An Interview with GEORGE VUCANOVICH

An Oral history produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
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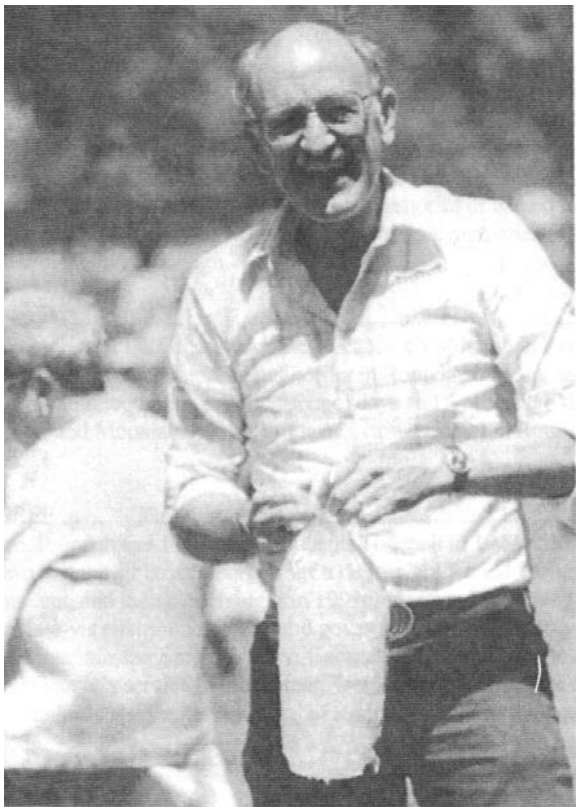

George Vucanovich

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

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

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

—Robert D. McCracken
2009

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—R.D.M.

Interview with George Vucanovich and Robert McCracken at McCracken's home in Las Vegas, Nevada, June 13, 1993.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: George, why don't you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

GV: As it reads on my birth certificate, it's George, initial only J, Vucanovich. That's the way Dr. Cowden wrote it in Tonopah. My dad used to spell it Vucanovic', and I don't know if he put the "h" on or not, because it came over from the old country with a circumflex accent over the "c," which gave it the "h" sound. Going into World War II, it was difficult to explain why there was only an initial and not a full middle name.

RM: I'll bet. And what was your birth date?

GV: April 29th, 1927.

RM: What was your dad's full name?

GV: John J Vucanovich.

RM: When and where was he born?

GV: He was born in a little sello of Yugoslavia by the name of Bugovina. That is about eight or nine miles from the town of Trebia, and that is about 30 miles directly inland from Dubrovnic. It's part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, just above the Montenegran border.

RM: What was his birth date?

GV: I don't know. I've seen two dates—1875 and 1870. His tombstone in Tonopah says 1875.

RM: And what was your mother's full maiden name?

GV: Anica Grubacich. She was from a little place called Bialsee, near Bilecha, which is about another 30 miles inland from Trebinda. That was also a little farming community.

RM: When did your father come over here, and what was his motivation?

GV: Bob, I don't know what his motivation was. I assume he came in 1893, because he was naturalized in Silver Bow County, Montana, in 1898 (there were Vucanoviches in Butte, Montana). Back in those days, as I understand it, records were kept by the states or counties where a naturalization took place. I contacted the people up in Montana and [learned that] the courthouse burned sometime over the years, and all the records went with it. The only thing I

have is his passport from when he came back from World War I. He went over as a volunteer, called a dobro voylatz, which means a "good soldier." He went back to serve the king of Yugoslavia when they tried to break out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He went over in 1914 and in 1916 he went to Athens, and because he was a naturalized American citizen he got to come back to this country. Otherwise, he'd have been stuck over there and would not have had the opportunity to come back.

Interestingly, in the archives of Washington, I've held the manifest of the ship that my mother came over on. A lot of the work of alphabetizing all these manifests and things in the archives was a WPA project. I thought that was fascinating. But the man told me that back in that 1890s time frame there generally was a ship a day, one into Philadelphia, one into Baltimore and one into New York, and if you didn't know the date that the person you're looking for arrived, you have a terrible time.

RM: I'll be darned.

GV: And of course there are not any WPA people to go back and finish up the rest of the records. But he appeared in the Butte, Montana, census of 1910.

RM: How did your mom get over here?

GV: Her brother, George, came over some time before she did. He had a friend in Tonopah, Tripo Susich. (I think he knew Mr. Susich in the old country.) Those two guys in Tonopah thought it would be a great idea if my mom, Anica, would come over and marry Tripo. They wrote to her and sent a picture and sent her some money, and she decided it was a good idea, so she wrote back or had somebody write back for her and said she would come. They sent her a ticket and $75 to get here. She went to Split, either by walking or by wagon or by train, whatever was available then. It took about 30 days on the boat to get to New York, and they went into Ellis Island and went through that process. She told of how everyone was afraid that they'd be turned back, and would have to go back to the old country.

She couldn't speak a word of English, but she understood "come on," and she had a tag around her neck that said who she was and where she was going. Apparently she went to a Newark, New Jersey, train station and then headed out. Whenever anything would happen, she would find the guy with the conductor hat and show him her tag, and he would direct her where to go. Her brother, George, met her in Hazen and they went into Tonopah. I think they arrived in Tonopah on New Year's Eve of 1911.

She married Mr. Susich some time that year and they lived in Tonopah. They had four children—Violet, the oldest; Stella, the next; and then the twins, Bob and John. They also lived in Goldfield for a while during this time frame. Susich was a miner, but he developed miner's con [consumption] and they moved down to Oakland, so that he could be at a lower altitude, and he died down there.

RM: From silicosis?

GV: Yes. Then she came back to Tonopah.

RM: How long was that after she had arrived in Tonopah?

GV: If I remember correctly, he died in 1919. So she had seven years with him. She moved back to Tonopah, and here she was, literally in a foreign land, widowed, with four kids. She ran a boarding table, and she cleaned, she said, the "Prosbeterian Church"—the Presbyterian Church. And when the kids would go to bed at night, she'd get out her still and make moonshine.

RM: Is that right? That was during Prohibition, wasn't it?

GV: Yes. She'd sell it to the miners for $5 a gallon. A surprising number of women in Tonopah did that. My mother told of one widow who went to the county to get some relief for her kids (welfare was then known as relief). Apparently the county took a confiscated still, took it over to her house, set it up, showed her how to use it, and put her in business. I don't think there was any organized thing [in Nevada against Prohibition] like we envision in the rest of the country during Prohibition. It was just people surviving.

RM: So the county actually gave this woman a still?

GV: Yes. Instead of giving her relief they gave her a still. I also know that Bob Shields, who lived right across the street from my mom, made the circular copper pipe for my mother. She said that he charged her $10 for it and his wife, Gertrude Shields, made him reduce the price to $5. These are the stories that have come down.

RM: Those are great stories. Where did your mom keep her still?

GV: Years later I went back to that house and tried to find it. She said it was in the cellar, but, as you know, there were no cellars in Tonopah. Everything was a rock outcrop. But there was a little under-the-house woodshed where they brought the boards down at ground level, and there was a door. It might've been kept in there. And then she'd set it up on the stove. I remember over the years she talked about the person who brought the grapes to Tonopah, but I can't remember who that was now, nor can I remember what she paid for them. So she supported her family, and then she met my dad.

RM: And how did he get down to Tonopah?

GV: Bob, I don't know. I find him in articles in the Tonopah Times, references to his being in Manhattan and as being one of the guys, the dobro voylatses that left Tonopah in 1914. There was one mention that he and some other guys all bought new Buick automobiles (I don't remember the time frame on it, though). That was really big in the newspapers.

RM: How did he earn a living? Was he a miner?

GV: Yes. He would also bartend. The story I've heard is that he would bartend and try to get enough money to open his own place, then sell it, take that money, grubstake himself and go leasing. And also I understand that back in 1918 and 1919, when the Tonopah banks went broke, my dad had made a strike and had $18,000 in the bank, and the bank went broke and he lost it all. I assume that's a true story because I think my mother told it to me, but I can't vouch for it beyond that.

RM: Where did he make his strike?

GV: I assume it was in Tonopah. We went to Round Mountain in 1929 because the Sunnyside and the Fairview were operating, and they had just found the Gold Hill.

RM: Gold Hill was north, wasn't it?

GV: North about eight miles, I believe. They had just started so he thought with three mines it would be a good place.

RM: Had he been earning a living for the previous ten years in Tonopah, then?

GV: Bob, I really don't know.

RM: When did he meet your mother?

GV: They were married in 1926.

RM: So there was a long interim there in which she was a widow.

GV: Oh, yes. That's a sad little scenario. She was married to Mr. Susich for seven years, and then she married my dad in '26, and he died in '35. Many years later, she said that after she had lost two husbands she just was not going to marry again. And she said, look what [marriage] brought me—a life by myself. That really hurts, when they tell you that. And she was off in a strange land. There were five of us kids, but kids [grow up and] go out to make their own lives.

RM: How sad. So she had one child by your father?

GV: Yes. Stella married a guy by the name of Ed Robertson, whose father was a good friend of Louie Gordon's, and that's how Eddie got to Round Mountain. And Violet was married to Earl Heath, who was from Hotchkiss, Colorado. He was in Austin, and his sister Aila was married to Clarence McLeod of the McLeod Ranch. She and Clarence had twin daughters, and she died in childbirth and one of the daughters died in childbirth. Marlene McLeod was the survivor and Marlene is living someplace in Utah now. I was trying to get the conversation around to Adele Eicher, here in Las Vegas, who kind of took care of Betty Holts. She would take Betty for shopping and all for many years. Adele was one of the Darrough kids.

RM: Now, you moved to Round Mountain in ’29, when you were two years old?

GV: Yes, I was two years old.

RM: And your dad was apparently working in mining or in the bars in Tonopah?

GV: Yes, either that or leasing.

RM: How long did you stay in Round Mountain?

GV: We stayed in Round Mountain until 1942. Dad died in ’35 and my mom and I stayed there. Of course, Stella and Violet got married and then Bob married Eva Brady, who was in the poem, and my brother Johnny married Ruby Cornett, who he met in Hawthorne. He ran a service station for Alan Reeves down there before he got drafted in World War II. So they were gone, and just my mother and I were left in Round Mountain. In 1942, the state required six students for a high school, and we only had five, so we moved back to Tonopah and I finished the last two years of high school in Tonopah.

RM: So you are a true native of Nye County.

GV: Right. And then by a stroke of good luck, Jim Aiken, who was a football coach at the University of Nevada, came through Tonopah ostensibly looking for kids to work on the farms in the summertime. But he was also looking for ballplayers. [Laughs] He was really looking at Joe Friel. And Ray Germaine, who was the editor and owner of the Tonopah Times-Bonanza then, was instrumental in this: He got Jim to come out and take a look at Joe, and then God love Joe, he said, “You know, George needs to go to college too” (or whatever he said). And I got a scholarship.

RM: Were you a Mucker on the football team, then?

GV: No, it was basketball in Tonopah; we didn’t have high school football yet. This was during the war and not too many guys were around. So I got to play in the second football game I’d seen. In the first football game I saw, Nevada and Wyoming played in 1937 at Reno.

RM: So you were a basketball player, but they put you on the football team?

GV: Yes, they were short of people. Bob Wardle and Joe Friel and I went down together. Then Bob and Joe got drafted and I got to finish the ’44-’45 school year, then I got drafted. I turned 18 in April and then got drafted that fall, and then got back after the war and finished up.

RM: That’s really interesting. My daughter graduated from Tonopah High.

GV: Hadley must have affected Tonopah High now. Barbara [Mr. Vucanovich’s wife, U.S. Representative Barbara Vucanovich] was the commencement speaker out there a week ago last

night. It was the first graduating class at Round Mountain since 1951. They graduated 19 kids. And Bob, they were good-looking, well-behaved kids; it was really a nice evening.

RM: That's nice to hear. What are your first recollections of Round Mountain?

GV: Mr. McDonald, who was the father of Lefty and Donna McDonald, had the coal yard on Elko Street in Reno. He brought my dad's back bar and bar to Round Mountain. Back in those days the road came through Manhattan, and over the summit, which is just off to the southeast. I kind of remember the truck coming over and this big thing coming down . . .

RM: Did your dad go out to Round Mountain to open a bar?

GV: Yes, he did because the three mines were operating and he felt it would be pretty good. But the things I seem to remember are just things at random, like every kid. I remember my dad taking me down to a miner's cabin and there was a little square hole in the floor, and that thing was plumb full of puppies [chuckles], and I was to get my pick. So I got my dog, old Spot, and we had him for about 13 years.

I remember the floods of 1930 and 1938, and I remember being snowed in, in '32 or '33. We were snowed in for two weeks. I can vividly remember Travis Darrough on his mare, Lady. (All of us kids in Round Mountain absolutely loved that horse because we could walk between her legs and she'd never [hurt us].) Travis came into town, leading the pack horse with mail that he had brought from Manhattan. And then that night or a couple of nights later, the trucks came up from the old valley road and into town and that was the first real communication we'd had for two weeks. Bud Tippen was running the store then.

RM: Was there more than one store in Round Mountain at that time?

GV: Bud Tippen ran the one that Alan Reeves owned, the Round Mountain Mercantile, and then Fred Cook had one down a little bit below, but Fred was pretty old. Karl Berg had the butcher shop, and a little house right next to Skook [Berg's]. Dan [Berg] opened a grocery store there a little later on.

Round Mountain started to die, so to speak, at that time. I don't know when that happened, because there was still work. But my dad died of pneumonia in '35. Remember, pneumonia was just like cancer is today; it was deadly. You got it and you were gone.

RM: Did he have healthy lungs, or do you think he had a little consumption?

GV: All I can remember is that he smoked. He used to hold his cigarettes like that [in a pinched fashion]. I said, "Dad, that's not the modern way, you're supposed to hold them like that" [between 2 fingers]. God love him, he held them like that ever after. But he caught a cold one night. He was great for exercising in the bar every night after he closed down; he'd always exercise. Apparently he worked up a good sweat, and went outside and got a chill and supposedly that's where the cold came from. I can remember them taking him to Tonopah to the Miner's Hospital, to Dr. Craig, and he passed away.

RM: That's too bad. Did the bar make a prosperous living?

GV: Well, he raised five kids on it, so it had to be a good living. And someone, in '33 or '34, came to town with an Oldsmobile that looked to me, as a kid, as if it was a mile long, and it had back doors that opened from the front. I don't know if the front doors opened that way or not. It had a radio in it, and I think my dad paid $1300 for it. He had $1400 in his safe and he spent the $1300 on the car and he had a $100 bill left, and was quite distressed with himself afterwards.

As a little kid, I got out to open the garage doors. One day I left the back door open. Now, these old guys didn't grow up with cars the way you and I did. My brother Bob, before he died, would just regale himself in laughter about the difficulty those old guys had driving the cars. They were coming back, I think from Pero Novacovich's funeral, and they came back through Tonopah. Apparently there had been rain or whatever, and there was water running across the old dirt road down by Rye Patch. Well, my dad didn't even slow down [laughter], and the spokes on the wheels were wooden. They hit that water and it broke the wooden spokes. Bob said the wheel [laughs] was rolling off down the road and my dad was mad. He said, "Stayo vojavo,—what's this devil?" Bob had great fun with that. Bob had great fun with the difficulties the old guys had with their cars.

RM: I've heard some good stories. One I hear all over Nevada is about the old rancher who takes his first drive in the car and forgets how to stop it, and he says, "Whoa!" [laughter] and runs it through the garage door or the fence or something.

GV: Absolutely. And going to Tonopah was an effort. We'd go to Manhattan over that dirt road along the pole line. My dad was a good friend of Joe Francisco's. (I don't know if you've talked to Dolly Francisco, she's now known as Ona Flowers, and she's a realtor in Reno. She'd have a good knowledge of Manhattan history.) But there was a summit as you went out of Manhattan . . .

RM: You went out east of Manhattan? Would you keep going up the hill?

GV: No, you'd turn off to the right. You'd come up the canyon to Manhattan and then turn off to the right. There's a spring up there, and invariably we'd stop, put water in the car, go on down there and pick up the old Belmont Road. My dad would buy pop and whatever else he needed for the bar. I was getting to the point where I would like to sit in his lap and drive. [Chuckles] My dad and my two sisters and I were coming down, and just as he was getting his old pocket watch out of his pocket to see what time it was, I decided that was an appropriate time to climb up onto his lap and drive, so I grabbed the wheel and we went off the side of the road and tipped over. No one was hurt, but my sister Violet was in back with cases of bottled soda water and whatever.

RM: What do you recall about the bar?

GV: There was a guy by the name Nick the Greek, and my mother was always afraid that when he got to drinking, my dad and he would get into a fight.

RM: Nick was pugnacious?

GV: I guess. From what I hear, my dad was a powerful, strong man, and so was this guy. I guess my dad could handle just about anybody and everybody, but my mom wasn't too sure about this guy. The old-timers would get in there and argue about military history or religion, one or the other. Nick the Greek would have been Orthodox; my dad was Orthodox so it wouldn't have been religion. Probably [they argued about] one of the assassinations [in Europe] or something—some question of history.

I remember my dad had three or four slot machines and the miners would set me up on the bar and tell me some cuss words to say, and then they'd put a nickel in the machine, and if it paid, I got the money. [Laughter] I had a pretty good vocabulary as a little kid.

RM: [Laughs] That's funny. Where was the bar?

GV: The bar that's there now is the Palace. It was, or is, Danny Daniels's restaurant and bar. That building was moved into Round Mountain after I left. And the building to the south of it was a church the last time I noticed. Now, that was my dad's bar.

RM: So the church was a bar?

GV: Yes, Big John's Place. Our house sat right alongside it on the north side.

RM: Where the Palace is now?

GV: Yes, except it was adjacent to it. We had a little yard in front with two locust trees, two apricot trees, and two peach trees. And occasionally we got fruit. There were two schools in Round Mountain at the time—the little grammar school was probably grades one through six. Straight down the street from there on the same street that the current school is on, but to the southwest, was a junior high and high school.

RM: Is either of the schools still standing?

GV: I was out there last weekend and I didn't notice. They built the new school in 1936 or 1937. Then they built the other school next to it, and they have a lot of temporary buildings around it.

CHAPTER TWO

GV: To get back to the bar: It was where my dad always was, and I had free run of it, except when there was some lawman from out of town. One interesting thing that happened . . . if you recall, back in those days it was illegal to sell alcoholic beverages to an Indian. The government's enforcement agency had a guy who was half-Indian and half-white, but he looked like a white man. He came in, and he was a stranger. My dad wasn't going to serve him at first, but he served him, and they nailed him. He had to go to Carson City and they fined him.

RM: So a half-Indian was considered an Indian?

GV: Yes. I remember my dad would stay up at night for the evening shift. I think they went over at 3:00 and got off at 11:00. The guys would walk back over from the mine, and he'd stay open in case they wanted to go for drinks. Then when that was over, he'd shut it down. My brothers would swamp out the place in the mornings.

RM: I wonder what he served the most—beer, whiskey, or what?

GV: I don't know, but I do remember that he made wine.

RM: Maybe your mom helped out there?

GV: Yes, and I remember my brother Bob in white rubber boots up to about mid-thigh, stomping around in washtubs that had grapes in them. I think Pete Beko brought the grapes up.

RM: Was Pete running the stage then?

GV: Yes, he was running the stage. But did he bring them on the stage? I couldn't say for sure that he did, Bob. That was when my dad was alive, so it would be pre-'35. Let's see, Roosevelt took off Prohibition in '33. I don't know if I remember this, or if I was told, but my dad brought a bottle of beer back to my mom, and said, "This is the first beer we've been able to buy since Prohibition was on."

RM: So he was running this bar during Prohibition?

GV: Yes, I think he was. That would account for the Orange Crush and other pop in the back of the car when we were coming out from Tonopah and tipped over.

RM: Oh, he was ostensibly selling pop and tobacco, but it was basically a speakeasy, only everybody knew where it was?

GV: Yes, the door was open—you didn't have to knock or anything.

RM: Did he serve food?

GV: No.

RM: How big was the bar? I know it's hard to remember, because when you're a kid, everything looks bigger.

GV: When you're a kid, things are huge. It was 20 to 23 feet wide. There was a back bar, his work space, the front bar, and a little area for people to walk through, and over against the wall were three slot machines, I think. Down at the inside end, where you'd come in the front door down past the bar, there was a showcase where he had cigarettes and a little candy and chewing gum and the likes of that, and there were a couple of card tables back behind it, and not a whole heck of a lot more.

RM: No dance floor or booths?

GV: Oh, no, just a bar and stools.

RM: How many stools would you say there were?

GV: I'd say ten at the high side. That is just totally off the top of my head.

RM: What did the back bar look like? Did it have a mirror or anything like that?

GV: It had a couple of mirrors, and there was a nice carpet.

RM: You don't have any pictures of it, do you?

GV: I doubt it very seriously. I've got a couple of old albums that my sisters gave my mom. I'll go through them when I get back out to Reno the next time.

RM: Great. Could you describe your living quarters?

GV: It was a frame house. As you came back from the bar there was a door and a small room behind that, and then behind that was another room which was my mother and dad's bedroom, and my bedroom until I started to grow up. You came straight back from the bar to this small room, and then you turned to the right, and that took you into the kitchen. There were two rooms in front of the kitchen, my sisters' bedroom and then our living room. There was kind of a porch on the back, and I guess my brothers must have slept there. There was kind of a pantry also, and the rear exit from the house went out of the kitchen, past the pantry and past my brothers' bedrooms, and there were some sort of stairs which I truly can't remember that went down to the outside.

RM: Was there indoor plumbing, or did you have an outhouse?

GV: We had running water in the sink over in the corner, with the stove on the other side.

RM: And it was just cold water, I imagine.

GV: Yes, it was cold; we had a reservoir on the stove. We all ate dinner at the table in that kitchen.

RM: Did you have electric lights?

GV: Yes.

RM: And you probably had a heater in the living room.

GV: I think there was an oil stove in the living room, and of course the kitchen stove provided the heat. I truly can't remember where my brothers and sisters slept, but I'm sure my sisters slept in the bedroom that was between the kitchen and the living room. One of my brothers may have slept on the couch or something in front; I really can't remember.

RM: It must have been a terrible shock when your father died, with a family of five children. What did your mom do then?

GV: My dad had bought another house from Frank Smith. That particular house, incidentally, now is part of the Berg Ranch.

RM: Oh, they moved it down there?

GV: Yes. So my mother and I moved to that house, which was still in Round Mountain, and she leased the bar. My brother-in-law Earl and my brother John ran it for a little while, and then I think she leased it to Bill Smith, who was Tom Smith's brother. He ran it for a while and then Round Mountain started down. A. O. Smith came out on a sampling project. I don't remember if my dad was alive during the sampling or not. When they finished up, the town almost imploded.

Anyway, back to my mom for a moment. We moved up and lived in that other house, which was an eight-room house. We used six of the rooms, and she rented out the other two to anybody who would come through. And she would lease the bar or try to sell it or do whatever she could. Then my brother John was drafted and we were his dependents, so we had a secondary allotment. His wife, Ruby, got the first allotment, and we had, I think, $37.50 a month.

RM: Which was a godsend, in those days.

GV: And we made it. We didn't know we were broke.

RM: What kind of a life did a kid in Round Mountain live in those days? What do you recall about being a kid there?

GV: I remember waiting for the mail truck to come in – that was the ac□vity of the day. Nicky Merlino was the driver. We got to be real good friends with Nick because we'd wait for him every day.

RM: Did you order things from the catalogs?

GV: Oh, yes. Now, how did that work? (Again, this is a memory from the mind of a child.) If you ordered from Montgomery Ward on Monday, it would come on Saturday. If you ordered from Sears on Monday, it would come on the next Monday.

RM: No kidding. That fast?

GV: This could be two weeks, Bob. It would be a day to get to Tonopah . . .

RM: But it was a pretty good turn-around?

GV: I thought it was great. You just had to get through this week until whatever you had coming came.

RM: And it would be a little toy or something?

GV: Yes, whatever you could con or get. Another big thing was when the new catalogs came and we'd look through them. I remember we usually got a movie once a week. I can't remember the name of the guy who brought them out. One of the pictures was Boulder Dam. They had the overhead trams that went across, and in the movie one of the cables broke and the trams started to fall.

We'd be up at the schools, playing on the swings, trying to pick a kid off of one side with all of us on the other side. As we got older, Skook Berg and I rabbit-hunted a lot, and did some fishing and did a little camping.

RM: Where did you fish?

GV: In Jefferson Canyon, mainly.

RM: Was it good fishing?

GV: I thought it was.

RM: How far up did you have to go?

GV: We fished from when you got down into the canyon until you got up to Herman's place – where the mine was and where Herman Schappel had built a park. Shoshone Canyon didn't have fish in it. Lots of people fished North and South Twin, and Skook went out to Anderson Creek. As you went out to Gold Hill, there was Barker Creek, Moore's Creek, and Anderson Creek (I'm not sure that that's the order they appeared in). We were out there three days and killed nine rattlesnakes – that was the highlight of that trip. We thought, boy, wow. There were a lot of rattlesnakes around.

RM: [Whistles] Did anybody ever get bit?

GV: No. As we got older, we ended up with cars of one type or another. Ed Welch was an old miner around, and when he died my brother bought his Model T for me. Skook was the real mechanic. He and Gene Michels and I had Model Ts, and we'd go to school and drive around in cars, and catch hell from folks for being in cars all the time. Things haven't changed.

RM: What do you recall about grade school and high school?

GV: Just last week my sister told me a gal by the name of DeWitt was my first teacher. I know there were a number of us in school. We had a stove in the back of the room that provided all the heat. We were all lined up in rows – I think first grade was on the le and it went on up to sixth grade, so I'd assume there were six rows. You'd go to school and wait for recess, and we'd play Auntie-Over. And we had a teeter-totter that would rotate. We'd get somebody at either end and make it go around. I tried to run out of it one day and poom! Right in the back of the head. [Laughs] I guess I had a concussion, now that I think back, because I really wanted to go to sleep. The teacher got me up and took me home.

Oh, Teddy Ott fell out of his uncle's car. He was a mechanic, and he was backing the car out of the garage after he'd done some work on it. Teddy Ott fell out and broke his arm. They didn't know about the growth point, and they set the arm, and his hand never grew. He still played trumpet in the high school band in Tonopah.

RM: Is that right?

GV: Chester Green came out from Reno as our schoolteacher, I guess, for my sophomore year. There was an article in the Reno newspapers on rural Nevada schools within the last ten days, and Chester was one of the folks it spoke about. He taught down at Montgomery Summit for two years first. And this is interesting: He had four or five kids to teach, and the kids had a little brother who was four years old. He was too young to go to school, but the parents were working, so Chester would take him along when he'd pick the kids up to take them to school in the morning.

Then Chester came out to Round Mountain. He talked a lot about the university and life in Reno and things like that. Then he got drafted and he would write to us. I guess he wrote to us in Tonopah, because I think he was the last teacher we had out at Round Mountain.

RM: And you said that you had Betsy Holts as a teacher.

GV: Yes, I think she taught my freshman year, and then she came down here [to Las Vegas].

RM: She was the principal, too, wasn't she?

GV: Yes. She and a lady by the name of Miss Trimble taught us. And along the way we had a guy by the name of Mr. Bean, who was our principal. Betty must have left Round Mountain before that. I remember taking Latin from her, so it had to have been in high school. And Mr. Bean started a little school band.

RM: How many were in your school, from grades one through 12?

GV: I've got a picture someplace of the whole student body from when we were in the eighth grade. There must have been 15 to 20 kids in the school. The high school was in one end of the school, and the grammar school was in the other end.

RM: Do you remember Blackjack Raymond?

GV: Oh, yes. He had a little mine up above town, kind of off to the northeast. (I guess most of these people are gone now, so we can talk about it.) He was a real fence for the high-graders. As a kid, you have all kinds of rites . . . I remember seeing a black lunch pail one time that was full of amalgam.

RM: One of the miners had it?

GV: Yes.

RM: Was it doré?

GV: No, this was the gold and quicksilver.

RM: And it was in a lunch pail?

GV: Yes. To my eyes it was full, but maybe there was only an inch on the bottom. I remember Ken Kirby, one time, coming back with these guys, and he took off his shoe and took out a bunch of $20 bills and counted them out, and there were 19. He thought somebody had cheated him, and he took the other shoe off and counted off, and there were 21. He apparently was the guy who would take the gold from Blackjack and go to wherever he went and sell it and then bring the money back. I think there was a lot of that going on.

RM: Yes, Round Mountain was a high-grader's paradise.

GV: And this was during the time of the gold dredge over in Manhattan.

RM: So he was fencing for that too?

GV: Yes.

RM: How would you describe Blackjack Raymond?

GV: Oh, as an old man. [Laughs] At least to an eight- or nine-year-old kid, however old I was in that time frame. I thought he was a mild-mannered man. I don't ever remember him saying much. But I remember that guys used to go up to his place and play cards and so on. He had a nephew known as Tex Raymond, and Tex ran around with my brother John to some extent.

RM: Did the nephew live with Blackjack?

GV: I think he did, yes. He was kind of a . . . what would a sharp dresser in Round Mountain be – a guy who wore clean shoes, I guess. [Laughter]

But all those kids ran around together – my brothers Bob and John, and Ge a Berg, and Frank Jacowatz; he and Getta were ultimately married. And there were Tex Raymond, and Rene Rogers . . .

RM: Those kids were all a little older than you, weren't they?

GV: Oh, yes. My brothers were 11 years older than I was. Violet is 80, and I'm 66, so she was 14 or 15 years older, and Stella was maybe 13 or 14.

RM: What do you recall about Lou Gordon?

GV: He was the man who ran the mine, and that was about all.

RM: He lived in Reno, didn't he?

GV: I think he did, but I don't really know, because there was a little bit of housing over at the Sunnyside. I have no idea who really lived there. The O'Keefes lived there at one time, before they came to Round Mountain or moved over there from Round Mountain. But they're the only ones I can remember who lived there. There were four or five houses at the most over there.

RM: Were they right by the mill?

GV: They were a little farther out toward the valley. And back then they had the small placer down below the mill, in the mine, and they were outside of it; about even with them. They were far enough away that the placer didn't bother them.

RM: Did you ever climb up on Round Mountain or anything like that?

GV: I never did. I think we got up on top of Stebbins Hill one time. My brother John would take my Model T and drive up on top of Stebbins Hill and then come straight down. Then he'd tell me he'd kill me if he ever caught me doing the same thing. They had lots of fun with those old cars, they really did. We went up Shoshone a lot. There was a dam over behind Fairview for the Jett Canyon and Shoshone Canyon water for the hydraulic [system], and we'd go over there periodically. But there weren't a heck of a lot of places to go. We didn't really have cars or any transportation until the last year or two. Maybe you'd walk out to Shoshone Creek when the water started coming down in the spring, and fool around with it, and that was about it.

RM: Did you guys listen to the radio?

GV: Yes, but there weren't a lot of them. The car radios seemed to work well at night. The big event was when Joe Louis would fight. Everybody would bring radios over to the town hall. They'd all have them around, and try to find the one that played the best. And usually they were one-round fights.

RM: And that was a big event there?

GV: A great big event. Baseball on Sundays was a big event. We had town teams. They would bring guys out from the university for jobs in the summertime. I don't know who arranged this, but Lefty Meyer, who was ultimately either the superintendent or principal of schools in Hawthorne, was one of them. There was a guy by the name of Brew. Since I saw him [mentioned] in the poem I have been trying to remember his name, and I can't. Wes Barkley, who was Lewellyn Groves's brother, came out. He was a good ballplayer. And there was a kid by the name of Lefty Reardon, but I don't know anything other than his name.

But they had town teams. Manhattan would come out and play, and Austin. I remember they drove over to Austin one time and played down below town where the railroad tracks were. Lefty Meyer was playing right field, and the ground was so hard that these guys would hit little pop-ups out to left field and Lefty couldn't get in to catch them so he'd play back to catch them on the bounce, and they would bounce four miles over his [head]. I can still kind of remember that. That happened to him a couple of times. They beat the guys pretty good. My brother-in-law Earl played, and I think Johnny, my brother, was the manager. They built a little A-frame, maybe four or five feet high, with black oilcloth on it, and they'd write the next game on it in chalk, and put it out in the middle of the street. It was kind of neat – all the cars would line up around it . . .

Silver Peak came over one time, and somebody pulled a foul ball and hit it right through Fred Vollmer's windshield. He was the heavy of the Silver Peak mining operation. It cut his thumb, and that was all. To think back now about that plate glass, and those windshields – getting hit by a baseball, it's a wonder anybody survived.

RM: The teams were made up of young athletic guys from town, weren't they?

GV: I guess so. The guys who came down from the university obviously were, but there wasn't a lot of opportunity to develop athletic skills out there. Our basketball and tennis court –

the same court – was made of asphalt. I think it was just spread with a blade with a motor patrol and allowed to sit, although they had to have rolled it.

RM: Did you have a basketball team in high school?

GV: Not in Round Mountain. We used to have tennis until the net broke. We also had a basket, and the net lasted for that long. Chester Green took us over to Manhattan one time and we played the town team from over there. That was the school team. And there was a town team basketball game after that, but that was about the extent of it. And then further on, pretty quickly, I ended up being almost the only kid in town. I'm trying to think who was there. Somebody moved away, and we got down to five students.

RM: That was for the high school?

GV: Yes. Probably Faye and Don Brommitt . . . I don't recall if the Ewing family was still there. The Ott kids, Chester, Teddy and Delbert, and Hamilton Ott's nephews. He had a ranch over in Wall Canyon and they came to school every day. But somebody moved away and we just had five. I wish I could remember who the five were – the two Brommi kids and myself, but I can't recall who the other two were.

RM: But then you and your mom were still living in that house?

GV: Yes. Then we moved to Tonopah.

RM: How did that sit with you? Was it kind of like going to the big city?

GV: Yes, it really was. I knew a couple of kids, and I knew Dave Banovich and Nicky Merlino, because they had both run the mail truck out at Round Mountain, and I knew Fred Inman because he had worked with them a little bit. And Harry Butler. So I knew a few people in Tonopah.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: What grade were you in when you moved to Tonopah?

GV: I was a junior in high school.

RM: Tell me about going to school in Tonopah, particularly in contrast to Round Mountain.

GV: Well, you went from room to room; that was a big change. We had a homeroom and five or six teachers. They had a basketball team and I went out for it.

RM: What position did you play?

GV: Center.

RM: You were tall, weren't you?

GV: I was tall, but I grew all at once, Bob. Joe Friel told me, years later, that people used to come to watch just because I was so clumsy. [Laughs] Again, you had no opportunity to develop [athletically] on Round Mountain. But it was still fun. I loved it all.

RM: But you made the team in Tonopah?

GV: I was the biggest one; they had to take me. [Laughs] And we had a band. Mrs. Rausch was the band leader, and I'd learned to play saxophone in Round Mountain.

RM: How did your mom support the two of you in Tonopah?

GV: We had the allotment coming from my brother John, and I worked at Safeway after school. Bill Kellison was the manager. He ultimately had the five-and-dime in Hawthorne for a lot of years.

RM: Where was Safeway in those days?

GV: As you went up the street, just when you came to the Y – the road that went to Ely and the road that went to Vegas – it was at the immediate right. There used to be a post in the middle of the road and you had to go around that to go up the Ely highway. Safeway was directly across from that, maybe two doors down from Reischkes' ice cream parlor, right above the Elk's Hall. As a matter of fact, I guess the Silver Queen is probably there now.

RM: Was Tonopah a pretty going place then? What year was this?

GV: This was '42. The air base was there, and it was absolutely full of GIs and families and it was a busy, busy place. We were always looking and listening for airplanes – wai□ng for

somebody to buzz us and wondering why more guys didn't buzz downtown. I can remember a couple of B-24s going down Main Street.

RM: What did you fellows think about the airmen dating the local girls? Was there any rivalry there?

GV: Not with us, but my mother kept me on a short leash. Here I was the biggest kid in school, and had the smallest mother in school, and guess whose mother came downtown and got him if he wasn't home by 9:00? [Laughs] She had absolutely no hesitation to come down.

RM: How funny. Was old Charlie Stewart in Tonopah then?

GV: Oh, yes. Charlie had the shoeshine place, and it was kind of a headquarters. When you went downtown at night, you always went down there to see him. I remember coming from Round Mountain and having enough money to get a shoe shine and have Charlie shine your shoes. It tickled; you couldn't hold your feet still. Charlie was a good man. He never was disagreeable with us, he just told us to behave. I think he had a pool table in the back, and we played pool once in a while. Those are pleasant memories.

RM: And the theater was right next to his place, wasn't it?

GV: Yes, the Butler Theater. Mr. Robb ran it. I think their shows were Sunday and Monday; Tuesday and Wednesday; Thursday and Friday; and then Saturday was serial day, with the matinee and whatever the feature was.

RM: So they changed the picture every two days? You got a real turnover.

GV: Yes. We had movies in Round Mountain, but we would get them maybe once a week, when we would get them.

RM: Were they bringing them in from Tonopah?

GV: I don't know where the guy came from. I also remember silent ones out at Round Mountain in the old town hall.

RM: Where was the town hall located?

GV: As you come up the valley road, the spot where Billy Daniels' place is now was vacant, then my dad's place was next, and if you moved down the street two imaginary buildings and went directly across the street, the town hall was there, facing towards the valley.

RM: Kind of across the street from where the Round Mountain Gold had that store?

GV: Yes, just up a little bit. I think a lady by the name of Mrs. Menken had a little restaurant right next to it. And there was a house right next to it that became a barbershop later on going up the street. And then there was a house on the corner . . . is that where Travis Darrough's family lived? I really can't remember. And the fire bell was on the telephone pole right next to it. That was the intersection of the valley road and Main Street.

RM: What do you think when you go back to Round Mountain now?

GV: I love it.

RM: And what do you think when you see the contrast? I understand it is now the world's largest single heap-leaching operation.

GV: You know, growing up in Round Mountain, that was your life. You didn't really know there was anything else. You'd go see something, but you always came back to it. I went to Tonopah and school, and when I went to university my mother went out to Round Mountain and I went in the service, and then I came back.

While I was going to the university, she stayed in Round Mountain because she wanted to sell her house. She ultimately sold the saloon building that my dad had had, and wanted to sell the house out there. I would go out on vacations and I disliked it – I wanted to get out of there, and we'd usually take off and go to Wendover, where my sister Violet and her husband Earl – the Heaths – lived. We'd go up there and then go back, and I'd leave my mom in Round Mountain and go on to school. I didn't go out there for a long time after my mother moved. I went back out after that and I said, "Hey, this is a pretty good place." [Laughs] I loved it. I loved to go up to the little old grammar school and sit on the steps and just look out over the valley. It is such a beautiful valley.

RM: It really is.

GV: Those mountains are so magnificent. You didn't realize then that they come up out of the valley floor and almost straight up. It is really special. The mine is just a function of mining. That happens. A lot of people criticize it, but, hey, that mine has raised – provided jobs for – four generations of people. I went down during this last [political] campaign to get some tapes for use in a radio ad for Barbara's campaign. The gal [on the tape] is the mother of three young ladies. She was either a pad operator or an equipment operator, and she was just proud as hell. She said, "Because of mining I can support my three daughters. I don't need welfare, I don't need food stamps, I don't even need child support from my husband."

RM: That's great, isn't it?

GV: They were all that way. So from that standpoint it's good, you know. You get into philosophical discussions about long-term effects on the environment and all that, of course.

RM: When you're back in Washington, how do you feel when you are talking to Easterners? Do you feel they really understand us out here and understand what places like Round Mountain are all about? For instance, Clinton is trying to put a big tax on the mines and cattle grazing. How do you view these issues?

GV: I classify it as a liberal environment. The government has to run and control everything. They run and control the mines by taxing them and they try to get them out because they feel that they're doing damage. The Interior Committee had some oversight hearings up in Alaska on the native corporations after Alaska became a state. (They set up native corporations to try and give those guys a boost up economically. Some of the corporations have been eminently successful and some haven't.) We flew around a lot. I don't know where the other people on the plane came from, but there were a lot of environmentalists.

RM: Was this in the '70s?

GV: No, this was in the mid-'80s. On a flight from Seward to Fairbanks, we saw mile after mile after mile after mile of dead trees. There was some kind of an infestation that was killing the spruce off; it was massive. Envision the Toiyabes from Peavine to Austin – this area was a lot larger. It was absolutely covered with trees, and every single tree was dead for mile after mile after mile. Suddenly they'd see a mine – "Oh, God, look at that mine down there – it's destroying everything." "Well, what about the trees?" "Oh, we don't care what nature does. We don't want man to destroy things." I find that hard to accept philosophically. But by the same token, you can't be destructive. Back when we were kids, there weren't that many people around, so there weren't that many needs, nor was there that much destruction of things. It's changed now. The equipment is larger, there is more of it, and there are more needs by the people. I really don't know what the answer is. But the Easterners think the West should be locked up and saved for their recreation. I guess that's the bottom line on it. I look at things and somebody will be . . . well, we're in Vegas here. Out north, on the way up to Beatty, off to the right side, there's a cinder mine. Why didn't those guys go around to the back side of the hill and dig instead of doing it on the side where everybody can see it from the highway?

RM: But, to me, that's not an eyesore. And probably when they started digging nobody thought of it as an eyesore.

GV: Oh, absolutely not. Look at the road that goes up to the top of Butler Mountain in Tonopah over the ridge. Why didn't they put it on the back side?

RM: Yes, but nobody thought of doing it in those days.

GV: No, they didn't. When we were down at Gardnerville yesterday for the parade . . . look at Kingsbury. They cut it right down and scarred the whole side of that hill. But some of those things have to be done. That is the technology and we have to live with it. I hate to see pollution and destruction of these natural things, but I also dislike seeing people lose their jobs.

RM: It's almost as if the Easterners don't want people living in rural Nevada, except for maybe just a few out there to run the government. You get the feeling they really don't want ranchers and miners out there.

GV: No, they don't.

RM: But if the ranchers and miners aren't out there, there won't be any people out there, because those two economic activities are the basis of the economy of rural Nevada.

GV: True. Is it the Fallinis who have apparently been doing a pretty good job of winning their lawsuits [concerning wild horses]?

RM: They have, yes.

GV: One of the things I've heard – and the numbers are just made up because I don't know what the real numbers are – is that an area of land, that by BLM determina□on would be able to accommodate 250 horses without destroying the range, has a herd of 1500, and the range is destroyed. So the BLM plays it both ways.

The Cliffords, at Stone Cabin [Valley], had something like 1200 or 1300 AUMs [animal unit months] three or four years ago. I grew up with Roy and we still see each other. He and his brother Joe (I don't know if this came before or after Joe's illness) decided their children ought to come back [to their ranches] and start taking over and Roy and Joe would get out. So the kids quit their jobs and moved mobile homes out or built houses and moved back to the ranch, and suddenly the Forest Service cut their grazing allotment to 500 AUMs. Then they cut them to 300, and I think this year they got 135 AUMs. They can run 135 cows . . .

RM: That's nothing.

GV: How is that going to support five families?

RM: Or even one family?

GV: That's the bad part. But still, with the drought . . . it's a two-edged sword. It truly is a two-edged sword. It's tough.

RM: Another thing that bothers me is that I don't understand why the government is sitting on so much of the land in Las Vegas. In the Las Vegas Valley, you can't touch an acre of old worthless desert land out here for less than $40,000. But the reason that land is at that price is because the supply is limited. If they would loosen up on it, the prices would come down.

GV: I don't know where the money goes when the government sells property like that. I'm sure they don't go to the agency that's selling.

RM: Well, they don't sell much of it; they're hanging onto it. What are they saving it for? Back in the East, they sold all the land off to put people on it. It's as if they don't want people on the land out here in the West.

GV: Maybe it's all they have left, and they want to save it.

RM: And there's something to that. I don't think they should get rid of all of it. But I'm concerned about the future of rural Nevada in that regard. The western senators were able to put the clamps on Clinton this time, but how much longer will they able to do that?

GV: It's hard to tell.

RM: I wanted to ask you about Will Berg. What do you remember about him?

GV: Will—or Bill—Berg was Skook's father. He was a hard-working man who always walked fast and always walked hard. From a kid's perspective, most adult men are busy, and they don't have time for other kids; they have their own kids.

RM: Right. Did you hang out at the Bergs'? You were younger than the Berg kids, weren't you?

GV: Yes, I was younger than those guys, but Skook and I . . .

RM: I think a lot of Round Mountain youngsters hung out over there, didn't they?

GV: Oh, yes, because they had the piano and Getta could play. I'm not sure that Bill liked the disruption. But he ran the water company and he had the ranch. He had beautiful white hair, which Skook has also. Skook's hair is like his dad's was.

RM: What do you remember about Lillian, Skook's mother?

GV: She played the piano. I remember Bill would go to bed early at night. That's one thing I remember—it seemed like when it would get dark he'd be gone. But he worked hard during the day. She was a pleasant lady. All the Bergs are pleasant folks; they were nice people. Of course, moms are just special, and you kind of put up with them, or they put up with you, whichever the case may be. [Chuckles]

RM: Let's jump forward again to when you went up to UNR on a scholarship. It must have been tough for your mom when you left.

GV: Yes, because she was left in Round Mountain by herself. She was in Tonopah when I went to the university and she went back out to Round Mountain right after I left.

RM: To live in your old house there?

GV: Yes, by herself.

RM: That must have been difficult. Did you ever talk to her about how she felt about it?

GV: Not really, but my brother John and I have talked since she passed away. That's the one thing that we have guilt feelings about, her being out there by herself.

RM: But there was nothing you could do, because you were a college student.

GV: No, not really. And Johnny was off in Wendover trying to raise a family and Violet was raising a family and Stella was raising a family. But in retrospect, maybe it could have been done differently. I don't know.

RM: How long did she stay in Round Mountain?

GV: She ultimately sold the house to the mine.

RM: Oh, to Round Mountain Gold?

GV: Well, to one of the predecessor companies. They were going to use it for a bunkhouse. Then she went to Reno and lived with my brother Bob.

RM: Was she getting up in years then?

GV: No. She would have had 95 years. She died in January and that February she would have been 95. But she stayed with Bob and Eva, and then I got out of school. I can't remember where I lived right after I got out of school, and then I got called back in that Korean thing. And she was in Reno then.

RM: And you were drafted in '45?

GV: Yes.

RM: When did you get out?

GV: I got out of the army in '47. Then when I was going to the university, they started the air guard unit in Reno, so we joined that.

RM: What was your reasoning in joining the guard?

GV: We thought Korea was going to blow up and I didn't want to get back into the infantry again.

RM: When did you join the air guard unit?

GV: In ‘47.

RM: You thought the Korean conflict was coming in ‘47?

GV: Well, something was coming in ‘47, because why would a guy have joined it? One reason I joined was that there was a whole bunch of vets back and I always was interested in aviation. The pilots are the ones who really wanted the guard units, to get back to flying, so they had to get all of us grunts to make the rest of it run. Then we were called back in for Korea.

When I came home in ‘52, I rented a little house in Sparks, and my mother and I lived together from then until Barbara and I got married. I got married a first time in ‘59, and divorced in ‘60; that didn’t go too well. Then my mom and I lived together again until Barbara and I were married in ‘65.

My mother stayed in Reno for a while after that, and then she went to Wendover with my brother John. They moved back to Reno in about ‘76 and she lived with them in Reno. She was diabetic for a lot of years. Her chemistry got a little out of shape, so they put her in the hospital, and she was starting to have serious trouble with her legs. She just couldn’t walk. She had no pain, but she just couldn’t walk. So she said she wanted to go to a rest home. My brother-in-law Ed made arrangements for her at Riverside, on Idlewild Drive in Reno, and she spent her last years there. She must have been there five or six years.

[Women of her generation] lived a tough life. The old country was tough, and then they’d get over here and they might be widowed once, or widowed twice, and then the kids all go off and make their own lives.

Ultimately, from some point in the ‘50s, she lived with one or the other of us all the way through. But there were those years out in Round Mountain. John and I, as I mentioned earlier, were talking about that. That’s really the greatest regret, that we put her out there alone. The circumstances were such that that’s the way it had to be, but there weren’t many people out there during that time. There were some, because the mines started picking up again in the late ‘40s.

RM: When was Dodge Construction out there?

GV: Dodge was there in the ‘30s. World War II really shut them down. When I say Dodge, I mean Dodge Construction out of Fallon.

RM: They were doing the groundwork for Yuba Dredge, weren’t they?

GV: They might have been, because they had a little pit. Then the war wrapped them up. George Eckman was there, and Smiley Atkinson. I can’t remember how the story went: George was upset because they weren’t getting enough gold, and so he put some padlocks on the jigs. But he didn’t know that there was some way that a guy could get into the jigs without going through the padlocks. [Laughs] I can’t really remember that whole story. I think they left there

before we went to Tonopah, so they got out of there before ‘42. It was a relatively small operation, in retrospect.

RM: Are there any other people who stand out in your mind from that community?

GV: Oh, Gene Michels. His mother, Mrs. Michels, was the postmistress for a long, long time. And his dad, Ed Michels, was kind of a caretaker of the mine property when it was closed. Gene worked for Amax in Golden, Colorado, for a number of years, and retired here a while back. His son is getting out of the navy this summer and they’re going to tour Nevada. When you get out there you just want to go back. Again, Gene was there up until the ‘30s or ‘40s or thereabouts and then he went on his way. Let’s see, there were the Bergs, of course, and the Goldbacks—God, I think they’re starting to pass away. I think Charlie died. Their daughter was Betty; Chas was her brother. I can barely remember her mom, and I guess her dad was a miner. Somebody else who was there as a youngster is Drake Delanoy’s wife, Jackie. He’s an attorney in Las Vegas.

RM: She was a kid with you there?

GV: Jackie was a Keenan, and they lived out there in the early ‘30s. Her dad was a miner, and her brother, Bobby, was my first real friend out in Round Mountain. Then he moved to Reno. He ended up with Thornton Audrain in the same bomber and on the same crew in World War II. Apparently Bob was an outstanding bombardier, and they took him out of Thornton’s airplane and put him in the lead ship for a particular mission and the lead ship and another ship had a midair collision and Bobby was killed. He was my first real friend. In subsequent years, Thornton, his pilot, became my best friend. We worked together in Semenza and Kottinger, CPAs, and played ball together. All these things intertwine and go on along.

RM: Did your family have any contact with the Serbian community in Tonopah?

GV: I remember my dad would go in to the lodge, or drushtow, as they called it. The drushtow was the lodge, the Young Mens’ Serbian Society, or some such thing. He’d go in periodically, and he had a big sash across his chest. He was buried out of the Serbian Hall in Tonopah. I can remember parties up there periodically.

I remember as a kid, going in from Round Mountain to Tonopah to visit sick people in the hospital. It was always men and they always had the con.

RM: These were friends of your dad’s?

GV: Yes.

RM: He probably had worked with them?

GV: Could be. They all knew each other. We'd go in to Tonopah and see them and then, sure as heck, we'd go back later on for the funeral. There would be a widow and some kids. It might be some guy who had been killed in a mine accident. I remember a lot of that.

I was always scared of dead people when I was a kid; I'm still uncomfortable around them. One time a bunch of guys were boozing it up and they went down to Darrough's Hot Springs to go swimming. They missed a curve down below, and one of the guys got killed. They towed the car into town and had him lying in the back seat. I could just see his hand, which was kind of hanging down off the seat, and it just scared the Jesus out of me. I was just a little kid then. I saw it when they brought the car back up to Round Mountain. I'd seen the guys boozing and drinking and raising Cain. Then I saw his hand and the vein was out, and it was all white. It just scared the billy goat hell out of me. And Kate Darrough said, "Don't ever be afraid of dead people, they can't hurt you. The live ones can."

RM: That was a small comfort, wasn't it?

GV: A guy who would be good to talk to is Lee Darrough, up in Lander, Wyoming.

RM: I tried to interview Luther Darrough, but he wouldn't talk to me, which I thought was too bad.

GV: Oh, that is too bad. But, you know, these guys almost become recluses because they've been down there for so long. And there were a lot of problems with the Darroughs' ranch. I understand some realtors tried to get hold of it to develop it, and the family got in a big beef over whether they should or whether they shouldn't, and from what I hear, Luther had enough money to buy out the interest of all the others. That might have made him a little testy. God, he was funny, though. My brother John's a character. He's just great—Johnny Susich.

AS I REMEMBER THEM

"Hello, old-time, how do you do?
How's your health, say what's new?
What's up town, what's on the street?
Anything doing, what's on the sheet?"

Old-timer paused and looking around,
asked this new arrival in the town,
"Who the devil are you, from where did you blow?
Your face or name I'm damned if I know."

"You ask me what's new, you knock me cold,
Why don't you ask about days of old?
When this was a boomin' lively place,
and smiles could be seen on every face."

"Say Johnny, I'll tell you of this old town.
It was once a hummer, though now it's down.
And the best damned people were on these streets.
By gosh, I'll tell you they were hard to beat."

"Cornish, Irish, German and Jew,
Scotch, Italian and others too.
All represented in this old place,
in fact we had some from every race."

"Name them? Why hell, I can't begin
to name all those who drifted in.
Some made their pile and beat it quick,
others were broke and had to stick."

"Many there were who joined in the race
for wealth and riches in this old place.
Some stayed with the lode when up, when down,
and now out north lie under the ground."

"Won't bother with those who made their dough,
Richard and Gordon and others, you know.
But I'll go to the other end of the line
and speak of some that I call to mind.

"Old Bob Gibson, and Dutchman Pete,
were a pair that were pretty hard to beat.

Karl Berg the butcher, Loop Legged Jack,
some years ago went over the track."

"Mr. Frank" Clarke, of ice cream fame,
we won't forget his cream or name.
Evert Morris, Flemming Jack,
both lie out north, and won't come back."

"Don nanman, Johnny Henneberg and Bob Brown,
men who couldn't keep their faces off the ground.
Aladino the Spaniard, Edmund Long – both cranks
Those two teased everyone with their pranks."

Gertie Williams, Eva Brady, Dan O'Keefe,
Pete Rogers, the cowboy that sold us beef.
Dolores Huff from out on the Oregon Road,
Rene Rogers, in all our parades she rode."

"Bob Belchor the old barber, who once ran for
mayor, and sold a hair tonic that would never
grow hair.
On the lock on his old bald head he would pull,
Saying, "Dis is for hair, sah; it doesn't grow
wool!""

"Baseball fans? Sure we had a few –
Lefty Mayor, Plenty Sweet Barkley and Brew.
Lew Sutton, Long Legged Heath and others we knew,
were some of the players that we had in our
crew."

"Drunkards? Hell, we sure had a bunch.
Oh boy how they liked their beer and free lunch.
They were men, with all the word "man" implies,
and believe me they never gave a friend the
go-by."

"Barney Horn, who would talk all day long and
real loud,
with his pal Roscoe Brady in the thick of the
crowd.
When the two got together they sure had their
say,
They'd make the other boys take stuff and go away."

“Blackie Dyre – of him, let me see –
Oh yes, with Chas Goldbach he threw many a spree.
When Chas started out to have some big time,
He’d always take Dyre and handfuls of dimes.”

“Professor Miller, of long ago,
as big-hearted a man as you’d ever know.
Of gamblers and sports we had our full share –
and most of them were on the square.”

“Another old friend I just call to mind,
is good old Skeets, a pal of the mine.
He has seen the old town in its glory and slack,
and still says, if asked “course it’s comin’
back”.”

“Banks the tailor, long laid away,
Mrs. Lowenberg, and old Tom Nay.
And don’t forget old Betty Holts,
examples of our school, now dead and cold.”

“The Smith brothers we used to know
tending the bar, running to and fro.
Kirby’s saloon, down by the Hall -
Kirby was craziest of them all.”

“Little Matt, so stooped and old
who combed the dumps for silver and gold.
Pete Boni, and Jimmy too
and names that are surely familiar to you.”

“Milwaukee brothers, Hold and Cap.
Always ready to stand for a scrap.
Lois McCuddin, my old mate –
All among the crowd that has passed the gate.”

“Glenn Miller and old JoAnn
we’ll count Clarence Wallace if we can.
Doc Debrich and the good natured cop too,
can all be counted in this ole-time crew.”

“Tommy Gordon who thought that he was tough,
was a real old sample of Cousin Jack stuff.

Dan Berg, Bill Wilson – oh I remember well,
they are some that we used to tell."

Bobbie the duck was another cure,
old Johnnie Susich the bellman, sure –
he paraded the street like a live wire
announcing auction, or fire! fire!"

"Dick Haderly and Daniel Bob,
another pair who were on the job.
Hold on stranger, now don't you barge,
I nearly forgot old Jack's garage."

The mercantile store on Main Street
was the best place in town for folks to meet.
Bud Tippin would tell some long winded story,
while we ate hot dogs in the height of our
glory."

"Pearl Barnes – another name
And Getta Berg, of musical fame.
She sure could make a piano talk,
when filled with beer, on the keys she'd walk."

"All of these folks lived in this town,
that you and I stare at now with a frown.
And at some future point, when again I start
spoutin',
I'll give a new list from this town of Round
Mountain."

"Numbers of others besides those I've named,
are entitled to mention in this same list of
fame.
Trying here to recall them, I've given my best,
I sure hope that each one is at peace and at
rest."

"Say mister, I could talk to you all day,
but you would get tired and wander away.
Of events that would seem awful strange to you,
but believe it fellow, they're really all true."

"Have one? Why sure. I'll have a beer,

and I hope you'll excuse me for dropping a tear.
You may hunt til Gabriel's horn makes its sound,
but another Round Mountain will never be found."

"Never will such a class of people meet,
as once were thronging along this street.
Rough and ready, they were to be sure,
but people whose friendships will ever endure."

"The camp surely looks blue, many think it is done.
Well long years have passed since it was begun.
But until the last day, when we're called up above,
Round Mountain will be our first and last love."

"And now one more word, before you go far,
just watch Round Mountain wherever you are.
And as sure as snow's white and charcoal is black,
Round Mountain's a camp that is going to come back."

Dorothy Darrough
Reno, Nevada
August 30, 1937

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