marriage, too, because I was gone 16, 18 hours a day. Had a lot of energy in those days, and ran all those places.

RM: I want to go through your sequence of bars, but, before that, is there anything else about Bobbie and the brothels?

BP: I remember going up there and helping her. I'm trying to remember. It seemed like Dave Roberts's son Dave and Curtis Kline helped put that cat house down on the foundation because it was up on blocks. They moved that house in from—I was told Goldfield, but I think it came from some place in Tonopah. They put that house up there, and of course she had guys like Wellington Rogers and those guys as carpenters. Went up and remodeled it and added to it. They added an old mobile home to it. Those guys helped her put it back together so it was a working house. But I remember all the time they were working on it, they had people coming and going.

RM: You mean customers?

BP: Customers, yes, all the time during the construction. Never slowed it down. Except for Robert Bird. I'm sure he couldn't get up those steps. [Laughter] Had to have special steps. But she ran a great house.

RM: My dad was up there when they put the new trailers in. He was doing that work. It was in the summer of '63. And that summer they were going to have a surprise birthday party for Bobbie. Do you remember that? Would you have happened to have been there?

BP: No, I really wasn't.

RM: It was the summer of '63. It was in June of '63.

BP: About '57 to 1960 is just about when she moved from the Trees up to there. So they were in the house up there, and they may . . .

RM: And, yes, then they fixed it up.

BP: They had the trailers. And the trailers had individual rooms.

RM: Yes, and each girl had her own room and everything.

BP: Yes. I remember going up there and seeing Jamie. We had a ladder set outside of her bedroom window, where I climbed through the window to see her.

RM: At that time? I think there was a girl there that summer named Jamie. Would that have been possible?

BP: Yes, it could have been. That could have been her. A very pretty girl.

RM: There was a girl there named Mona. I got to know her and actually did her history. I still have that. I came close to making the big time, getting rich with it. I was a little bit too late. I had one of the leading literary agents in New York showing it. I worked it up into a book.

BP: Oh, you did?

RM: Yes, we were going to split the profits. He told me, "If you had got it to me a couple of years earlier. . . ." I met her at that birthday party.

BP: Pretty classy, right? Bobbie got some really pretty women. She had some beautiful women. I'll never forget one of them. I can't remember her name, but she was absolutely beautiful. I met her a couple of times when she went to the grocery store with Bobbie. Every head was turned, boy. She was pretty and built. Really, really beautiful girls.

RM: How long, typically, do you think a girl stayed? I never had a sense of that.

BP: She had a few, like Jamie, that stayed over a year. But most of the time they didn't stay that long. Bobbie kept a real straight house, too. If you had any kind of a problem, if it be drugs or alcohol, you were gone.

RM: In the '60s, after they fixed it up and everything, it was the classiest whorehouse between Vegas and Reno.

BP: It was a nice whorehouse, and it had a good reputation. The Cottontail was going right after that—Beverly Harrell. Yes, it was during that time, the Cottontail. Beverly ran for an assembly seat. I have a picture of her someplace, where she stood on the Tonopah Club bar, Beverly did, and gave a speech.

I was with her the night that she ran, the election night. And she went to bed thinking that she won. But, you know, the whole county had come in. Everything but Hawthorne. She got beat by Don Moody in Hawthorne. She thought she had won, and to the day she died she thought that they had padded the ballot box for Don Moody.

RM: Maybe they did.

BP: No, I don't think they did. What happened is that she didn't spend any time in Hawthorne. Every place she spent time in, Goldfield and Tonopah, for that assembly seat. She didn't spend any time in Hawthorne. I think what happened is that they voted, like, 90 percent for Don, and she couldn't believe it. I talked to her many, many times about it, and with her husband Howard. She thought that they screwed her. She never forgave people, either. She was upset. She almost walked away from the Cottontail. She almost did. She did go to Puerto Vallarta. She was really upset. She thought she had that race won. She had little cards made, too. They were actually made out of metal—a little credit card that you could take to her establishment and get anything you wanted. And she would be billed. She printed one for me.

RM: A collector's item.

BP: I don't know what I did with that. But that was a different world then, when a madam could run for office. She almost won the election. Very close.

RM: And there was no resistance to prostitution in the town. I mean, the women supported it, didn't they?

BP: Yes, they did, actually. When I was growing up they supported it. As they went further down the road—and when Chi Chi bought the Buckeye and was going to open it—there was a lot of resistance from the churches. And the commissioners held to that ordinance that said that you had to be 300 feet from the highway. That kept them from licensing Chi Chi.

She was mad at me for a long time for not going to bat for her, but I was running the convention center, and they were basically my bosses, to an extent. There was a lot of resistance in the town to her opening that up again, once they closed them like that. You know, Barbara Raper had it, and she sold it to Chi Chi. Barbara ended up with it after Bobbie died. I'm sure there were a lot of things happening that we don't even know about.

RM: I think someone should reopen it as a bed and breakfast.

BP: Chi Chi kind of had an idea of reopening it, and I told her, I said, "Well, I think with all the time and money you spent on this thing, I'd get a bulldozer up here, and I'd just take that mountain away and push it over and make it a bigger dump until you get back 300 feet. If you just do a little bit every year, eventually you'd have 300 feet, and they can't say you can't open it if you're 300 feet from the highway." I think she only had to knock away about 100 feet of mountain, which was a lot. It's a whole mountain.

All the time and money she spent.

RM: Where is she now?

BP: She still comes up here. She spends her summers up here. She's down in California. But she was quite a lady. When she was young she was a dancer, and she did burlesque. She had a real nice picture that she had where she's sitting on John Wayne's lap. John Wayne was giving her a big kiss on the cheek. She was quite a lady. She's in her 70s, late 70s, and she's still going strong.

Her name was Chi Chi [Clarita]Fazzari. It's too bad that she couldn't have gotten it open. The first Bobbi that had the Shady Lady came up here, and she was going to buy it. She was going to open it, and they stopped her. Then she decided to go down to Sarcobatus Flat. And that's how Bobbi got down. Her name is Bobbi, too, that owns that. She's a big woman like Bobbie Duncan was. And she opened the one out here.

RM: Let's go to the point in time when you started getting involved in the economic activity of the town with your first bar. Let's go through the sequence of your bars and what you recall about all that.

BP: From about 1959, '60, I had my first bar, the Pink Elephant Room, and I think it was right after that I leased the Ace Club. Denny Hill had the Ace Club and the Rex Club, and I started running the Ace Club on a lease. Then he bought Nick Banovich out. Well, actually, he was going

to buy Nick Banovich out, and then he let me have a chance to buy it. So I ended up with the Club, too.

RM: So, you had both of them. Were you managing or owning them?

BP: I actually bought the Rex Club and I was leasing the Ace. Running those bars, I'm not sure which came before which. At one time I had the Tonopah Club, the Ace Club, the Rex Club, the Pastime Club, and the bowling alley. I had the Silver Queen. I told him, "I know nothing about machines, but I can run a bar." I had everything. I had a movie theatre upstairs, a bowling alley downstairs, and we had good food. Then I had the Pastime Club for a while. Actually, I bought the Pastime Club.

RM: What did you have to pay for that? Can you say?

BP: Yes. I had a great deal with Nick Banovich. I bought the Rex Bar, and he wanted $600 a month. He offered it to me for . . . I think it was $50,000. And I said (I'd already worked out a deal on paper), "I tell you what, Nick, I'll give you $600 per month for ten years and no interest. Well, if I pay interest, I'll give you 9 percent interest." And I paid a lot more than that. So it turned out well. It was like $7,200 a year for ten years—like, $72,000—but it was probably going to save me $30,000, $40,000. So it turned out okay. I paid payments to him until I finally owned it. I ran the bar up until 1978, and that's when I started leasing it out. I have been leasing it ever since. I still own it.

RM: What were the challenges? What were the ins and outs of running a bar in town in those days?

BP: Well, in those days, in that period that I ran the bars, from about early 1960s to 1978, we had pretty good bar business. It was always good in the fall. The summers were always slow. When hunting season started, and when we got into celebrations, into holidays and stuff, it was always a pretty good business. I had some of the same people work for me year in and year out, like June Manhire. I had some bartenders that stayed with me. The big challenge was trying to keep the bartenders honest.

You always had bartenders that were like: two for them and one for you and two for me. I'd walk in, and they'd have whiskey under the bar where they'd been drinking. They drank every day, and there was always a shot of booze around. So I actually put in a couple of phony cameras and kept them going for a while. [Laughter] They thought I was watching them, so they quit some of the stuff they were doing.

I'll never forget one Jim Butler Days. The place was packed. That was the other thing, too—I was running the convention center at the same time. I had managers helping me out with the bars. Jim Butler Days was packed, and I was going to the convention center and doing a lot of stuff for Butler Days. I came in one day, and I had three different bartenders working at the Ace Club. We had a live band, and we were packed. I just went in and took all the money. And, God, this one bartender, Pat Breedlove was really upset. She said, "What are you doing?"

I said, “I’m just taking the money; I put a fresh bank in for you.” There was $473 over the take that she had planned on taking at the end of the shift. Of course, at that time we were taking in a lot of money. Butler Days, with three bartenders working, we’d take in $500 an hour or more. Three bartenders working and a cocktail waitress. It was that much over, so I fired her immediately. She was upset with me and bad-mouthed me.

But I always had a lot of women working for me. At one time, like I said, I had all the bars at that one side of the street; didn’t make any difference where you went.

I always had things happen. I had a guy shoot a guy in one of my bars. John Gilman who used to be a probation officer in town, was working for me as a bartender. He worked at the Tonopah Club. Then he went down to the Ace Club to work for me, and Bob Connelly came in. Bob was a local guy who was working construction in town. He was the brother to Audrey Cannon or Audrey Jensen. They called her the Black Widow because she had been married a lot of times. This guy came in and was giving him a bad time, and he just pulled a gun out of his belt and shot him.

RM: Now, who shot whom?

BP: Bob Connelly shot this guy. I can’t remember the guy’s name. Shot him right in the chest with a .257 Roberts. Blew a hole in him that big.

RM: Four inches.

BP: Went through just a short distance. Went through him; blew up my juke box. A kid by the name of Jerry Korine was in there, an alcoholic from Goldfield. He spent a lot of time in the bar. The kid who was shot had a hole in his back. He was sucking air; he couldn’t breathe. He grabbed a roll of tinfoil and made a big ball like a baseball and stuck it in that hole and got him breathing again. He saved his life, and the guy lived.

He had a hole in his back this big around where it came out. I was on the phone talking to John. I used to call down there and talk to my bartenders to see how many people were there, what was going on. John said, “Put that gun down!” I heard a boom, and I was out the door. I got there almost as fast as. . . . Jerry Korine saved his life, though. Finally went to prison. Connelly had a trial. He went to prison for shooting him. Bill Beko was the district attorney then. It wasn’t good for me, of course, because it happened in my bar. It was just one of those things that happened.

But usually I had a pretty good bar business. The Rex Café was open. We had Chinese food. People would come down, have a cocktail before dinner, go in and have a nice Chinese dinner. So, you know, it was kind of like the old times. They don’t do any of that stuff anymore.

Andy Demetrius had just hit town and was our new district attorney. He was going to work in private practice and brought his new wife, Alex, from Reno. They built a house up on the hill.

You know you could probably write a book about my life from there on, with my different marriages.

RM: I don't know if you want to go into that. Some people don't like to go into it, and for others it doesn't matter.

BP: Yes.

I did the bar business for quite a few years until I finally leased my last bar in autumn of 1978, the Rex Bar. I had sold the Pastime Bar and bought the NYCO Building next to the Pastime. Bud Soper bought the Pastime Bar and the NYCO Building from me for $90,000. So I invested that money. I was always investing money in one thing or another. Been in business all my life, and I always had employees. But the bar business is a tough business. You better expect seven days a week. You are married to the job.

RM: What are the some of the downsides—the problems and the challenges?

BP: Well, I always tried to keep my bars clean, as much as I could, and tried to keep them without any riffraff. Tried to keep the undesirables out of them, so there were no fights. Well, you can do everything you want to do, but some things you can't stop. That was the downside—trying to keep people from breaking the place up, trying to keep my bartenders honest.

They were paid minimum wage plus tips, so they didn't make a lot of money. I always explained to them, "If you don't make money, I don't make money." You wanted to have good bartenders that have a good personality. I tried to hire a lot of women, mostly because they were not only cleaner but also attracted more business. I mean, once in a while you'd get a bartender that was a man that could really handle the crowd.

Funny stories happen all the time. I called the bar one time and Kelly Kelly was down there. He was different—a good bartender. He could handle a big crowd. So I called, and Kelly didn't answer, so I ran down to the bar and tried to check it out and find out what was going on. Where's Kelly? It is completely full of people and no bartender. So I go back to the ice room, and I can't get the door open. He's lying on top of this lady, this woman, having sex, with his foot against the door. [Laughter] I said, "What the hell are you doing? That bar is full of people." I was so mad I almost threw him into the bar, and I said, "You're fired." And I went behind the bar and started bartending. He came back and started helping me, and I forgave him. I said, "Why didn't you wait until after your shift?"

Another time I had a band in there. Kelly Kelly had some lady on the stage back there and put his foot through the bass drum. I had him pay for that. There were always things happening.

I had a cousin by the name of Terry Boscovich that was crazy. He got back from the Vietnam War.

RM: That was Bozo's son, right?

BP: Bozo's son. When he came in drunk, I'd baby-sit him. I'd take care of him. Well, one time I was hiring some other people, and I said, "Terry just wait a minute." He grabbed my bar and picked it up. Broke all my water lines. So water is spilling every place, and he's shaking the bar up and down.

RM: Oh, my God. He must have been strong.

BP: He was so strong, you can't believe it. And then he went through the glass door after that. The door was locked, and you had to pull it. He couldn't pull it, and he was just pushing it—walked right through the glass door. He got all cut up. What a character. I could write a book on Terry; he was different. So those things happened.

RM: Were the people that you hired mainly locals or people coming through town?

BP: All locals. Tinker came from Reno, but he bartended all over Tonopah and then he worked for me. In fact, I went to Alaska hunting and finally got to a telephone. Came out of the bush, got to a telephone, called the bar. Jake used to get all flustered up when I called him. He said, "Jesus, where've you been?" I'd been out there hunting Dall sheep, and I was back in the mountains for some days. He hadn't heard from me, and he thought I was going to call him every day.

I said, "I'm not near a telephone. This is the first time I got to the Yukon Territory. It's the first time I could call you, Jake." But anyway, he was all flustered, and he had taken the drop every night up to my house. My wife took care of that.

But the bar business back then was so much different than it is now. We didn't have a lot of people, but we had our own pool tournaments and stuff like that. And we did things. We formed pool teams, and we played from bar to bar. We played Goldfield. We created business. Every Sunday we had a pool tournament.

RM: What bar was this at?

BP: This was at the Rex Bar. I did it most at the Rex Bar and the Pastime Bar. But I would put on dinners all the time and have free dinners—free spaghetti dinners and stuff. I'd serve chicken and spaghetti. It was great, because the people came down, and any time we'd have a dinner—basketball tournaments, baseball tournaments—I'd have the players come down. I'd serve them spaghetti and stuff and serve these big dinners for them all the time. Always doing things to make more business.

We'd have live bands come in, too. During that early '70s period, right after we started Jim Butler Days—from, like, 1970 or '71 to '77, right in there—I had these great bands come in to Butler Days, and I'd have them play at my place, too. We'd have crowds in there so you couldn't even get in the place. It was just crazy.

RM: How did you find out which bands to get?

BP: I had some people's names in Reno, and a few times I drove to Reno to listen to them if they were playing a club up there. I had one band that had five kids that came down and played for me three years in a row for Butler Days. They were wonderful. They'd just pack the place. We got to be good friends. In fact, they'd stay for a week afterwards. I'd put them in one of my rental houses. Damn if they didn't have a car wreck up in Idaho going to another gig, and three

of the five got killed. It was a terrible thing. I knew their wives real well. They were all married, and the women lost their husbands. Those things happen. But I had them for Butler Days, and in those days we really had big crowds—3,000 people in the street that would watch the parade. It was really good, Butler Days. We're going to have a good one this year. It's going to happen, we just had a meeting last night.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RM: I want to do a whole thing on Butler Days and all your whole activities. You're kind of the sparkplug of the town.

BP: Back in 1970, that's when I started Butler Days.

RM: You started it? I didn't know that.

BP: Yes.

RM: But let's finish up with the bars. Are there any other downsides or challenges in making it work? Or any more promotional things that you did to improve business and such?

BP: Mainly that was the biggest thing we were doing at that time. Of course, I got out of the Tonopah Club; I was running it for Leroy David. We closed it down, and vagrants got in there and burnt the Tonopah Club down. Everybody had thought that Leroy had burned it down for the insurance. There was no insurance on it. It didn't have any insurance; he lost everything. And this was such a shame.

RM: And it was an institution in town.

BP: Yes, it was neat.

RM: Tell me about the whole bar and its history—everything you know about the Tonopah Club.

BP: When I had the Tonopah Club it had that big, beautiful bar. It was about 60 feet long, and it had those old pictures of the nudes on the wall there. There was that big room, and there was always a crap game going on, and a 21 game. My dad had the poker game there when I was in there. Eddie Marfisi was running the Tonopah Club then. I took it over from him after he had been there; that's when I had the Pink Elephant Room. I must have taken it over in the '60s. Must have been, like, 1966, '67 when I took the Tonopah Club.

RM: You bought it from him?

BP: No, I leased it. I ran it for Leroy. Leroy put 25 slot machines in there. I remember we opened the Keno game, and we had a dishonest Keno dealer. We got hit for a $5,000 Keno ticket. We almost had to go into our pockets just to dig out a few dollars. But we couldn't prove it, we couldn't prove it. She had set this thing up with a friend of hers. We lost the $5,000. And I had a good chef—I'm trying to remember the chef's name. At that time the Rotary Club met there, also, in the back, in the fireplace room.

RM: What do you remember about it as a kid?

BP: As a kid, I remember, I went down there to have coffee with my dad. He used to meet a couple of guys. A guy by the name of Flea. His name was Flea LeFevre. He was an electrician in town, an electrical contractor. And we used to meet with him and Felix Traynor. Felix Traynor was a local mine inspector, and he was married to Josephine Traynor. He and my dad were good friends. They played two-handed pinochle, and they got me started on two-handed pinochle.

Those guys were great guys, and they used to meet for coffee every day. My dad had a drinking problem—we used to tease him—but he drank 15–20 cups of coffee a day. Probably did. Between that and the cigarettes—that's why he had problems later on. But we used to go there when we were roofing. We'd always kind of break to go down there.

I loved the Tonopah Club. It had a good atmosphere. I liked the restaurant, the restaurant was good. But the barroom was neat. Things happened in the barroom. I'll never forget the 1950 celebration, when I was only 12 years old. They had a big celebration downtown. As kids, we used to go to the Tonopah Club all the time, of course in the restaurant part. Then we'd go see my dad, or catch him in the bar part. Well, I remember when Floyd Summers was the cop. He walked through the door, and he killed a guy right there in the Tonopah Club. A young kid had threatened to beat him up the night before.

RM: Killed him with his fists?

BP: No, no. Shot him. In uniform. He was in uniform.

RM: He was in uniform and just shot him?

BP: Shot him and killed him. Didn't warn him or anything; it was premeditated. If he saw the kid he was going to kill him.

RM: Going to kill him because the kid had threatened him earlier? What did they do to him?

BP: You know what? He got away with it. I can't remember what happened. The kid had threatened him, and they had words when he shot him. I don't think the kid knew that he was going to pull his gun and kill him right there. So the guy was a smart aleck, and said something, and Floyd shot him. It was crazy. That was crazy.

I told you about the time I saw Charlie Stewart and Milt Russell fighting. That was quite a fight. You know, Charlie was the guy that had the Skunk Dive, the black guy.

But the Tonopah Club was a fixture in town. Out in front of the Tonopah Club all these silver dollars were in some type of an epoxy, and they were all on the wall there. The kids would look at the silver dollars. But the Tonopah Club was a unique building. They had rooms upstairs, too. Some of the bartenders and dealers stayed up there. They rented them.

RM: They actually lived there?

BP: They actually lived there. They went through a series of cooks, always.

At that time there was the Tonopah Club; the Rex Café, with Chinese food; and the Town Hall. Right by the newspaper office, they had a restaurant there—Town Hall Café and Bar. When my mother was growing up there was a place called the Quick Lunch, and that was where everybody worked, like Milka Beko and Rose Skanovsky. I remember a little bit of it, but I was really small then. I can't remember much about that. But I remember going to Fabbi's Bakery and getting the bread when I was little. Oh, the Banc Club down the street had a restaurant, too. There was another hotel when I was growing up, and it had Basque food. The Truebas ran that.

RM: Did they serve it family style?

BP: Yes. I went to work with Jay Howard and Jay Howard became sheriff later on. When I was a cop in 1963 to 1966, I worked with Jay. One time I said, "I always wondered what horsemeat tastes like."

He said, "Well, you ate horsemeat. [Laughter] Did you have hamburgers at the Banc Club? Well, you ate horsemeat." So I guess I knew what horsemeat tasted like. That's probably a true story.

Bill Stevenson had the Pastime Club at that time, and also his wife had a western shop in the building, which now is the new hardware store. So, as kids, we knew all those businesses on Main Street. We knew every business and every business owner.

RM: Around the mid-'60s, what would you say was the number one nightspot in town?

BP: Up until the Tonopah Club closed, that was probably it. I would think that the number one place to go to dance on Friday and Saturday night was the Pastime Club. The Twist had just come out, and some of those things. When I had it, I put in one of these mechanical bulls, too. The guys would go down there and start riding the bull.

RM: Was that a big hit?

BP: It was, yes. I have pictures of me and George Guzman riding that with just tuxedos on. That was a big hit. The Pastime Club was kind of a rough club. There was always a fight in there, I don't care what I did. One time, I had a bunch of Indians in there, and they were getting ready to fight. I wasn't a good boxer, but I could handle myself, as far as breaking up a fight or pulling people out. The bar was full of people, and I jumped up on the bar. These three or four Indians were fighting, and I took a big leap. I was going to land in the middle of all four of them. Dang if they didn't move at the last second. I felt so stupid. I got up, and I mucked out the two bad ones. I could always get along with the Indians, because I knew how to talk to them. And they usually settled down; very seldom did I ever have a problem.

But I was young in those days, a good-looking guy, always having girls around and women working for me. I was always in trouble. I'll never forget, I was bartending one night at the Pastime Club. This would have been about 1965. I had a guy there from San Francisco, and he kept leaving. I'd serve him a drink, and he'd leave me a $1 or $2 tip. Those were big tips in those days. And at the end of the shift, I'll never forget, he grabbed my hand, and I said, "Are you leaving; going to call it a night?" I'll never forget, he put his hotel key in my hand. He was gay. [Laughter]

So I said, “Hey, thanks for your tips, but you’ve got the wrong guy.” You didn’t see too many gay people.

RM: Were there any in town? People who were known as gay?

BP: Yes, there were a couple, and they were local residents. In fact, I think the one might have died of AIDS. And there was another kid by the name of Tommy Henderson that worked for the FAA. I’m sure he was gay. They kind of, you know, talked like they were gay. We had a gay kid in my class by the name of Fred Priester.

RM: Did you understand anything about gayness in those days? I mean, that was kind of a distant world.

BP: No. We knew he was different. He sounded different, he talked different, and we just treated him like one of our own. We never held it against him. It was the same thing with the gay guys in town.

RM: They were accepted, weren’t they?

BP: The one guy had local people, local relatives, here. He had guys come up from San Francisco to visit him that were really gay. And they would stay with him at the time. We knew that they were all gay.

RM: But did the town think anything about that?

BP: No. I don’t remember anybody ever saying anything. There was just kind of a way that they accepted it. There was never an influx of a lot of gays in town. The guys that came in always seemed to have money. And I didn’t see any problems.

RM: We lived in a mining town in Colorado, and there was a gay guy everybody knew. We were just kids, and our dad said, “Just stay away from him.” We weren’t quite sure why he said it.

BP: That’s about the same thing it was here. My mother and dad accepted things a little different than they do now. You never looked down on them; they were just one of the guys that was just a little weird. And my mother and dad would have no problem going to Bobbie Duncan’s to say hello or do something, have a coffee. My dad went up there quite a bit. He was always fixing the roof and doing things for her. Half the time he’d do them for nothing. But my dad would never do anything where the girls were. He’d always go around the back and have a cup of coffee when he was doing the roof.

RM: I don’t know whether you would want to comment on this at all, but I was talking to a guy in Smoky Valley, a native, and he said, “I’m thinking about writing a book on Smoky Valley up there.”

I said, “What’s going to be the title?”

And he said, “It’s going to be A Little Peyton Place.” Was that a characteristic of Tonopah in those days?

BP: It was and it wasn’t. We had . . . I used to call them detectives. We had some women that were widows, who, before TV and right after TV, would drive around town all night, and they knew everything that was going on.

They would go around and check people’s windows and their cars. We called them detectives. They were two sisters.

And then there were another two people, prominent people, who spent a lot of time looking. They knew everything that was going on in town. It was like they could tell you things that happened before the word got out. That so-and-so was going to get a divorce. They knew about the fights they had.

So, there was a little bit of a Peyton Place in Tonopah. There were a lot of people that were cheating on their wives sometimes; that was happening. We knew a little bit about it, but those two knew it all. They knew what was happening. And I remember people getting caught coming out of somebody’s house.

RM: We lived in a town in Colorado—Breckenridge, Colorado, an old mining town. It was a two-part town. There were the churchgoers and everything who were playing it really straight, supposedly, and then there were old miners and a couple brothels and a lot of affairs going on. Would that characterize Tonopah at all?

BP: Actually, it would. There were a lot of things like that happening in Tonopah, and it’s hard for me to say people’s names now.

RM: I wouldn’t want you to.

BP: Because their families are still here. Just like the detectives. Those were prominent people, and their families are still here, and I wouldn’t want to offend them.

One time I was with my girlfriend Leila Wolfe. I don’t mind saying her name, because we were girlfriend and boyfriend. We were not doing anything except just kissing. It was real funny. I came home from a dance, and I was in front of her house, and I had this old car. Leila was underneath me, but we were just kissing. I looked up, and here was this woman’s face pressed against my side window. She was blind, almost. Her name was Nellie— Josie Traynor’s mother—and she was pressed up against the window. I think she thought I was killing her. I jumped up, and Leila jumped up. We were always out smooching.

We were out smooching another time. The cops came around the corner, and I was backed up against the old hospital. At that time, Julie Hughes lived in the old hospital up there, above her street. My uncle George was letting me use his truck. The cops came around the street. I’d just learned how to drive with Dave Banovich’s driver’s license, and I let the clutch out, and I hit the gas, and it was in reverse. [Laughter] I knocked the whole fence down. So the next day I had to go up and put another fence in. It took me a half a day after school to put the fence in.

But there were people having affairs in Tonopah; there were quite a few of them going on. People knew about it. There was one affair that was going on for 20, 30 years. Two or three times, when I went out with my girlfriend, I would run into them out there parked.

RM: Were they married?

BP: They were both married.

RM: And probably their spouses knew it and accepted it.

BP: Their spouses knew it. In fact, Les Carlson was president of the Rotary Club. It was Secretary's Day, and he had seen this woman with this man so many times that, even though her husband was there, he didn't realize that, and he introduced her as the boyfriend's wife.

And the whole room went silent. No one said a word. Somebody said something; he went on and on. So, after the meeting I went and told him, "Boy, big screw-up." [Laughter] He was our mortician, local mortician.

So, there were things going on all the time.

RM: It seemed to me that in Tonopah they took sex as more natural. Where I grew up, in Denver, it was repressed.

BP: There was never really a lot of church activity in Tonopah, where that was a separate group or something. But there were things going on all the time, and we kids got to know about it, because we were out seeing people, seeing things happen after dark, you know, that type of thing. I wouldn't say we were a Peyton Place, but let's say there was a lot of mischievous activity that was happening. It was kind of funny and interesting, too, because you almost felt sorry for the guy or the girl, whoever was getting cheated on.

RM: Yes, but I think in a lot of cases they were cheating, too. Was that true here?

BP: Yes, that was true, too. A lot of that was going on. I went to Bishop with the basketball team I was on, and we had a hotel room. I opened the door at the same time as the people across from me opened the door, and it was two people from Tonopah that were having an affair. And you were sorry to meet them when they'd been doing that. It was just like, "Oh, my God." [Laughter] What do you say?

There was always something going on. Every once in a while a fight would break out with somebody that had some of it, or too much of it.

RM: Were there ever any shootings or anything like that? That was how Jim Butler met Belle Butler. It was a shootout. That's how he got her.

BP: Yes, I've heard that.

RM: So, it wasn't unheard of.

BP: You ought to get the records on the prostitute that got shot. There've only been a few murders in Tonopah, not very many. Probably ten or less, including Louis Meyers and Frankie May, when they got killed by the young guy. We talked about that. There was the prostitute who got killed on the line by that Ormes. Then he went to Carvers, and they caught him up there. I don't think they killed him, though. I think they shot him in the belly, and then he came out. Maybe they did kill him. You see, I can't remember those things. We need to look that up.

RM: Was that up at the Buckeye?

BP: No, that was down on the line, at Taxine's. Right behind where the Pocket Park is. That's when I went out and sold all these newspapers. I sold, like, 120 newspapers. That plaque on the wall.

RM: But some guy came in there and killed the girl in her bed?

BP: Killed her in her room. Yes, in her bed, basically. Of course, there was Lloyd Sammons shooting that guy in the 1950 celebration in the Tonopah Club. If you dig up that 1950 publication, you'll find that. And there was another deputy that got killed in the sheriff's office. A deputy sheriff got killed who was a kid—I think his name was Ray Moran. That was a long time ago. There weren't that many murders. There are only those four or five that I can remember.

RM: It would be good to compile a list of Tonopah's murders.

BP: If nothing else, old Bill Roberts ought to do that—give him something to write about. Those were kind of interesting, the details of each one. The prostitute, of course, that was a big thing. And something like that happened back in—it must have been the late '40s or early '50s. That was a big thing in Tonopah, of course, a murder. Of course, when the kid, Mike Shellenbarger, killed those two old tramp miners, that was a big thing too.

RM: One more question, totally unrelated, just popped into my mind. Did you ever know a guy named Johnny Sudenberg? He was a boxer. When Jack Dempsey came here for something they asked him what his toughest fight was. He said it was with Johnny Sudenberg, here in Tonopah.

BP: I've heard that story, and I think it was probably a true story. I have a picture of Jack Dempsey when he was here, with the committee that brought him here. They all got beards that year to celebrate Tonopah's fiftieth anniversary.

RM: Dempsey did?

BP: No, the Lions Club members. For the fiftieth anniversary.

RM: Yes, and I think Freck Lydon worked out with Dempsey when he was here.

BP: Tim Lydon has pictures of him and Freck together.

CHAPTER NINE

RM: Bob, do you have any thoughts from our last meeting about things you might want to comment on?

BP: Well, we got up to the convention center. Bill Beko and Ray Downs went door to door to sell the bond to remodel the convention center, because we felt as a tourist destination we had the best place in the state to have a nice convention center. So they really worked hard at this. It passed; not by a large amount, but it passed. It turned out to be a great idea, because we were really proud of the convention center. A contractor out of Idaho came in for, I think, only $125,000 in 1966-1967. Remodeled the convention center. We had 400 nice padded chairs with arm rests. I think there were about 75 or 80 new tables. The convention center had red carpet and brown paneling throughout the building. They redid it and left a large area in the middle for conventions and for dances and local events.

So I made application to be the first director at the convention center. They didn't have any money; it was going to be a part-time position. They asked me to try and give it a shot and see how it would turn out. So I sent letters out all over the state of Nevada—every organization in the state. And because of the location of Tonopah we started to get calls. We had a small brochure made up, and people wanted to come to Tonopah. At that time we had over 500 rooms. The town was in pretty good shape, and we started getting these calls for small conventions— anywhere from ten to 300. We could take a convention up to 300 people. We had enough rooms in the town, and, because of the central location, it became a great place for statewide conventions. Groups like the Elks, the Eagles, the Does, the Rotary Club, and all these different places. They came out really good.

I started there in 1968 on a part-time basis. When I first started I was the director, the secretary, and the maintenance guy. I did it all. That was a good endeavor. I ended up staying there for almost 28 years, until I retired. I retired in '94. It was actually 26-1/2 years. Jim Merlino went in and took my place, and I retired.

We had a lot of groups that voted to come to Tonopah every year, year in and year out, not to go anyplace else, because it was better for their membership to drive to Tonopah than it was to drive the length of the state to Vegas, Reno, or Elko. So it turned out to be a good endeavor. A lot of religious groups, a lot of fraternal organizations.

RM: For a typical convention, when in the week would it start and how long would it last?

BP: Most of the conventions were actually two- and three-day conventions. Some started on Wednesday or Thursday, but most of them were just Friday-Saturday and go home on Sunday. They'd register most of the time on Friday and stay till Sunday. There were groups, of course, that came in for four or five days, but most of them were just the two and three days.

RM: What stands out in your mind about any of these groups or events?

BP: Well, the mayor of Las Vegas right now, who is . . . oh, shoot, I can't think of his name.

RM: I know who you mean, the lawyer for the mob.

BP: The lawyer from the mob, yes. He used to come up with Harry Clayborn all the time.

RM: Harry was a judge.

BP: Yes. We had a lot of judges' conventions here, too. Judge Beko, of course, was the judge here in town, and was the host of those things. Sometimes they'd have those seminars where they bring in speakers and pick up some credit for new laws that came into existence. They had to stay on top of those. They were required to take so many hours every year of new laws and changed policies and such.

I know through the years we had a lot of great conventions, and I was honored four or five times by the conventions that came here. Those were all good. They did come back, and it was nice.

The other thing I did is I drove around the state. I would go to the different towns. If they were having a convention in Winnemucca, and the board of directors met to pick where they were going to meet the next three or four years, at that time I would go ahead and give them my proposal on Tonopah and what we could provide for them. At that time we didn't charge for the convention center; it was absolutely free. The coffee was free. And my services and my secretary's services were all free. So it paid off making those trips. Four or five times I think I kind of put people on the spot because I was standing there in front of them. So when they came to their vote they gave us the chance to host their convention. The state bar association started coming every year, which was nice. The state Democrats met here three or four times. They even had a Vegas/Reno-type central committee meeting when they met here.

RM: How many conventions would you have in a typical year? Any way of estimating?

BP: No, but conventions that were, probably, 25 delegates or conventioneers or more, we probably would average pretty close to three to four a month. Some were small groups. We had a lot of church groups come, also. A lot of groups, like the Eagles and some of these other groups that came here, had their quarterly meetings. They would meet every quarter. So, we would end up with pretty good numbers.

RM: Almost one a week, then?

BP: Almost one a week, yes. We had some smaller rooms, and there were some weekends when we'd have a small group come in with a large group. We'd do that. We did this from 1968 to about 1980. At that time we decided to get some more money, get another bond, and we added the large room in the back called the Buckhorn Room, some more restrooms, and remodeled our kitchen. So we added two rooms. We had another room that had an outside entrance. And it had its own bar and own restroom. You could seat 150 people in that back room. Between that room and the front room, which could seat 200 people, sometimes we'd

have two conventions going at once and use the outside entrance. And in the large room we could seat 350 people.

At that time we had a lot of restaurants in Tonopah, which we don't have now. When I'd set up a convention, I'd have different caterers—we had Rex Café, we had good Chinese food—and they would come cater for me, bring food up. We had two or three Mexican restaurants that would come cater for me. Of course, we had the bigger restaurants that would do the American food. So that turned out real nice. But now they have a real problem with catering, because there aren't very many restaurants. So what they do now is they use a lot of organizations, like the Elks and the Lions, to do their catering now, because they have trouble finding restaurants that will do it. My friend Chris Bramwell has a beautiful catering business where he does a lot of barbecue chicken and ribs for my local and out-of-town groups.

RM: So the Elks actually provide the food?

BP: The Elks provide it; exactly. They'll do quite a bit of that.

RM: Did it stay strong through all of your tenure there, or did it begin to fade before you left?

BP: It started to fade a little bit. They started building more convention centers in the state. Elko had a big convention center, and Winnemucca had a big convention center. Ely built their convention center after ours. People weren't real happy with going to some of these places on account of the mileage, but they still would go ahead and try these other places out. Fallon had a convention center, also. So I started getting more and more competition. But some of the groups stayed with us year in and year out and never left.

In 1986, I was appointed as the rural commissioner on the Nevada Commission on Tourism. So we had a chance to bring in some bus groups and tourism groups that were staying overnight. We would actually feed them at the convention center, and they'd spend the night. We'd do some tours with them. We took some Round Mountain Gold tours and some of those things. Being on the commission for 13 years, we also got some of the tourism conventions here. So that was all good.

RM: What happened to it after you left?

BP: It did go downhill, because the town changed. And when the town changed it was harder, because there were no caterers. We lost a lot of rooms, too. Two or three motels shut down. That wasn't good.

RM: Which ones? Do you recall?

BP: Of course, the L and L Motel. When we first started, it was open at that time, and they had over 100 rooms. And then the Sundowner was off and on. The Silver Queen. When I first started there was no Best Western. We actually, at one point, had 650 rooms, I think, total. And then they just started to go. Now we're down to around half that, or maybe 400 rooms.

RM: Do you still get conventions here in town?

BP: Yes, they still get conventions here. They do. They don't get as many, but they do get conventions here. Now they charge for events, which we never did. It was all free. So that made a difference, too.

I was trying to think if anything stood out in my mind as something spectacular. There wasn't really a lot. It was just kind of a boring job. Life went on. The only thing is, being on the commission on tourism was a great position for me, because I had a heads-up on what was happening in the state with tourism and had a chance at attracting bus tours that we wouldn't have got otherwise. So those were nice. And then I traveled all over the world.

RM: Where did you go?

BP: I went on big tours. I went with Dick Bryan and Bob Miller. We went every place. We went to Seoul, Korea; we went to Singapore; we went to Hong Kong; we went to Tokyo.

RM: To promote tourism?

BP: To promote tourism for the state of Nevada.

RM: Was Miller governor at that time?

BP: Miller was governor, and Dick Bryan was governor, both. I went with both of them, at different times.

Those were wonderful trips. I had great contacts. The commission on tourism had an office in Japan, and some of those contacts I made became lifelong friends. I had some of those people come from Japan to Tonopah, and I had a chance to entertain them. They usually took a group of anywhere from eight to 12 people, and they would all be set up ahead of time, as far as who we met with. Mostly we met with tour companies out of Japan and Korea; and I went to Taipei. Real interesting trips, of course, because I had a chance to become a tourist and sight-see. But we made great contacts. I get along well with the Japanese people. Like I say, they brought some tours into Tonopah. Even though they wanted to go to Vegas or Reno, they always stopped here, too.

As a commissioner I had the chance to go all over the United States, too. Mostly to bus association conventions. I had a chance to go to some of those conventions. I went to Salt Lake City, I went to Louisville, Kentucky, to Charleston, and to Atlanta, Georgia.

RM: And you would work those conventions? Would you have a booth?

BP: I'd work those conventions. Sometimes I'd have a booth. I'd always carry all my cards with me, and a couple of times I'd get to speak to groups and tell them what they had to see in the state of Nevada, in rural Nevada. I always represented rural Nevada. But those were trips I never will forget—going with the governors. Dick Bryan was funny. When we went to Japan he

didn't like Japanese food, especially raw fish, sushi. He couldn't handle it. But if you knew Dick Bryan, which I'm sure you do, he was a very polite man and trying to be hospitable to the Japanese. He said, "Now, listen, let me pass some of this food to you. You eat it, and I'll just tell them how good it tastes." [Laughter]

I told him, "You're going to make me fat. I'm eating twice as much." He was hardly eating anything, and I was eating everything. A couple of times he passed it too soon, and they would give him more food. [Laughter] It was really funny because they'd give him more food. I hadn't eaten what he'd already given me the first time. He was a great governor. I really like Dick Bryan, and I liked Bob Miller. They were both Democrats. At that time I was a Democrat. I didn't change parties until later.

RM: What insight can you give us into their personalities and characters?

BP: Well, you know, Dick was a very articulate person. He always worked on speeches. They'd have speeches written up for him, and he would change them, and he would speak to the Japanese or whichever event before a tour group. He didn't like to go. When he didn't bring his wife, he did go on tours. We took some tours to the different places, run by the government of Japan. That was nice.

We had a lot of fun with Bob Miller. I'll never forget, when we went to Tokyo we went to the Playboy Club there. There were about six or eight of us—five or six of us, anyway—and we were drinking Crown Royal on the rocks at the Playboy Club. It was before we went to dinner. Of course, I was the rural rep on that trip, and these guys had been so nice to me, and I wanted to treat them to a couple of cocktails. I was just a naive kid out of Tonopah. We had two or three rounds of Crown Royals, and the girls came by and said hello to us and introduced themselves. I tried to get the ticket before we went to dinner; I wanted to pay for the drinks. This Japanese gentleman—Michinroo was his name—was our representative in Japan. He grabbed the ticket out of my hand and said, "No, no, no, you're not buying the ticket." I had taken money with me, but the ticket was for $880. We only had two rounds of drinks. That would about wipe my budget out. I thought maybe a hundred dollar bill would cover it.

RM: Good thing he did cover it, right? [Laughter]

BP: It's a good thing he did. The drinks were, like, $250 per round. So that was funny that that happened. We didn't meet the Emperor of Japan, but we met one of his men. It was kind of funny, too. When I landed in Tokyo my luggage went ahead of me and went to Taipei. So here I am in a pair of Levis and cowboy boots. I went and got my laundry done and had to wear the same clothes. I had this cowboy hat with me—we always brought these white cowboy hats. And this gentleman took a liking to me, and he took me around because I had a western hat and cowboy boots. I had a white shirt on and a black coat. That's what I came with. So this Japanese gentleman took me around, and I got a chance to meet some of the dignitaries from Japan. They had some guests there that were hotel owners and things like that. Well, I found out later—he didn't speak English very well, and at that time I had a full head of hair. He thought that I was Dean Martin.

RM: No kidding?

BP: Yes. [Laughs] So that was kind of funny, because everybody was really nice to me. I heard something a couple of times where they said "Mr. Martin" or something. I didn't know what the hell they were saying. I finally got a hold of him later, after I found out that he thought I was Dean Martin because I had this cowboy hat on. I told him, "No, no, no, no. I'm from a little town called Tonopah, Nevada." I said, "That's a compliment. I appreciate it." I said, "I wish I had his money, but I have to pass." That was kind of funny.

But we had some great tourism trips. We ended up getting some nice tour companies to come here from all over Japan and Taipei. I had a chance of doing some great sightseeing. Here's a kid from Tonopah, Nevada, that had never been any place, and one day I'm in Taipei, and next day I'm in Singapore going through palaces and special gardens.

Our first director—his name was Steve Richer—for the Commission on Tourism was from New Jersey. In fact, I just saw him about two months ago. He's now, or he was, head of the tourism commission in New Jersey. He took me by the arm—in fact, I stayed with him in the same room—and he kind of took me by the hand and really showed me a lot. That was nice. That 13 years I spent on the commission really turned out to be a great 13 years. I had a chance to meet a lot of people. I had a chance to have dinner with Steve Wynn.

RM: What do you recall about him?

BP: We had pictures taken. He just seemed like a nice guy. Bill Beko had known Steve Wynn from before. There's a picture at the Beko Hardware Store of Steve Wynn and a guy who was the mayor of Las Vegas. I'm trying to think of his name. This was when Steve first got started. Bill Beko met him through Harry Clayborn. He knew Steve Wynn. I had a chance to meet Steve Wynn because I was on the commission. We had dinner with him and his wife when I was with the governor. That was about—not too long ago—about ten years ago, I guess, now.

RM: Since he built Bellagio?

BP: Yes, about ten years ago. I've got two or three pictures someplace of me and Steve. Nice guy.

When they opened the Great Basin National Park—made it into a National Park—the commissioners were asked to go there and be hosts for the dignitaries that came from all over the world for that. I was one of the young commissioners in pretty good shape, so I was assigned to CNN to make sure that they were covered. I got to go up and take them up in the park at the Bristlecone National Forest. I carried one of their cameras for them and stuff. Those types of things. Ribbon cuttings.

When they did the movie Independence Day we had a ribbon cutting. I was the rural commissioner, and I was the assistant or co-chairman. We had a ribbon cutting at Rachel for all the movie actors when they made the movie Independence Day.

RM: It was filmed at Rachel?

BP: Part of it was filmed there. The big thing about it is that's the Alien Highway. It had to do with the aliens and stuff. I gave the producer of the film a key to the ET Highway, and we cut the ribbon there on the highway. It was a freezing cold day in Rachel. We had a big cocktail party at Caesar's Palace first, and some of the actors who were in the movie itself—I had a chance to meet all of them. So that was kind of nice. Jeff Goldblum was there, and the black guy that now has become a $20-million-per-picture star. It was nice to see those guys. They were all at the cocktail party.

RM: Do you remember anything about when they filmed Cherry 2000 here?

BP: Yes, I was involved. Pam Dawber was going with a guy by the name of David Andrews. He was in the movie, so she came with him on location. She came to the convention center and I recognized her because she's been on Mork and Mindy as Mindy. So Pam came in, and I went out and said hello to them, and I introduced myself. She was a beautiful young girl. She was going with this guy in the movie who probably had the number one part. The male lead. So I drove her back over to Goldfield, where they were filming, so I could meet him, and I never did meet some of the cast with them. Well, they were there but I didn't get a chance to meet them. I did meet Ben Johnson. She stopped by two or three times after that, and we went out for coffee a couple of times. That was kind of neat.

There was another movie made down by Beatty—Butterfly or something. It had a guy by the name of Stacy Keach in it. He was in that movie. He had a little bit of a harelip, there. He was a good actor. He made that movie right outside of Goldfield.

But Cherry 2000. The old guy that played the crazy old guy in Cherry 2000—he was bald headed and had been an actor for years—I met him, too. He'd been in a lot of movies through the years, especially Westerns back in John Wayne days. The other movie that was made here, where I had a chance to meet someone, was a movie that was called Vanishing Point.

RM: Vanishing Point was made here? Oh, my God, that's one of my favorite movies.

BP: Is it, really? If you look at the movie you'll see some of the highway pictures are right out close to Tonopah. Most of them were taken out by Austin. They used that one junction in Austin, and a lot of them were taken down by—what was the gentleman's name? Petrocelli?

RM: I don't remember.

BP: He played in that movie. The director and the producer were down at the convention center, and I had a chance to meet them. They were asking about maps and locations and everything. That was a good thing.

RM: But some of it was filmed around Tonopah?

BP: Some of it was filmed right here, yes. Up on top of the summit towards the Buckeye there, that one cut right through there. They show a bunch of stuff over by Austin and then down between Tonopah and Goldfield.

RM: I love that movie. That was, what, ’69? Was it that long ago?

BP: A long time ago. I was thinking it was in the early ’70s.

RM: Yes, you’re right.

BP: That was kind of neat, that it was made here. My experience with Robert Conrad was kind of neat. Robert Conrad came to the convention center, and he introduced me to his new wife. The one that he was just going to marry. I met him out there in the lobby of the convention center, and he said, “I want to get married in Tonopah. This is going to be spur of the moment.” She was Miss Teenage America. She was only 18 years old, and he must have been in his early 40s. Looked just like he does in the movies. He was a very nice-looking guy. So we went up and had lunch at Jerry’s restaurant. I took him down and introduced him to Karen Quilter, and Karen gave him a marriage license. I’m trying to remember who married them; I think it was a judge, Solan Terrell, that married them. Anyway, I asked him if he would be our parade marshal for our Jim Butler Days parade. He said, “I love Tonopah. I really like Karen. Karen’s really a nice person.” So he ended up coming back and being our marshal for our Jim Butler Days parade.

RM: Do you remember about what year that was?

BP: I don’t. It was in the ’80s, I believe. Early ’80s. I’d have to look that up. I took him out to my ranch. At that time he was in a show about a group of guys that were up at Lake Tahoe, skiers. I can’t remember what that series was. Those guys all came down here, and I had a big barbecue out at Pasco Canyon. At the trailhead there is a big sign that says “Robert Conrad Trail.” We named it the Robert Conrad Trail, and the Forest Service put a great big sign in. He went up and did the ribbon cutting. We had a big dedication. It turned out to be a real nice thing. Then I had a barbecue down at Pasco. The scouts came with him. The counselor from the school, who just left here last year, came down and got involved in all this, and it turned out very nice.

RM: Do you have any other movie memories?

BP: Let me think. That’s about all I can think of.

RM: On Cherry 2000 my daughter Bambi (McCracken Metscher) was a stand-in for Melanie Griffith.

BP: Oh, is that right? Melanie Griffith was there. Oh, I remember that now.

RM: She was the female lead. Bambi dropped out of school that semester and traveled with the film. In fact, she was actually in a couple of scenes in it.

BP: I'll be damned. She kind of looks like Melanie.

RM: I think that's one of the reasons they chose her.

BP: At home, someplace in my drawer there, I have the article about Bambi in the TV Guide. Do you still have that?

RM: Oh, yeah. That was John Gilman.

BP: John Gilman had a studio up in the Mizpah. That was kind of neat. It was a fun experience for her.

RM: It was a wonderful experience. She majored in communications then at UNLV, I think in part because of that experience.

BP: Yes. Melanie Griffith did that movie. David Andrews—the one with Pam Dawber—had the main part. I watched that movie not too long ago. It was on TV.

RM: I watched them film a lot of it. Personally, I thought it was a really good movie. I don't know if that was because I was biased. I don't know why it didn't do better at the box office. It was a flop.

BP: It didn't do well. It was a flop. Was that where the black guy was in the Goldfield Hotel? No, that was Vanishing Point. In Vanishing Point the black guy was a disc jockey. They had a couple of other movies that they made—some of the local guys got into them as bit players—up in Goldfield. Butterfly something was one of them, but there was another one, too, that they made over in Goldfield. Some of their guys came over in the Mizpah Hotel and were picking up part-time actors. I know John Blum was in that thing, and he got a check. He was a stand-in. But I can't remember any of the other movies.

I remember Joel McCrea and his son. We had a guy by the name of Scotty Mullens, who was a gas attendant at the Mizpah Garage and worked for Lee Henderson for 40 years and pumped gas there. They became good friends of Scotty's. When he died they came here as Scotty's pall bearers. That was kind of neat. I thought Joel McCrea was a neat guy, and his son was neat. They both looked just like they did in the movies. Those were good guys, down to earth.

We used to have people come through here. Bing Crosby used to come through here a lot. I mean in the early days when he used to go to Elko. He had a ranch in Elko and he'd stop here. He had friends here, just by meeting people. Willie Nelson used to drive through here.

RM: In his tour bus?

BP: Yes. He liked to drive. He used to drive between Vegas and Reno. He used to stop right next door here at a place called Rich's Liquor Store.

RM: I remember Rich's.

BP: He used to stop there. Those are the only connections with Tonopah. We never had much of anything else.

CHAPTER TEN

RM: Do you see Tonopah as having a future in film as a locale?

BP: I was on the state film commission for 10 years. We had meetings. Lorraine Hunt was the chairman of it, and we met about twice a year. We had a couple of guys that came from Las Vegas up here. They wanted to look at locations, and I took them on a couple of trips. I showed them some. I said, "These are some places that were wonderful for film," but they were too far from services. I took them to Hot Creek Canyon. I thought that was a unique canyon to make films, because it has everything there—beautiful scenery. But they said it was too far away from services. They'd have to take catering trucks out, and they wanted to be closer to a town—hotel rooms and stuff like that.

I did have a thing happen one time. A guy came out here and stopped and got ahold of me and said, "I'm gonna break the world record on a motorcycle." His name was Hal Needham; he's the one that was the producer and director of Smokey and the Bandit, with Burt Reynolds. He made a lot of money on the thing. So, he came out and set up an appointment with me, and he said, "Would you take me to all the dry lakes?"

So I took him down by Silver Peak and showed him that lake. We got on the lake. I had my little car there. I forget what I was driving—I think I had a Mazda then. I said, "You can get this thing, and you can drive 100 miles an hour on this lake. I took him there, and I took him out to Seyler Lake in Smoky Valley. I took him way out to Railroad Valley and showed him the lakes out there. We finally settled on Mud Lake.

Well, the day of the race he asked me to come out there. I was out there with him, and there were a lot of people out there, of course. They were filming the whole thing. Well, he got up to speed, so we're real close to the world record, and he lost control, and he went sliding down Mud Lake, I thought, forever. I thought, "God, this guy, I hope he's gonna be okay." He had so much padding on his outfit—it took it all off, but he never got hurt. I thought he'd lose all the hide on his body. But when that thing went over at about 100—I can't remember the exact figure.

RM: And he was the producer, or director, of Smokey and the Bandit?

BP: Yes, he produced and directed it. And Smokey and the Bandit 2, also. He also was a self-made millionaire, and he was a daredevil and wanted to break the world record. So I had the chance to have dinner with him a couple of nights. That was another experience. Things like that happened periodically. It's kind of nice to have things like that happen.

RM: My brother and I have played around with an idea. John Ford once said that the reason he liked to go out to Monument Valley is there were no distractions. It was all work. We thought, "What if you took one of these old hangars or something out here and made it into a sound stage?" Then you tell people in Hollywood, "You get a free sound stage up here. Just come here and guarantee us so many rooms and so forth," and get them to come into town that way and spend money here. They would not have the distractions they would in LA or Vegas or somewhere.

BP: A photographer came up here from Hollywood—his name was Yakamoto. And I took him and showed him the hangars, because I thought that was an attraction itself for some filming. He wanted to see everything he could see about locations. I took him to Tempahute because the buildings were deserted, and I said, "What a great place to have a movie." Places like that, I thought, all had potential. They had two mill buildings, and all those buildings were still there. But your idea is a great idea. See, we talked about that. At that time they were trying to build a sound stage in Las Vegas because there are very few sound stages around.

RM: That's right, and they're very expensive to rent. But you could give somebody free use of a sound stage and say, "Just stay in our town and pay the going prices."

BP: That would be a pretty good idea, yes.

RM: Of course, you'd need to get the seed money to get the sound stage.

BP: The biggest problem they had was exactly that. It was just trying to get them to actually make the commitment to come here. Listen, you're talking about in the '80s and into the '90s. They've abandoned the film commission.

RM: They've abandoned it?

BP: I don't think they have a film commission anymore. I haven't heard of it. But I had a chance to go to a couple of really nice parties with celebrities and stuff. I met a couple of people. But the thing about it is at that time we were trying to get Las Vegas set up where you could take care of everything. Right now, when they come in to do a film they have to go to different offices, different locations. We were trying to get it so that it was a one-stop thing, where we take care of everything. You make one stop, and we do it all for you. They were working on that for years, and I think they finally got it on, which was a good thing. So that was good.

RM: Why did they disband the commission, I wonder?

BP: I don't know. They paid my mileage just to go down to the meetings, which I did. And I was the rural commissioner on the film commission. I said, "You send people to me, and I'll cater to them and take care of all their needs. Make sure they're taken care of." We also met in Reno, mostly in Reno and Las Vegas. We went to Reno, right off of Kietzke Lane. A film company was there. And they have kind of like a sound stage on a small scale, where they'd have productions in Reno, mostly for commercials. I had a chance to meet all those people, so that was a good thing. I had a lot of great things happen.

Anyway, all my experiences with the convention center were all good. I had a lot of chances to meet people from all over the world. I was selected the rural commissioner for the commission on tourism, mainly because of my position as the convention center director. I worked with four governors. I started out with Mike O'Callaghan in the '70s.

RM: What did you do with him?

BP: He invited me to go to the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They were celebrating their 100th anniversary in Edmonton, so we went up there for a week. We were assigned a resident of the City of Edmonton. There was a kid by the name of Tommy Ryan who had two large casinos in Lake Tahoe. There were about six of us on that tour. I had a wonderful time. Stayed in a hotel called the Chateau Lacombe, which had a beautiful revolving restaurant on the top of it. One of these things where you sit in one location, and the entire restaurant revolves, so, through the course of dinner, everybody in the restaurant would pass in front of you. I thought that was the neatest thing. We were guests of the government there. Sat in front row seats—special booths for all the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They did a great big thing there in something like a fairgrounds. We were in parades and had a chance to meet many, many people. So it was kind of a neat thing. We were there for five days in Edmonton.

RM: What do you remember about O'Callaghan?

BP: Mike was a great governor. Mike came here when I first started in the tourism business, because I was in the convention center. I had a bottle made. I wanted Jim Beam to make me a bottle for Tonopah. Ezra Brooks made it. I have one of the bottles. I don't know if I have one here, but I have one at the Hock Shop or home. On the bottom of it, it has a prospector, throwing a rock laden with silver, and a burro. On the bottom I put May 1900 and my initials—RWP. I had all these bottles made, and we sold them. I had Mike come down from the Tonopah Club, which at the time I was running, in the early '70s, before it burned down and we closed it. He broke the mold for me. In fact, the best piece of the mold sat at Bobbie's Buckeye Bar. The girls were there with Bobbie to watch the big celebration we had, and they jumped in and grabbed one of the best pieces of mold.

RM: And they took it up to the Buckeye? How cool.

BP: They took it up to the Buckeye, and it sat up there. And Mike signed all these pieces. He was a great governor.

RM: What other governors did you work with?

BP: I was, of course, with Bob List. He even came down to my wedding. He and Kathy, his wife. They're divorced now. Dick Bryan and Mike O'Callaghan and Bob List, and I finished with Kenny Guinn. I had all the governors from the late '60s or '70s all the way up through Kenny Guinn.

Sometimes things happen. A good example: the Tonopah plates I have. It's funny; it was like it was meant for me to have those. Because when I applied for them it was after the seven-letter plates came out, so you had seven letters. I never even thought about it, and when I applied for them it was, like, two weeks after they came up. No one had applied for those. It

was amazing. It actually is. It's almost like it was meant for me to have. I said "What I really want is Tonopah."

And she said, "How do you spell that?"

And I said, "Well, it's T-O-N-O-P-A-H." I said, "They just started; it was only six letters."

She said, "Well, guess what? You're in luck. No one has that plate. No one's applied."

RM: So it's been yours ever since?

BP: Yes, it's been mine ever since they came out, about ten days after they said you could go to seven letters, so it's been quite a few years.

RM: Did you have any contact with Howard Hughes or any of his people?

BP: No, not really.

RM: It was before your time, when he got married here, wasn't it?

BP: Right. But Leroy David told me about Howard Hughes and the fact that he got married in his apartment.

RM: Where was that apartment?

BP: Right above the L&L Motel. That happened right there. Bill Beko was the one that set it up. They contacted Bill Beko, and they said they wanted to come here. This was January 9, 1954, I think. They said they wanted to have the wedding here.

Let me grab this piece of paper. There's the story. That's the whole story. That's me. They wanted to get married. They wanted to get away from the media, mainly, and to have the wedding in Tonopah. So Bill Beko got a hold of Thomas McCullough and Eudora Murphy. They came in and, under another name, they got their license.

RM: You can do that?

BP: Somehow they did that. His name is in the article.

RM: Would you let me make a copy of those articles at some point?

BP: Sure, you can take them and bring them back. So, I got involved because I wanted to take the original place where Howard Hughes got married—it was in the apartment up above—and make it into a Howard Hughes museum and wedding chapel. The town finally decided that the building was too far gone, in too bad a shape, and so they turned my proposal down.

But let me tell you, when this article came out it went all across the AP, all across the United States, and a lot of people picked it up. I had people call me that had seen it in the papers back on the East Coast. We wanted to make a Howard Hughes museum and wedding chapel. I also had people that collect Howard Hughes memorabilia. This one guy in San Diego

called me—I have his name still. He said he has four rooms full of it. He said, "I have a collection of Howard Hughes stuff that no one in the world has. And I would put it in your museum."

RM: Why doesn't Tonopah start a museum? Did they tear the L&L down?

BP: It's all gone.

RM: You could put a building right there and say "This Is the Site."

BP: Yes, that's the site. Oh, they could still do it. I wanted to have a Howard Hughes museum and wedding chapel. You could go there and get married where Howard Hughes got married. People loved the idea. I even had some people drive up from Vegas that were in the wedding business, they do the big weddings. This one gal drove up in a big limousine. She's the one that started the idea where you could get married at a drive-up window. She started that. She'd married people—every way you can think of. And she thought it was a great, great idea. She wanted to handle it. She said, "I'd love to handle the weddings. We could bring people up to you." I could never convince them that it was going to be a great idea. Some of them said yes, and some said no.

RM: Could you still get that guy's memorabilia?

BP: Yes. He calls about once every six months. See, the Ramona Hotel sits right next door. It's a beautiful old hotel. They fixed the roof on that hotel. It would make a great Howard Hughes museum and wedding chapel, and you're only 40 feet from where he got married. But the town doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

RM: Why? What a tourist attraction that would be.

BP: I'm not sure why. Oh, I think it would add a lot. In fact, you might be surprised at what you'd have.

RM: Does that guy want to sell his stuff?

BP: He never did say that. I have his address in my pocket someplace.

RM: You know, a few little things like that along the way would bring them out of Vegas.

BP: I think that actually had a great potential to do something. I think that would have been great. Because when you talk about people like Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Howard Hughes, they sit up, and there's always that mystique. Howard Hughes was always a very, very quiet man who didn't want a lot of publicity.

Let me tell you, this is kind of funny. This kind of fits in. Melvin Dummar, from the movie, Howard and Melvin, stays here. Every third Friday he stays here. He still stays here. And all we ever talk about is Howard Hughes, because he's still on the case. He still has a retired FBI

agent that's still trying to get him money. He would do an interview with you, too. He picked him up, right past the Cottontail on Highway 95 on a rainy, cold, windy, freezing night. And we talk about it all the time. He picked him up and drove him to Vegas. At that time he ended up getting on the will, and he was supposed to get some of the money. He's got a lot of things happening. I brought him back here right after that.

RM: You were with him when he picked Hughes up?

BP: No, I wasn't with him, but I brought him here after that and made him grand marshal of our parade for Jim Butler Days. See, at that time he actually started singing, and he was a pretty good singer. But he's a character; he's a real character. The other day, I said, "What are you doing now?"

He said, "Well, I just got a brand new truck."

I said, "How'd you get a brand new truck?"

He said, "I went on The Price Is Right down in Vegas."

I said, "You mean the one with. . . ." The new guy's there now, the one that took over. What was the guy's name who was 80 years old when he finally retired? I said, "How in the hell did you get on The Price Is Right?"

He said, "I dressed up as a chicken." He got on The Price Is Right and won a brand new pickup truck. He's just kind of a nut, but he stays here every third Friday. He was here last Friday. He's a character. He picked up Howard Hughes and took him to Vegas, and the story went from there.

Picked him up down by the Cottontail. The side road there, freezing cold. So he took him to Vegas. That's where it happened. They went from there with stories. It's pretty crazy.

RM: Do you have any more Howard Hughes tales? Did you meet him?

BP: I never did meet him. I wish I would have. You've got to remember, in '54 I was only a sophomore in high school. But Leroy started telling me about Howard Hughes getting married in his apartment, probably about when I started with Leroy. My dad would put me to work with Leroy when I was about a senior in high school. We became really close friends. After I got out of school and came back, and I ran the Tonopah Club for him for a while, we became friends. He told me—he and Angie—they got married in their apartment. And she picked flowers from her greenhouse for her.

RM: For Jean Peters? I had a crush on her when I was a kid. [Laughs]

BP: Yes. Beautiful woman. So there are quite a few stories, but that supposedly is a true story. That's how it happened. Now, the Hughes Tool Company said that they had a mobile home up here, where that mining park is, and that Howard Hughes stayed in that mobile home a couple of times. But I never have been able to run that down for sure. But, you know, Howard Hughes will never change. It's always a mystery. Because of the way he ran his life, there's always that mystique about him.

RM: And he was so damn rich.

BP: So damn rich, exactly. I always thought there might be a guy who would come forward and say, "I'll invest $300,000 or $400,000 into putting together this thing right, to have a museum." I think that you'd probably attract—I really believe this—1,000 people a month that would come, if it was set up right and done right and had a great museum. In Vegas they have a Liberace museum.

RM: Liberace's nothing compared to Hughes.

BP: If you had all his stuff in there that they could look at, and then you did the different things.

RM: If I had the money myself I'd give it to Tonopah to do.

BP: I think it would bring enough people in that it would be able to support the museum, including the workers that worked there, a couple of people to work there. I had people write me and say that they'd come and work for nothing if I got the museum going. There was a lot of interest for a long time.

I had a guy from the Associated Press that worked out of Reno. He's the one that wrote the story. This is him—Martin Griffin. He came here three or four times and talked to me. And he felt the same way I did. He said, "You know, you're missing the boat. The town's missing the boat."

RM: Oh, absolutely. It'd be a kick to get married where he got married.

BP: Exactly. So there's a lot you could do with that. You remember the thing called the Spruce Goose?

RM: Absolutely!

BP: Well, there's a guy in California that had one that was a small one, about twice the size of this room right here. And he said, "I'll bring the Spruce Goose up there."

I said, "That would fit right in on the parking lot. That would be perfect." It would be big enough to walk into.

RM: So, it was a replica of it?

BP: A replica. There's a lot of different ways to go. [Yawns] Excuse me, it was a late night. I went to Reno and back.

RM: I don't know how in the hell you did it. That's a big round trip to drive.

BP: Well, I went on the pole line road through Gabbs.

RM: Is it paved?

BP: No, almost 43 miles of dirt. You save about 30 minutes both ways. But you can drive 60 miles an hour. If I have my truck I go that way all the time. I just like the scenery.

RM: Sure, and getting away from the traffic and the cops. [Laughs]

BP: On the Hawthorne road, right?

RM: How did Hughes or his people know to contact Beko, and how did they pick Tonopah?

BP: I'm just guessing, but I think that someone in Las Vegas—could have been Frank Scott, someone like Frank Scott—said, "You need someone from Vegas. You want to get away from people."

She said, "I don't want to go where there's any media," because they brought a large plane up to handle it. It had like 17, 18 people on board and landed at the airport. I was told that they were going to spend the night here, but then I heard after that a large plane brought all their friends with them. They didn't come into town; they just came into town. I haven't run all that down for sure. I know that Walter Bowler, who was a justice of the peace, married them. Of course, Eudora Murphy and Rena Bailey were the ones that made out the actual marriage license.

RM: And they didn't have to go up to the courthouse or anything to get that license?

BP: I think they might have gone to the courthouse.

RM: Oh, they did. But they didn't use their real names?

BP: No, they didn't use their real names.

RM: I guess you could do that. I mean, you could use any name you want as long as it's not intended to defraud.

BP: It's in here—the name they used. I think they used the name of Johnson. This story—take this with you when you go. That tells you the whole story.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RM: I was talking to Joni Eastley before I came over here, and she said, right out, "Tonopah would not be the same place if it wasn't for Bob Perchetti." She meant that in a very positive sense.

BP: That's very nice of her to say that.

RM: How do you view that statement? It's like one guy can make a difference.

BP: I understand what you're saying. When I was in the position as the director of the convention center, I first started out trying to bring people to Tonopah. After I got involved in that, I found out people want to come to Tonopah. There's a lot here to give them, to show them, for conventions. So I started doing special events. I started doing basketball tournaments; I started doing softball tournaments. I didn't do it in a rural way. I tried to go after big-name players out of Reno and Las Vegas. I put on a Jack Dempsey fight festival for the Rotary Club. Using a promoter by the name of Ted Walker in Carson City, I brought in over a thousand people through the door to watch the fights.

I found out Tonopah's got a natural attraction, because of its location. And I had the contacts. It became a lot less work, with the contacts I had, to put on all these special events. And I did a lot of special events. When I'd have a tournament, say a slow-pitch tournament, and bring in the Harold's Club and Four Kegs out of Vegas and Folson Dice and some of these big names, we'd bring 500 people out of town.

So not only was it helping me in my job, I was filling motel rooms even though they weren't at the convention center. Basically, the events were break-even type things. If I could break even I was happy, but we filled the town with people and had some great sporting events. So that's how a lot of that started. I did a lot of special events. I even brought in big billiards. I had a guy bring in 15, 20 pool tables and billiard tables in the convention center, and I had these big pool tournaments. We had Reno and Vegas people show up. Even in a small way—I did pool tournaments where we had Gabbs and Smoky Valley and Silver Peak and Goldfield and Tonopah all compete.

RM: Where do you get your ideas?

BP: That's a good question. When I had my ball tournaments and stuff, at that time I had bar businesses going. I would put on free spaghetti feeds for all the ball players. And they remembered that. They still, to this day, remember that. Bob Miller used to come as a ball player before he was governor. He still remembers the feeds I had. So those types of things were great. I just came up with ideas. I was always involved in sports, so the softball and the basketball were easy. I had the contacts. I knew everybody along the way.

Things like the Jack Dempsey fight festival—I still want to see another fight promoted in Tonopah. I think it would still go. When we had these people here last year for Boomtown, there was the history about the old-time fighters, when they fought here in the early days. Just listening to them, I thought that was such a great idea. They'd like to see that happen here, too.

I positively want to see UNLV and UNR boxing teams meet here in Tonopah—have them come here and meet and have a big fund-raiser for the school to raise money. That could happen real easy, because I've already talked to both coaches. They're willing to come. We just have to figure who's going to take care of their expenses. That's all they care about.

So things can happen; I was always involved in things. When I was younger I was kind of a daredevil—wouldn't mind taking a chance. I remember having a guy challenge me to a race from Tonopah to Millers for a $100 bill. That was in a bar race, a foot race. I beat him. I was a runner, and I got $100.

RM: How much did you beat him by?

BP: I beat him by a quarter of a mile. I almost killed myself. I was sick for two days. That was a little further than I wanted to run.

And one time I had a cowboy out at Carvers. There was a big crowd out there. I was going to the University of Nevada. I was in good shape, and I could run a quarter in 50 seconds. This cowboy came in with cowboy boots, horse shit on his cowboy boots, and he was probably ten years older than me. We got drinking and talking, and he bet me to run a foot race.

He said, "I understand you're a runner."

I said, "Yeah, how far?"

He said, "I don't know, just up there to the end there." (We're at Carvers.)

There's a bunch of guys with me, and we'd been playing basketball in Austin or someplace. I said, "I can beat this guy. Let me see what he wants to play for." I said, "How about a drink for the house?"

He said, "How about a drink for the house, and I'll bet anybody else that wants to bet against me for cash?" These guys all jumped in there. They knew I was in good shape.

So we paced off about 500 yards up there, and we had a race from there down to Carvers. That's probably as good a shape as I've ever been in my life. Good shape. Well, guess what. I was fast. I could run a 50-second quarter, but he beat me! He was good. He took his cowboy boots off.

He had his girlfriend with him—cute girl. He said, "You start us."

And I ran just as fast as I could possibly run. I didn't think anybody could beat me right there, especially a cowboy. I had to buy a drink for the house, and all my buddies lost all their money. I lost by about two feet, is all. It was that close. We were neck and neck running down the highway. I knew I had a race. I lost that race, and I always felt bad.

RM: Was he running barefoot?

BP: He had socks on. I actually had tennis shoes on. I never forgot that guy. I always wondered if he just set me up. [Laughs] He was a cowboy. I mean, he was a cowboy off of some buckaroo horseshit ranch.

RM: He must have been in pretty good shape, though.

BP: He was in great shape and he was fast. I never saw anybody that fast. That was funny.

RM: Fifty is fast for a quarter.

BP: I could run then.

RM: What could you do a half mile in?

BP: Two minutes. A little under two: 1:59.

RM: You could do a two-minute half?

BP: I never did run the mile, except in high school I ran a 4:48—that high school record lasted for 26 years.

RM: That was good in high school.

BP: Yes, in 1955. That was when they broke the four-minute mile. I've still got articles about that. Anyway, I've always been involved in bringing special events to Tonopah and doing special stuff in Tonopah.

RM: Would you like to talk about Beko? It seems to me that you and he are two of the larger-than-life figures in Tonopah.

BP: Beko was a great guy.

RM: I'd like to know about his background and what you knew about him when you were growing up and so forth. I tried to do an interview with Beko, and he gave me the best turndown ever. He said, "Yes, subject to availability of time." [Laugh] I couldn't get him to break the time out.

BP: It's too bad, because Bill Beko was one of a kind. I mean, he was a favorite son of Tonopah, but he ruled with an iron fist, too. He really did. I didn't realize that. Going up through high school, I told you he kind of took me under his arm. I was a young Yugoslavian kid, and he let me use his black convertible when I was a senior in high school. It was a Cadillac.

RM: That would be the epitome of status, especially for getting girls.

BP: Exactly! I used his black Cadillac, and I was hauling girls around. I put a dent in it—just a little, tiny dent—but I was scared to death. I said, "Before you see it, I've got to tell you." I thought he was gonna chew me out from one end and never let me drive it again. But that wasn't the case.

The whole time I was growing up, all through high school, he and my father and Don Tomany and I all hunted together. So I had a chance to camp with him. He was an avid sportsman—loved to fish, loved to hunt, hunted everything. Grew up hunting with guys like

Walter Bowler and Ira Jacobson and Bruno Skanovsky. They all ran together and with my dad and Don Tomany. At that time we were archery hunting, mostly up at a place called Butler Basin and Willow Creek. We went up there a lot.

RM: He grew up here, right?

BP: He grew up here, yes. Of course, he was Serbian, like I was. We'd have big Serbian dinners. Then he married Dorothy after he got out of college. They had Vikki and Tommy. And I was involved with him in the Rotary Club. When I went to college he sponsored me to the Sigma Nu house. It was nice of him, because he had been a Sigma Nu. All the Tonopah boys have been mostly ATO and Sigma Nu. I think the Barsanti boys went to ATO. So, those were nice thoughts.

Letting me use his car was really nice, because I didn't have my own car. I just learned how to drive. That black Cadillac convertible was really something. That was pretty nice.

RM: I'd have given my eye teeth for one of those.

BP: This was in about 1956. I think it was a '52 or '53 Caddy. Beautiful Cadillac. I have pictures of it. But Beko was there through my whole life. We played a lot of golf together. The day that he got his only hole in one I was with him in Bishop. It was kind of unique. We would play golf together, and he coached me in town team basketball. He would follow us in all the sports we were in.

RM: How much older than you was he?

BP: I'm guessing he was about 12 years older than me. I think that's pretty close. When he died, I started having the Bill Beko Memorial Golf Tournament. It's been 15 years—we're in our 15th year now. He was about 74 or 75 when he died. So he might have been more like 15 years older than me.

RM: What was the secret to his success—being the big guy in town.

BP: Good question. Well, first of all he was a very intellectual, smart person. He'd been through college, he was an attorney, he was very capable of being the governor of the state. If he'd lived in Vegas or Reno he would have been governor of the state, there's no doubt in my mind. He had a charisma about him. A very good, articulate speaker when he spoke to groups. But he didn't like corruption. Like, with prostitution and that type of thing, if they were not keeping within the law, doing anything outside the law, then he got on their case, and he never let up. He tried to run three or four people, like Walter Plankinton, out of the county. It was a big feud. If he didn't like you, you were in trouble, no doubt about it. He made life pretty miserable.

RM: And if he did like you, he'd do damn near anything for you.

BP: He'd just about do anything for you. I know when Dorothy and Vikki wanted to have a birthday party for him, he got a kind of chip on his shoulder about the whole town, the way he was treated.

RM: He felt he was mistreated?

BP: I think he felt that some people talked about him behind his back. We talked a little bit about that a couple of times on the trips to Bishop, playing golf. He just kind of said, "Screw these people. I did the best I can for this county. I've always tried to think about what was best for the county." And he did. He was a good spokesman for the county. If someone was against him, it's because of something they did that he set them straight or held them accountable for.

RM: He could really come down on you if you needed it.

BP: He could. And he did that for a few people, too. But he took a lot of kids, I know—like myself, Tim Lydon and a lot of these guys—under his wing. People got in trouble. Tim got in trouble a few times. Beko took him under his wing. Sometimes he overdid it. In the case of Mike Shellenbarger, the kid that killed the two prospectors, Beko got him out of prison and took him into his own home and tried to rehabilitate him in his own home. It didn't work. The kid finally ran away and ended up hurting somebody back in Wisconsin. He's still in prison. He tried to save this kid, but it was too late. He was a bad seed.

RM: Did you know he took his own money and set up a scholarship for Bambi at UNLV?

BP: Did he really? Well, that's the kind of guy he was. Like I say, if he liked you. . . .
He was really a good guy when it came to kids. He would take them under his wing and do whatever he could for them. A couple of times he slipped me $50.

RM: Is that right? He got me and my dad our jobs down at the Test Site when we were desperate, wondering what we were going to do. We were out there at the end of Reveille.

BP: Yes, he was a good man. It was a big loss when we lost Bill. Both his kids are good. I love both his kids. I like Tom and Vikki, they're both good kids, hard workers.

RM: Bob, can you tell me about your experience with Butler Days? That's one of the things I'd like to have a lot of detail on, because it's a major thing.

BP: Butler Days has been part of my life since 1970. In 1969 I was a convention center director. I was hired in 1968; started running the convention center on a part-time basis. We were trying to figure out ways to bring more people into Tonopah—put more people in motels—because we were surviving on room tax for the convention center. We were trying to figure out how to get more conventions in. I had always been very interested in the history of Tonopah and the celebrations that they had in the heyday. I used to hear my uncles, my dad,

and my mother talk about the great celebrations that they had before TV. I'm talking about the time before 1956.

RM: What were some of those celebrations?

BP: Well, every holiday in those days was a big thing in Tonopah. They always had the 4th of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, every holiday, including Easter. Any holiday the people had a reason to celebrate. But my grandmother used to talk about the big parades that they had in the early, early days. And then my uncles used to talk about competing in the big mining events—the single jack, double jack, mucking, jackleg. They used to do the jackleg drilling.

My uncle George and Bozo and my uncle Ted Leissring—they all did jackleg with my dad. They all got in that contest. I got to thinking about it, so I went to the museum and did some research on some of the celebrations and saw what happened and what they did. They were really big, and the crowds were enormous. They had big, big parades that would go on for over an hour.

RM: That's big!

BP: And they did floats and stuff. So I called up a guy by the name of Jim Younghans, who was president of the Chamber of Commerce. I said, "Meet me at Jerry's Restaurant." Jerry's was a restaurant that was connected with the Silver Queen. And he came up there.

Oh, before that, I started to do a bottle show at the convention center, mostly antique bottles, bottles that were embossed, whiskeys, beer bottles. At that time there were big bottle clubs throughout Nevada. There still are in Las Vegas and Reno. I had a bottle show for '68–'69. The last year that I had that bottle show, 1,000 people signed my registration going through the door. I said, "God!"

So I called Jim Younghans, who was president of the Chamber. He had a little trailer park right where NAPA Auto is now. It was a little mobile home park where people did overnight parking. I said, "Jim, listen, we need to think about doing a celebration patterned after the celebrations of the early 1900s." We'd call it Jim Butler Days because Jim Butler's our founder. And I said, "My bottle show's a success, so what we need to do is add to it, keep the bottle show going, have a parade, and start the mining events. Let me go to see Mike O'Callaghan in Carson City, because I understand that Gabbs gave up its state championship mucking event. And I'd like to see if he would proclaim Tonopah as the home of the state championships. And then go into state drilling contests, too, and have them all."

I told Jim, "I'm getting 1,000 people though my door for the bottle show. Let's try to add a parade and some mining events and maybe do some other things." So I went and saw Mike O'Callaghan and got a proclamation made up.

And we started our first Jim Butler days in 1970. What happened is we went ahead and had a committee meeting. We got a bunch of people from the community to get involved. We started having pancake breakfasts.

At that time I was trying to run all the mining events. We started out, if I remember right, right where the Jim Butler Motel sat. We had the mining events right there, and we had a pancake breakfast there, too. And we used the mucking contest. My brother was, at that time,

into mucking. He had just won the state championship in Gabbs; Bud was a good mucker. So he started mucking, and we had guys like Jack Manhire. He helped me run the drilling events. His dad was from Goldfield. Jack was a local boy that went to the University of Nevada and then was a biologist in Alaska. And he came back to Tonopah.

So the first event we had turned out to be a success. We had people come in from all over, and we had muckers and drillers. And we went around door-to-door and got prize money. We had a raffle, had a pancake breakfast. Oh, and we had the bottle show. That was the big thing. A lot of people came for the bottle show. We had raffle prizes at the bottle show, and then we had a big dinner up there. So that was the start of Jim Butler Days in 1970.

RM: How many people do you think showed up?

BP: We must have had about 1,500 to 2,000, if you count the local people that came out and participated. I had 1,000 sign my register, and it was bigger than the one the year before. So we probably had 1,500 people that showed up. We had some big dances. And the dances turned out to be really good.

RM: Did you have the dance in the street the first year?

BP: Well, we had a dance in the convention center.

We had a pretty good turnout. I said, "Let's have a meeting three or four days after the celebration. Let's everybody sit down around and have a roundtable discussion. And let's see how we can improve the Butler Days celebration. How can we make it better than it was this year? What events can we add to it?" So we did that.

Sometimes we've had some really weak years through the years, but those first ten to 15 years were really good. They got bigger and bigger. We tried to look for a special parade marshal. We had Robert Conrad one year. I had Melvin Dummar, who picked up Howard Hughes; he came in and performed for us. We started having a big dance at the convention center. There was a street dance on Friday night, always.

RM: From the beginning?

BP: From the beginning. Well, the first year we only had the street dance, and we didn't have another dance. But we started having other dances to go with that on Saturday night and Sunday night. We had the Last Blast dance on Sundays. I started hiring five-, six-piece bands. We'd pay them a lot of money in those days, but we had packed houses. The bars were packed, the convention center was packed. The Tonopah Club was still there till the early '70s. It was in operation for the first Jim Butler Days. I had Mike O'Callaghan come, and I made a Jim Butler Day bottle of Jim Butler picking up a rock laden with silver and throwing it on his burro. It was made by Ezra Brooks. We had a flatbed parked in front of it, and he broke the mold on that.

So, we had these big dances. The dances turned out to be very successful. We had the bottle show. We played. We played BINGO, gave away embossed bottles. I made a wheel like a roulette wheel. It's the only one that I've ever seen. It had 36 numbers on it and spaces between the numbers. You put money on it like a roulette table. And we had shelves. If it came

up on your number, you could pick any bottle you wanted on the first shelf, the second shelf, third shelf.

It turned out to be great, because they were spending a lot of money, and we were making money to put the celebration on. We were giving away these bottles. We ran that table for about five, six years. We made a lot of money on that table. And we gave away a lot of embossed bottles. At that time you could find embossed bottles—whiskeys, beers. There were a lot more around.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BP: My mother had a bottle house. My dad and I had dug up a lot of bottles from the different bottle houses here in town.

RM: By that, you mean houses that had been built of bottles? And then you took them apart to get the bottles?

BP: Yes. We took them apart. I still have about 5,000 bottles from the original bottle house. I sell them out here all the time for $1 apiece. I had labels made. I had a picture of the bottle house, and that would be glued onto the bottle. Most of them were embossed; they were just beers. There's no writing on them, but they're old because they were from sometime before 1932. They still have globs and imperfections, which makes them more valuable. They were going to bulldoze down the bottle house, and my dad and I said, "We'll take it down and save the bottles and let Mr. Downs buy that property."

He said, "Well, I'm just going to take it down." We took two bottle houses down.

RM: They were just made of mud and bottles, right?

BP: Mud and bottles, right. Some of them, when you took the mud away, just disintegrated. There was so much weight. But they didn't do that until you actually moved it. And I found some of the great bottles, too. We had some great bottles that just came out completely broken.

RM: Just fell apart with that weight?

BP: With all that weight, yes.

So, the Tonopah Club burned about '72, '73. Right in there. We were still using that when we first started our first Butler Days. After that, I took a trip to Klondike Days with Governor Mike O'Callaghan. I think that was 1974.

RM: That was to the Klondike in Alaska?

BP: Actually, Edmonton. We were invited to the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We had front row seats. There was a committee of six people in tourism, plus Mike and Carolyn O'Callaghan. We were up there for a week. I was a guest of a German family that were involved in this Klondike celebration. They had a race in the middle of Main Street, right there in the middle of Edmonton, which had 450,000 people. They did what they called a bartenders/waitresses race. They just used waiters. The bartender would pour the beer, and they would run up around these chairs, with tuxedos on, and come back and set the beer down, and the bartender would drink it. Well, I brought that contest back to Tonopah, and we still do it. We've been doing it now for about 36 years.

RM: Where do they hold it? I don't remember it.

BP: They hold it right there at the street dance. Mary Tisue has been chairman the last ten years, and we do it right there. But each bar in town has a bartender and a waiter, male or female. He pours the full mug of beer, they put it on the tray, and the waitress or waiter takes off running as fast as they can.

RM: Holding it up on the shoulder?

BP: They can do it any way they want. They can't use the other hand, though. Bring it back to the bartender, and the bartender chug-a-lugs it down as fast as he can get it down. They have judges to make sure you didn't spill too much and that you didn't touch it with your other hand. It's turned out to be a fun thing to watch. All the bars will be doing it again this year. We've been having our meetings, and they'll be doing it again.

At one time, during those first ten years of Butler Days, I had a grant to count just the people on Main Street during the parade. And we had 2,950—almost 3,000—people watching the parade.

RM: About when was that?

BP: You know, I wish I could remember exactly, but it was somewhere around '80. The University of Nevada sent four students down—it might have been six—and they counted every person on the street by taking a section each. They would go through and count every head on the street and sometimes inside the bars and other places. They wanted to know what kind of turnout we were getting.

The greatest parade we ever had is when we had the Stealth fly down Main Street, very low and very, very soft. This was right after they made the announcement that the Stealth was going to train there. I think it was the early '80s. Oh, it was really a neat, neat thing to see that thing. People were just amazed at how quiet it was. He went up and turned around and came back down Main Street again. They're supposed to be able to go under radar. So it was really neat that he got so low.

Through the years we've had lots of skydivers land on Main Street during the parade. We haven't had anybody contact us lately, but it's too bad we don't have that again this year, because that's always fun to watch skydivers come down. They land right on the crosswalk between the Mizpah and the Belvada.

So we slowly added new events. I added that bartender's race, and it's still going. And the mining events. What's funny about this Jim Butler Day celebration is that we changed it. In all the 40 years, there was only one year, in 1980, that we actually cancelled the parade. It was so cold. The wind chill was, like, zero or below zero.

RM: Oh, my God.

BP: Ken Eason came to my house—I lived on Valley View Street—and he said, "What are we going to do? It is absolutely freezing out there."

I said, “Well, Dick Bryan, our governor, is going to be here as our parade marshal. Let’s go down to his room and talk to him, explain to him what’s going on.” So we ended up having the parade inside the BINGO Palace next to the Mizpah, everything but the horses and the floats; we had all the walking entries. I was in there, and the governor sat there, and we critiqued everybody and actually had a lot of fun doing it. We sat at the microphone. That’s the only year we’ve ever cancelled it.

RM: Did it snow that day?

BP: We got snow. It was blowing down Main Street. It was absolutely terrible. So that’s when they decided, “Now, let’s go to a Jim Butler Day celebration in July, the last weekend in July.”

Well, we tried that a couple of years. I never did like the idea in the first place. I said, “You’re in Tonopah. You’re going to have good years and bad years. And let’s just keep our fingers crossed, including this year, that we have a good year, that the elements aren’t going to be too bad.” Because, for the mining events, the miners could care less. They’re going to get up there and muck and drill, and they don’t care if the weather’s windy, dusty, freezing cold. And we’ve had all that stuff through the years.

We moved the state championship mining events from the lot where the Corner Store was and the Jim Butler Motel is now over to the parking lot across from the convention center, which is across from the Fire House No. 2. Then we went down on the lot where the Tonopah Club burned down—had the mining events down there. From there, we went down to the Banc Club parking lot, which was a big parking lot. And we went from there up to the Elk’s lodge and ran it there for years and years. And then from there, about five years ago now, we went up on the top of the mountain at the Mizpah Mine. So we’ve had about six locations.

We’ve had different chamber presidents all through those years. We’ve had buttons and garters. I gave Jim Butler Day buttons to people in Japan as gifts. They like buttons back there. I’ve been pushing Jim Butler Days for 40 years now. We’re in our 40th year, and we think it’s going to be really a good celebration this year.

RM: Oh, that’s wonderful.

BP: We’ve had great years. If you ask me something that happened in 1982, I probably couldn’t tell you. It’s just seems like 40 years fly so fast. But it’s been a good celebration.

I said we’ve changed and had different events through the years. For a while we had a 10K foot race. University kids came in and ran. We called it the Toughest 10K in the West. We did a figure “8” though the mines.

I was very involved in it—probably the first 25 years, I got very involved. I was just about doing everything I could do to keep it going—making enough money to break even, getting grants. Then I got involved with state tourism as the rural commissioner. That helped a lot, because it opened up some doors that we never had available to us.

RM: How do you see the future of Jim Butler Days?

BP: Well, I think we need new blood. We got some new blood this year in Donna Otteson. We had our first meeting, and I said, “Donna, before you go any further, you should be

chairman of Jim Butler Days. You have a business in town. You're right in the middle of things." In fact, I just took her to her first Rotary meeting yesterday; I want her to join Rotary. So I think it takes that new blood. We really have a problem right now because the Tonopah Chamber of Commerce—the TDC office—is closed.

RM: And what is TDC?

BP: The Tonopah Development Corporation, and it sits right there in the fire house right next to the bank. It's been a good office. We have a very active Tonopah Development Corporation committee, and we've done some good things. We're going to have our ninth monument and mural dedicated on Jim Butler Days. It's going to be a great mural, and I'm really excited about it. I had a picture of it here I was going to show you.

RM: I think Joni Eastley was telling me how you and she were looking at the design.

BP: We're both involved in it. And Joni's just a wonderful woman to have on working point, because she just jumps in with both feet. It's just a neat thing that she gets involved. [Shows picture] That's going to be on the side of the turquoise building.

RM: Oh, that's neat.

BP: It's going to be the 1905 world championship single jack contest. And we're going to have this. The Mining Park is going to pay for half of it. This will be dedicated on Saturday, the 29th of this month. So, that's a wonderful thing, yes. This is our ninth one. I've been chairman of the mural committee since the first one that we've done. We've actually had 11 in town, but we've done nine as a committee, with me as chairman of the mural committee and monument committee. I have tons of ideas. It just depends on where the finances come from, and the money. But what we've done is good. I went to Ely, of course, and saw those great murals that they have over there. And we started out by having some painted like they did in Ely. Now we're going to vinyl, because we can't afford the $15,000, $20,000 murals anymore. We're trying to raise as much money as we can. So this one's done on vinyl, but we'll blow it up—it's going to be 28 by 14. We blow up a photograph. We put it on vinyl, but we build a billboard first. Six feet will be in concrete, and then we have eight feet out of the ground, and the mural starts. It's 14 feet high, so it comes to about 30 feet. It's a pretty good thing—extensive.

RM: Is the vinyl process expensive?

BP: No, it's not. It's very reasonable. Wade Barton in Hawthorne's doing it. This actual vinyl, by the time we get through, is going to cost us $5,000. That's our whole budget, for the vinyl, the billboard, the concrete, the frame, everything. It's going to be sheeted with 5/8-inch plywood. It's a major project, but, before, we were spending $15,000, and now we're spending $5,000 on it. And we're getting some pretty good results.

RM: That sounds really good.

BP: Now, that area where it's going to go is right next to the Masonic lodge on the old parking lot that was once the Tonopah Club. We're going to call that Fred Yockey Square. There was a world champion singlejacker in 1905 to about 1925 by the name of Fred Yockey. We're going to have all mining scenes inside that square and put cobblestones down on the surface and make it a really nice little square. This is the first step.

RM: That is really cool.

BP: We're excited about it.

But back to Butler Days. Butler Days has been up and down. We've lost some events. We quit having the Toughest 10K in the West. I got my kids really involved in that and the 2-mile and 10K. They became great runners and ran that thing and won it in their age group many, many times. Just about all the events that we've had through the years are still taking place. And this year we're going to have a rock and bottle show; we're having a craft show; and we're having an art show. There are a lot of people very involved in those three things—crafts, art, and the rocks— especially with the new price of gold and the turquoise mining that goes on here. We're going to have two dances here, one on Friday night and one on Saturday at the convention center.

So it's getting back to the old days again. I'm just hoping that the volunteers don't lose their enthusiasm and that they keep this celebration going because I've just been trying to give them advice on what not to do and what to do. The first thing I always tell them is, "I'm not telling you what to do. I don't want you to feel like I'm telling you what to do. I want you to have a mind of your own, and you do what you want. But this is what we've learned from our past and our mistakes!"

RM: Could you go through some of the dos and don'ts that you've learned through experience?

BP: Well, I tell them that it's getting real close to Butler Days, and there are a lot of things. We meet every Thursday night. And what we do is go down from event to event, and check in with the chairman of that event—we have a chairman on every event—and say, "You've got to make sure that your ribbons and your trophies are ordered and in place, and make sure that you've covered all the different categories. You got to make sure that the posters are done."

So, anyway, you learn from your mistakes. We always have problems. The big thing you've got to do is make sure that whatever chairman you have in that event is on top of it, especially whoever is in charge of the buttons and garters. That's how we make our money, selling buttons and garters and raffle tickets for prizes donated by local businesses. Every year we sell these. We have them made, and then we sell them for $2 each. We've got to put them in every business that we can. If someone doesn't do their job, and they don't move those as much as they can, and the businesses don't sell them, then we end up with 500 or 600 of them left over, and that kills your project. So those are the don'ts. Don't get stuck with a bunch of stuff left over. Try and get rid of your stock. And that's important. That includes all the raffle tickets. There's about 95 percent profit in those tickets.

RM: Is it hard to find the chairman of each group?

BP: Yes. This year, now, I got on the phone, and I recruited a couple of chairmen. I talked Cindy and Don Kaminski into being parade chairmen. She's always the announcer. I talked Joni and Dennis Eastley into being our senior king and queen. She doesn't tell anybody that, but they're our senior king and queen. Now Dennis is, you know, a lot older than Joni—well, not that much—like I'm older than my wife. They're going to go to the dinner and will be crowned; next Wednesday night is our Jim Butler Day junior queen pageant. They're going to go to that, but I don't think they're going to ride in the parade, because he judges the parade every year, and she's so involved in the mining events with me that she doesn't want to change and do all the stuff in between. She's trying to talk her way out of riding in the parade. So we're working on that, trying to talk her into it. Joni won, and a good thing because she does so much for the state championship mining events.

But you have to find those people every year. There are a lot of things that have to be done in the last minute. We have to have posters made for the floats, for the junior king and queen, for our grand marshal. Our junior queen has to have a poster made. So those things have to be done. You don't want to wait till the last minute if you can help it.

You have to have the parade. Try and make sure the people get there early enough and you have enough volunteers there so that you can start your parade at exactly 10:00. And you make sure, when they go down the street that they're about 30 to 40 feet apart. And when the entry in front of you stops, you stop. Otherwise, they get pushed together and jumbled up. And it makes a much better parade if you do it that way. There are a lot of little things that you have to do.

We've been trying to get a new state-of-the-art PA system for a long time, so people can hear everything on the street. Like I say, you have to make sure that the buttons and garters and tickets are all moving. Our chairman this year is Mary Kraus, who's in charge of those three things. And she has to go door-to-door, business-to-business, pick them up when they sell them, bring them new ones. There are all kinds of little things behind the scenes.

Vendors. You've got to make sure that you meet with the vendors and they have a good location. You want to separate the vendors according to what they sell—keep the food vendors together so the people have a variety of food. There are always a million things.

RM: If somebody from another community said, "We want to do something along this line," what would you tell them?

BP: That's a good question. Every town is different, and of course the celebration is going to be changed with every town as you go along. I mean, every town has a different theme. Hawthorne has Armed Forces Day.

I would positively tell them that they should have a parade. I think the key to the celebration is the parade. If you have an excellent parade, things kick off. Now we're doing the parade; when the parade's over, we're jumping into the mining events and the mural dedication. So the parade's really important; you can build your celebration around it. Even in

Goldfield, when they have the little Goldfield Days, they always have a pretty cute little parade. I've been announcing that parade now for over ten years.

Then make sure that the vendors are located in the right spot and that they have what utilities they need. Also, I think it's really important that you—the committee people—when you have your meetings before the celebration, that you don't overlap. You don't want to overlap events. It happens a lot. If you overlap the events, it dilutes it. You want to try to space your events so that people can go from one thing to the next thing.

Now, this year we're bringing back arm-wrestling, and we're really advertising the hell out of it. It's going to be on Sunday afternoon at 2:00. Joey Westerlund and his wife Lisa have done a marvelous job of going out and getting sponsors, buying new tables. We're going to have a big, big crowd there. People want to see that come back. It's been gone for a few years. So that's an event that we're bringing back and that we know will be popular. But you've got to do it inside, not outside. Outside, it just doesn't work. We've tried it. It's not just the elements, but we were overlapping other events. You've got to make sure you don't do that.

A pancake breakfast is a great opportunity for organizations to make money. A lot of these organizations need this, and the best way to do that is through food. The Boy Scouts do the pancake breakfast every year. It turns out really well, and they get a good response, and they make a lot of money. The high school softball team's putting on the food concession at the arm-wrestling. Spread these things out so that they have an opportunity to make some good money.

RM: You're the sparkplug of Tonopah, the way I see it. What other events or activities have you been involved in through the years that are part of this sparkplug role? You're Mr. Tonopah, really.

BP: With the convention center I was in the role of promoting the town of Tonopah. And that's why I did these other special events besides Butler Days, like the major statewide tournaments—the softball tournaments, the basketball tournaments. I brought in teams from all over the state, from four different states. The work involved was not that big, but the reason I did all that is it filled every motel room. You bring in 13 teams and their families, and it fills up the rooms.

I've actually met with other towns when I was on the Commission on Tourism. Through the Pioneer Territory, which is now Silver Trails, I got to meet the heads of other chambers of commerce and convention authorities in other towns and had group discussions. I've actually been on a panel at the Rural Roundup where they asked me a lot of questions: "We're thinking about doing a celebration, and we'd like to have your advice. We want to do a parade, or we want to pattern the celebration after the Wetlands or Fallon," or something like that.

So I said, "Well, you know, to the best of my knowledge, these are the things that I would do." And I told them basically what I just said. You don't want to overlap events. You want to make sure and have events that people are going to turn out to. Bring some history into it. Art shows, craft shows, rock and bottle shows are always good. They not only bring people in, but you have a chance for the vendors to make some money.

I don’t know what else to say about Butler Days. It’s been 40 years, and I’m ready to hang it up. I’ll probably stay involved with the mining events, but we’ve got new blood now, and I think they’ve got enough experience now that they can take it over and do it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RM: How do you see the future of Tonopah?

BP: I think we're right now on the roller coaster, which we've been on for a long time. And it's been down at a low. We're down on the bottom of it now. And I really have good optimism about this couple of years. I think things look really good. The things could really happen, even though the economy in the whole nation—including Tonopah, the state of Nevada, Reno, and Las Vegas—is down, and employment's down. I don't see gold dropping very fast. It might even rise a lot more. So I've got to believe, with the projects that are online right now, that the future for Tonopah from 2011 through about 2015 looks good. There's the solar plant that's going to go in. I'm 95 percent sure it's going to happen. It could employ as many as 450 workers doing construction.

RM: To build it?

BP: To build it. Then it's going to have, like, 50 people working full time. The AU Mines out in Manhattan are going to clean the gulch. They're going to have about 50 to 75 people working. And they have told me that they will be there indefinitely. They could be there forever, a long time, because they're going to take everything from the town of Manhattan all the way to Highway 376. Remember, Round Mountain has been going for over 60 years.

RM: From right below Manhattan? So they're going to take the gulch where they dredged.

BP: All the way. And what they're going to do is just like a great big trough. They're going to clean the entire gulch down to bedrock. And they think they're going to find lots of gold down at the bottom. They're going to clean that and turn it all over and reprocess it all. The optimism is really high. They think they're going to make a lot of gold there. And gold's at $1,239 an ounce. It's really high. If they can't do it now, they'll never do it. They're supposed to get their final permits. So, that could be a plus to add to the solar project and the large expansion at Silver Peak.

RM: What about the gold mine north of Rye Patch? Is that a comer?

BP: Midway. It says it's another one of those mines where they have to work out the water situation with the state. But I think in 2012 we're going to see that open. That's what they're telling me. There's a chance in '11, but '12 for sure.

The other thing that I've always thought—and I've been on that committee for years and years and years—is that there's a ton of potential at the airport. The county has 4,200 acres there. There's the infrastructure for a new housing project, which could happen right away with this solar property. That could open up and maybe open up those lots out there. But I've got a feeling that if we ever get one good lessee to come in there and put in a power plant, or put in a solar plant, or do something out there, once you get one of them through—get their foot in the door—I think you might see something really happen out there. I mean, look at Fernley. I

can remember when Fernley, even 20 years ago, never had one manufacturing building there. And now it's just unbelievable. Everything's there. It's just warehouse after warehouse, acres and acres of warehouses. And the town has prospered and grown.

I was working really close with a group out of Hong Kong. We had them over here three times. They wanted to bring in cargo from China into Tonopah. This would be a distribution center. They would unload the cargo here, and they would put it on planes that would go to Vegas. It would put Tonopah on the map. And you drop the big spokes—the spokes go to Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Francisco, Salt Lake. They have a great idea. A month ago I heard that they've never given up on that yet. They're still trying to raise the money. They feel the Tonopah airport, economically, is the place to come. They can't talk to Las Vegas or Los Angeles, because they don't want cargo operations. Their air time is too expensive in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. So Tonopah would be ideal, because we have a big enough airport to land a large airplane, a cargo plane that would bring all this in, and we'd have a distribution center. And they'd put it on other planes and send it all different directions. Apparently, they have the merchandise in China made at a price that can be afforded. It's interesting, because they're still looking at it. The feasibility studies that they did all show that this was a plus/plus situation.

RM: What would be your take on one or more nuclear reactors on the Test Site or somewhere in the area?

BP: Well, I'm like Danny Tarkanian. I feel that there was so much money spent on Yucca Mountain that to go ahead and mothball that thing and shut it down is a waste of taxpayers' money. If they were careful about putting in a nuclear reactor there, or storage there, it would be good. It's close to Las Vegas, and it bothers people that there could be leakage. But everything that they've looked at so far shows that that probably wouldn't happen. And I really think it would create jobs. I would just hate to see them mothball that completely.

RM: I was wondering if you would like to talk about your family.

BP: I have seven children: five daughters and two sons. I have three stepdaughters that have been with me and Debbie for 18 years. Has it been that long? Yes, it has been, because Britty is about 21, and she was three when they came.

God, if anybody was a lucky person when it comes to kids, it's me. I have wonderful kids. They don't smoke. They don't drink. They all have jobs. They never ask me for a dime. When I was sick and in the hospital, every one of them came up and visited me. You couldn't ask for better kids. I think a person—especially somebody like myself that's been through basically a heart attack, as well as diabetes—you always hope for one thing, that you'll never have a child die before you.

RM: Oh, yes.

BP: That's the main thing. So far, I've been very fortunate. I have 13 grandchildren. I have great, great family support. I've been married four times. The first one was very short. It was to Margaret Atkins and we just lived together for about six months. And then I was married to

Yvonne Jensen, who was from a ranch out here, Peavine Ranch, and who now is John Davis's girlfriend, basically. I'm not sure if they're married or not, but I think they are. Then I married a girl by the name of Sue Cassis. So it's been quite an ordeal as far as marriages, but I don't want to actually talk about them as much as I do my children.

RM: Do they live here?

BP: They all live in the state of Nevada. I have two daughters that live here. I have a son that lives 55 miles out here at Carvers and works for Round Mountain Gold. He's a crane operator and a welder. Great kid, hard worker. I'm always catching hell from people that work at Round Mountain Gold.

I'll say, "Do you know my son Bryan?"

They say, "Yeah, we know Bryan."

I say, "You don't sound good."

They say, "Well, we got to figure out how to slow him down. He makes us all look bad, because he works too hard. He outworks three of us out there." [Laughter]

I say, "Well, you'll never slow that kid down, because his work habits have always been the same. He's always been a tremendous worker."

And my son Mike is the same way. Mike's a veterinarian, but it's nothing for him to work a 20-hour day in the hospital there.

My daughter Christine by Margaret Atkins, my first wife, is beautiful. She's my oldest child and she was a showgirl at the Tropicana for over 20 years. Margaret was her mother. Margaret's a really nice lady who lives in Seattle, Washington

They're all great kids. My daughter Antoinette, "Toni," is a teacher. She's about 30 years old and very beautiful. She has two children, Gabriel and Cheyenne.

My daughter Melissa works in Reno for a construction company. She keeps advancing, and she's doing real well. Brittany works at the Test Site. She's 20 years old. She'll be 21 on November the 29th. It's real funny, my son Mike and Brittany were born the same day, November 29th. My wife Debbie, my daughter Melissa, and my mother were all born on June 26th. All the birthdays are all together. But—knock on wood—things are going great. We have, like I say, 13 wonderful grandkids. And they all live in the state of Nevada.

RM: We've covered a hell of a lot of ground. One of the things I've found fascinating is that people are constantly coming in, and you're obviously a clearinghouse for all kinds of things in this community. Do you want to talk about that?

BP: They all rent from me.

RM: They rent from you? Rent property?

BP: And then they borrow money from me also, once in a while. They borrow just to get through till the payday. I think I know the date of everybody's payday. They borrow from me, and then they buy stuff from me, and they pay it on time. It's just one of those things. Where do I stop this? If you do it for one person you have to do it for everybody. If you stop it, then you have to stop it completely. And if I stop it, the town might come to a standstill.

RM: [Laughs] Well, you're too good-hearted.

BP: Well, that's true. Like I gave a kid money to go to Reno—and I'll probably never see it again—last night. His grandfather was a good friend of mine, Chris Passarelli. He lived on the corner right in front of the house of ill repute down in Sarcobatus Flat. The Shady Lady. Joe Passarelli raised those kids from the time they were just babies. His daughter was on drugs, and he lived in a little trailer right there. Trailer's still sitting there; the cathouse came in later.

RM: Oh, so that's the origin of Shady Lady? That's cool.

BP: Yes, Passarelli. So this kid was working. I got him a job at the Station House, and he and his girlfriend, Brittany, decided to go to Reno. He owed me some money. He just took the money and took off. I said, "When you get on your feet, I hope you've got as much class as your grandfather, then, and pay me back, because your grandfather was a really nice guy."

Really a neat guy, Joe was. I remember him coming up here and bringing the kids. His daughter was on drugs, and he was bringing the kids to the hospital when they were just babies. I said, "How you taking care of these babies?"

He said, "I'm learning the hard way. I don't remember how I ever changed a diaper in the old days. Now I'm changing diapers three, four times a day for each kid."

RM: What do you know about the origin of the Shady Lady?

BP: I know a little bit. I remember the first day that Bobbi, who runs the Shady Lady, hit Tonopah. She was going to go into the Bobbie's Buckeye Bar. She was going to buy it, she and her husband. She's a big lady, bigger than he is, and a neat lady, too. She was kind of like the old Bobbie Duncan—that type of personality. Big heart, but she also had a temper, I found out. [Chuckles]

Anyway, she wanted the Bobbie's Buckeye. She was going to buy it, and that's when Chi Chi ended up buying it. She found out that you had to be 300 feet from a highway, and she went to the commissioners. They said, "Unless the law changes, the ordinance changes, it's not going to happen."

So she went and looked at the Cottontail. She came back one day and said, "This is a lost cause, trying to put a house of ill repute here in Tonopah. It's not going to happen. But I found a piece of property down in Sarcobatus Flat," which is about 60 miles from here. And she said, "I think I'm going to put it there."

I said, "Well, you got a lot of traffic going up and down that highway. You'll probably do pretty well there. But don't expect big things right away." So she started out with a double-wide trailer and that Shady Lady sign. And she's been on national news, just recently, with the male thing, male prostitutes. That, by the way, fell flat on its face; didn't work.

RM: She was going to have male prostitutes?

BP: She actually had them down there. A couple of reporters went in and actually wrote a story about that. I thought one of them was in here on television. But she's always going to do okay there, because she keeps a clean house and she's got the same personality as Bobbie Duncan did.

But I don't think Tonopah will ever see a brothel again. I just don't think it will happen, because we have a lot more church people than there's ever been, not only LDS church but other denominations. A lot of new churches started. We have one that meets at the convention center and one that meets at the Elk's hall every Sunday. There are, like, 50 cars over there some Sundays. So there are getting to be a lot more of the church people, who are basically against legal prostitution. And, you know, I think once it's established, like in Winnemucca and Ely and Battle Mountain, and it's in the communities—they have houses inside the city limits—then it's become a way of life. In Tonopah, it was a way of life when I was growing up. There weren't a lot of people that were ever going before the commissioners, asking them to close the cathouse or Bobbie's Buckeye Bar. That never happened, because the right person was in there as a madam. They were grandfathered in on the 300-feet ordinance. The commissioners that were in office at that time took a stand to pull that ordinance up. I think Joe Garcia was a very religious person who was also a minister.

RM: Oh, he was behind getting that ordinance?

BP: No, he was behind not letting them open.

RM: Oh, really? I did not know that.

BP: He didn't want them to open. So I think that once that they established that, they decided.

RM: Do you see prostitution ever coming to an end in Nye County?

BP: Oh, it's brought up all the time. But not in my lifetime. I think it's good for another ten years. The only thing that's going to kill prostitution, if it ever happens—and we're basically talking about Pahrump, that's where the population is—is if they keep opening these massage parlors and do more than just give a person a massage. If girls start going to hotel rooms and doing those type of things, I think that's what's going to kill it. If they keep their nose clean and do exactly what they're supposed to do, just run a house of prostitution and keep out of the limelight and the news. The houses don't need exposure or sensational headlines. Keep a low profile and follow the rules.

I was really surprised that the Moonlite—I think it's called the Moonlite—was on HBO. It's outside of Carson City. Big time, they're on HBO. And I was just amazed. The guy that runs the place is trying to buy all of Joe Richards' properties.

RM: Oh, yes, I heard that.

BP: That's the worst thing, I think. They almost lost prostitution in Storey County, because Joe Conforte was the type of individual that wanted to be out there on the public side. And that's the last thing that they should do. When it gets right down to it, the women in this world have a lot to do with what happens and what doesn't happen, even though their husbands might be the spokesmen. When it comes to women, I'm guaranteeing more than 50 percent of the women would outlaw prostitution.

RM: They would?

BP: I think they would. But there have been a lot of statistics done about the amount of rapes that you have in places like Las Vegas and Reno—they say that that figure would be a lot higher if there wasn't prostitution. There would be a lot more forceful rapes. And there's probably a lot to that. There is some to it, I'm sure. But what scares me more than that is just all the molesters that are out of prison and now have to be identified, I think, by a number on their house, even. There's so many of those around. You just don't realize it until you actually go and look in the records. Even the town of Tonopah—we have a bunch of them.

RM: Oh, really, registered sex offenders?

BP: If you bring them up on the Internet, it tells you where they live in Tonopah.

But I think prostitution is going to be okay in Nye County. The only thing I think that would cause problems is that the churches would eventually have enough power to close them. But they do bring in revenue, too. And the county keeps raising their quarterly fees. So all those things are good. And there are very, very few, if any, cases of AIDS or anything of that nature, which is good. As long as they can advertise those types of things, then I think they're on the right track.

But Las Vegas supports Pahrump. I mean, you see chauffeurs out there, you see limousines, you see taxicabs driving to Pahrump all the time. They're just coming from the Strip over there. A $100 bill to get there and spend their money and go back. It's kind of crazy.

RM: What I don't understand about prostitution nowadays is the price they charge guys, compared with when Bobbie Duncan was in business. What's happened?

BP: The price changed.

RM: Talk about a price balloon!

BP: Yes. Now there's a place up on the way to Reno, this side of the Mustang. They have a place called the Wild Horse Ranch. And the prices there. . . .

I've not been, really, in a house of prostitution for I don't know how many years, years and years and years. But back in the old days, you know, a $20 bill went a long way.

RM: You could have almost an all-nighter for 50 bucks.

BP: Today they won't even talk to you for less than $500 or $300 or $400. And I think even places like the Shady Lady probably operate for $200 or more.

RM: Yes, I don't think you can get anything for less than $200.

BP: And, you know, in the old days you could go up and have conversations with a prostitute, and have just a one-on-one without actually going to a room with them. Those days are gone. If you want to talk to a prostitute, you're going to pay for it. And if you want to go further than that, you're going to pay more. So those days are gone, yes. Bobbie Duncan's days—someone should write a book about prostitution in the old days.

RM: I would like to do that, except I don't know where I'd get the information.

BP: Most of the people have died. Now, I told you about that full-page ad on Bobbie Duncan by Joe Richards.

RM: Yes, I'm going to try and get that.

BP: Those days are gone and, you have to be born and raised in a rural community like Tonopah, when those things were happening in the old days, to really understand what it was like in those days. Through the period when I was a young teenager in the early '50s up to now, which is over 50, 55 years, I've had a chance to watch everything change, you know. Just like the escalation of the price, how the price has gone up.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BP: I told you I knew Joe Conforte. I used to stop at the bar when Nick Banovich had the bar, and we used to play pinochle together with the sheriff. We had a county commissioner, a sheriff, myself, and a piano player who would be called up and say, "Can you be there tonight at 12 midnight? Joe's coming by and he wants to play pinochle." They all came because Joe Conforte was a real pimp; never a class act, but a real character. Had a foot-long cigar. He had at least two muscle men, always went with a bodyguard, always carried two girls in his limousine. He used to never leave Reno until probably 10:00 at night. He'd get here about 12:00 or 1:00, 2:00 in the morning, and Nick Banovich would call us up, and we would go down and play pinochle.

The main reason we went down and played pinochle is because we played for pretty high stakes with Joe, and he was a terrible pinochle player. We'd always win. And it was so funny. I used to just enjoy going because I was the kid on the table. First, he had a girl sitting next to him that was showing a lot of cleavage, so we always enjoyed looking at that. And she was usually beautiful. And when he grabbed a cigar out of his pocket, the bouncer had a light for his cigar before it hit his mouth. These guys were all kissing butt with Joe. And he had a roll of $100 bills that wouldn't quit, because he was rolling in dough.

You know, that's real funny, because I always had this fear of the FBI walking through that door at 2:00 in the morning and saying, "Is this an illegal game? What is going on?" I'm sure that they watched him quite a bit; but we never had that happen. And I always felt safer because the sheriff was there, Don Tomany. Something you see only in Nevada. You never see that happen anyplace else. Here's a guy that, you know, was skimming. That's where I first understood that the price of nookie was expensive, because, listening to Joe talk and those people talk, I later understood that he put away—skimmed—tons of money off the top. He would show money but, I bet he showed about 33 percent.

RM: On the books.

BP: On the books. And the rest of it went into his pocket. He was buying stuff all the time. One time I was in Harrah's playing blackjack. I was up there for something, and Joe Conforte came in with his two girls, as usual. And he'd wear a big fur coat. Girls were always about six inches taller than him. There used to be an ashtray that showed a girl and a little gentleman with a bowtie and a hat, and he had his hand behind the girl. And on the back of the ashtray it showed she didn't have anything on and he had his hand on her butt. I always thought that was Joe—reminded me of him.

He stopped and talked to me the one time, you know. We talked for a minute about pinochle. He said, "Well stop out at the Mustang. We'll play some pinochle when you're on your way home." I never took him up on it, because Bill Raggio was just about ready to nail him about that time. He was making too much. That's a good example of being in the public's eye too much. That's when Raggio was going after him. And Bill Beko didn't want him in our county, you know. He tried to get his foot in the door in Nye County, and Bill Beko stopped all that. I was told Bill Beko—I never was there—but I was told that he came before the commissioners, or when Bill was just returning. When he left, Bill went out into the parking lot, and I think

when he got through talking to Joe Conforte that Joe never wanted to set foot in Nye County again. [Laughs] I wish I would have been there for the conversation. Because I think he really chewed his butt out about even thinking about coming to Nye County.

RM: Bill ran the county, didn't he?

BP: He ran the county, yes. And I heard that he was out there, and he aimed those big size 14 shoes at Joe. Joe wanted nothing to do with Nye County; got the hell out of there.

RM: And he could run it with an iron first, couldn't he?

BP: Yes, he could.

RM: He was a just man, in my view, but, I mean, you didn't screw with him.

BP: But when it comes to the people—when it came to that—he was going to come put his foot on it, and he was going to stamp you out. And he wore size 13s or 14s.

RM: He did?

BP: Oh, yes, monster feet. Like his hands. You ever see his hands?

RM: I don't remember them.

BP: Big, big, big hands. God, he had big hands, really big hands. Chic Salois has big hands too. But Beko was a pretty good athlete, you know. He always told me he was too slow, but he did play for the University of Nevada football team. And so did the Olinto Barsanti boys. But he ran the county. He ran the county. And the same thing with Plankinton—he was trying to get his foot in the door. But Beko was pretty good. He loved Bobbie Duncan. He had no problem with the houses in the county, but he knew every one of them. And of course he took care of Nye County, Mineral County, and Esmeralda County. So they were all under his jurisdiction, but Tonopah was his home.

RM: Do you remember Fran's Star Ranch? Did you ever have any chance to meet Fran? Did you know her?

BP: I didn't know Fran real well, but I used to go in and say hello to her. My brother knew Fran much better. I used to tease my brother, because he was the roofer for Nye County. He took care of Beatty, the Cottontail, Tonopah. He took care of Fran's. And I always said that the best roofs in the county were the whorehouse roofs. [Laughter] I swear, I said, "What did you do to Beverly's roof?" She was down at the Cottontail.

He said, "Those damn gutters were all full."

I said, "Which side of the building?"

He said, "The right side."

I said, “Oh, okay. I’m sure you put holes in the left side so you’d get called back again.” [RM laughs] He’s done a lot of them. He even remodeled that—he’s the one that moved the Cottontail Ranch from where it was up to where it is now.

RM: To make it legal?

BP: Yes, he moved it up about a half mile. Moved that whole thing.

We had a carpenter by the name of Bill Foster, and when they finished the place and they opened it up, they had a Jacuzzi in there and it was going. Bill was about half crazy. Well, they all got to partying, and Bill picked up Beverly and dropped her in the Jacuzzi. Talk about one mad little redhead; she was going to kill him. So Buddy stayed clear of that.

He used to fix Fran’s roof a lot, too. But there was another girl, by the name of Lee, that was down in Amargosa Valley, down at Ash Meadows. Lee McGowan ran the house down there. I knew her because I was a deputy sheriff at Mercury.

RM: You were? We didn’t go into your Mercury days.

BP: We used to go down there and patrol. We had a lot of things happen while I was deputy sheriff. Remember the kids that disappeared in Devil’s Hole? I sat there for 48 hours, waiting for them to come back up. They never came back up.

RM: Oh, my God, so they’re still down there?

BP: They’re still down there, yes; they never came up. But I worked with a guy by the name of Glen Henderson, a deputy there.

RM: When was that? What years?

BP: 1962 and a half to 1966.

RM: So you were working for DOE?

BP: No, no, I was working for Nye County. We worked 84 hours on, 84 hours off. Glen Henderson had a great big stomach, and when he laughed it would just jiggle. He was so funny. We all bought property out there in Amargosa.

A guy by the name of Manuel Rodella. Manny was from Tonopah, and he was the goosiest guy I’d ever met—if you touched him. Well, one time in the cafeteria in Mercury he was in line, and I forgot about him being goosey. I went up and just touched him on the shoulder. He put his hand right through the sheetrock.

RM: Oh, my God.

BP: I said, “Manny.” [Laughs]

RM: A little jumpy, right?

BP: Glen Henderson had a trailer down there. We all lived in trailers.

RM: At Mercury?

BP: At Mercury on our three and a half days. Glen Henderson knew how crazy Manny was. He was a labor foreman, and he said, "I want you guys to be outside the trailer tomorrow night." Because Manuel would go down every afternoon after work at 3:30. Glen would go in there. They'd have a big iced tea or a Coke, and they would watch "Gunsmoke" together. He used to have a .357 right next to his bed. Manuel was really, really touchy, really goosey. So we went down there in the cop car, and we parked outside the trailer. At 3:30 they started watching "Gunsmoke," and all of a sudden, we heard boom, boom, boom. What Glen did is he put blanks in his .357. And what was the guy that played in "Gunsmoke"? James Arness, that played Sheriff Matt Dillon. And he said, "Matt Dillon, you son of a bitch." And then we hear boom, boom, boom. Manuel hit that door so hard it flew open, and he hit the ground, crawling on his hands and legs. He shot three times at that TV set.

Glen Henderson was a story in himself. He came from Maine and he told me a lot of stories.

RM: I love your stories.

BP: He told me about being a Forest Service ranger in Maine before he came out west to become a deputy sheriff. He said he caught a bear cub out there; he was working for the Forest Service. And this cub kept getting bigger, so he put a chain on its neck. It had 30 feet of chain. He would run out 30 feet and the chain would almost tear his head off. At 30 feet he would do a summersault and go the other way . And he got pretty tame; he was a pretty cute little cub. He got bigger, and he got bigger and bigger. So one day here came the Fish and Game and said, "Glen, you can't keep that bear. You got to turn him loose."

Glen said, "Well, I've been raising him since he was a cub."

He said, "I know, but he's getting big, and he could become dangerous."

And he said, "That poor little cub. I said my goodbyes. I took the chain off his leg. No chain on him, but he's used to hitting the end of that chain." [Laughs] He got used to hitting the end of that chain, so he knew when the 30 feet were up, he'd take a couple of summersaults. So he turned him loose, and that poor bear, the rest of his life . . .

RM: Poor thing. That's interesting. What was your job as a deputy sheriff there?

BP: I did everything. I covered Highway 95 on my shift.

RM: In Nye County?

BP: In Nye County from Indian Springs to Lathrop Wells.

RM: Oh, my gosh.

BP: That's where I met Lee McGowan. They had a shooting down there in her whorehouse. It was in the trees there; I forget the name of it.

RM: Oh, at Ash Meadows.

BP: Lee McGowan was her name, great lady. Probably a good looker when she was young. She always had coffee for us deputies; knew Glen real well. Her husband lived in Yerington, had a bar. We were called down there, oh, maybe three or four times all the time I was there. But we went down there on a guy that got rowdy. One guy got thrown out of the whorehouse and shot up her place. And they were all hiding on the floor. When we came down, we told the guy to drop his gun or he would be lying down with them, but he would be dead, too. .

RM: Did you like the job?

BP: Yes, I liked the job. We worked in the base out there. You know, I'm probably one of the guys that should have had some leakage from all the Plowshare shots and all the stuff that happened out there. Because I was working there with Tim Lydon in that Area 12 and Rainier Mesa. Ed Siri was a deputy sheriff, too. We used to go up on top of Pioneer and Rainier Mesa and look at those deer that would have big patches of hair off them. We used to see all those animals.

But it was crazy out there. One time I thought we had to take a gun away from a guy on the Test Site. It looked like he had a gun, but he didn't. I never had to really shoot anybody. I came around a corner and held a gun on a guy that was running a big crane and had beat his wife up the night before. There was a warrant for his arrest. He's the one that had the gun. And I said, "We know you have a gun on you, and we need you to come down here and put these cuffs on, and you have to go in for questioning." He sat there and hesitated for a long time. It seemed like five minutes, but it was only about a minute. I thought for a minute. I said, "Oh, gee, he's going to pull his gun. I know he's going to pull his gun." And he thought about it; he thought about pulling his gun. I didn't know till afterward that he had what looked like a gun.

RM: Did you have your gun on him?

BP: I had my gun on him.

RM: So you could have just plugged him.

BP: Well, I told him I had my gun on him. I said, "I got my gun on you. Before you even turn around you'll be dead." So he thought about it, and finally he just took a weapon out and threw it away. I think it just turned out to be a crescent wrench.

RM: That's quite a story.

BP: Anyway, crazy stories. Glen Henderson used to tell me, "Yeah, when I first hit Nevada I went to work in Amargosa Valley there, bought a little place." He actually lived in Beatty to start, but then he bought a place in Amargosa Valley. He said, "I went to work down there. I went to work for the Coffin brothers on the graveyard shift in the Funeral Mountains, in the Dead Man's Mine." I figured out he was just telling me a bunch of shit, because it was for the Coffin brothers on the graveyard shift in the Dead Man's Mine in the Funeral Mountains. But he was a real character. Yes, he was. So we had a lot of fun down there.

I got on a picket line for eight weeks there with the Teamsters when they were picketing. I got so friendly with them that their wives were bringing me food out there. I played poker with them. We all became friends, but we were stuck on the picket line. I'd be down there for eight hours a day.

We were there right during the time when, on Easter, they'd have all those hippies come down and protest. And I made the mistake of putting three of those girls in the back of my sheriff's wagon and hauling them to Beatty. Then we ended up handling it in Tonopah, but that was a mistake because they stunk so bad.

RM: They really did?

BP: They were really bad; they really stunk. There I was, doing that.

Anyway, those were fun times down there. We had things happen, you know, through the years there. We almost turned over two or three times on the Goldfield Summit in the snow. I bought a station wagon and started hauling all the deputies. I forget what I used to charge them. I was an enterprising young man. I think it was, like, $15 a week, and they all paid me. It paid my gas anyway, or the payment.

I worked with Bruno Skanovsky, who was a great guy. Bruno was so funny. We had a scientist that we picked up, and we interrogated him because we picked him up for DUI, for drunk driving. We tried to talk to him, and he just was real arrogant and didn't want to talk and "I'm so-and-so and I have a degree, and I'll get your job," and that type of stuff.

And Bruno said, "You guys got to settle down, and you got to talk to him."

Now, Bronco had a terrible temper. I said, "You got to talk to him, and just don't get upset."

So he said, "Let me go in the back room and let me talk to this guy."

I said, "Okay, but you're not going to get any further than we are." He went in there five minutes, and he knocked him clear through the door. And Bronco got sent back out to Area 12. [RM laughs] He used to bring his paperwork in, but he wasn't allowed to come back in front to the gate up there above the town of Mercury.

So we had a lot of things. I worked with Art Sorenson, and I worked with Starle Terrell.

RM: Starle worked out there?

BP: Starle worked there. We worked together. He was on the night shift.

RM: Oh, as a deputy? I did not know that.

BP: He and Jimmy Clark. We'd catch these guys, these DUIs, and we'd confiscate their whiskey. Did I tell you this?

RM: No.

BP: All year long, we'd confiscate all this liquor. We'd put it in our evidence room. And then at Christmas time, we'd go and have a Christmas party. We didn't have to drive. We'd have a Christmas party, you know. The two guys we had watching the graveyard shift were Jimmy Clark and Starle Terrell. Well, come the Christmas party, they were on another shift. We decided to have a Christmas party and open up a couple of bottles—and they'd gone through it all. [Laughter] It was all tea. They drank all of it. It was all tea. Here we had all this stuff like Crown Royal or Seagram's 7. We were going to have a real smooth drink and then have a big steak before we went to bed. And we opened up the bottles of tea. They'd already wiped out all the booze.

I had other things happen, too. We were deputies down there, and we had to take care of Base Camp. And I was single for a short period there. Was I single? I'm trying to remember what happened. But they had a theater right next to the sheriff's office, so I'd go in and watch a movie. We were watching this movie, and they called me in the theater. They said, "You've got to get up to such-and-such a barracks. There's a big fight going on." I jumped out and jumped in my car, threw it in reverse, and they had it jacked up. So I sat there, axles racing sitting still. [Laughs] They were doing stuff like that all the time.

I was riding down the road one day, and this girl called in. She said, "Would you come and see me?" She said, "My cat died and I need someone to take and bury it."

Well, when I got over there, here's this beautiful girl; I mean, absolutely beautiful. I said, "You know what? I think it would probably be appropriate if I go and get the shovel and dig the grave, and you say a few things over your cat." Because she was crying and everything. And so I was making a move. Actually, we became boyfriend and girlfriend. But these guys were all upset because I took the call and had the pretty girl.

Well, I guess we better knock off. I have to shut it off.

RM: Okay. That concludes the interview with Bob Perchetti. Thank you very much, Bob.

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