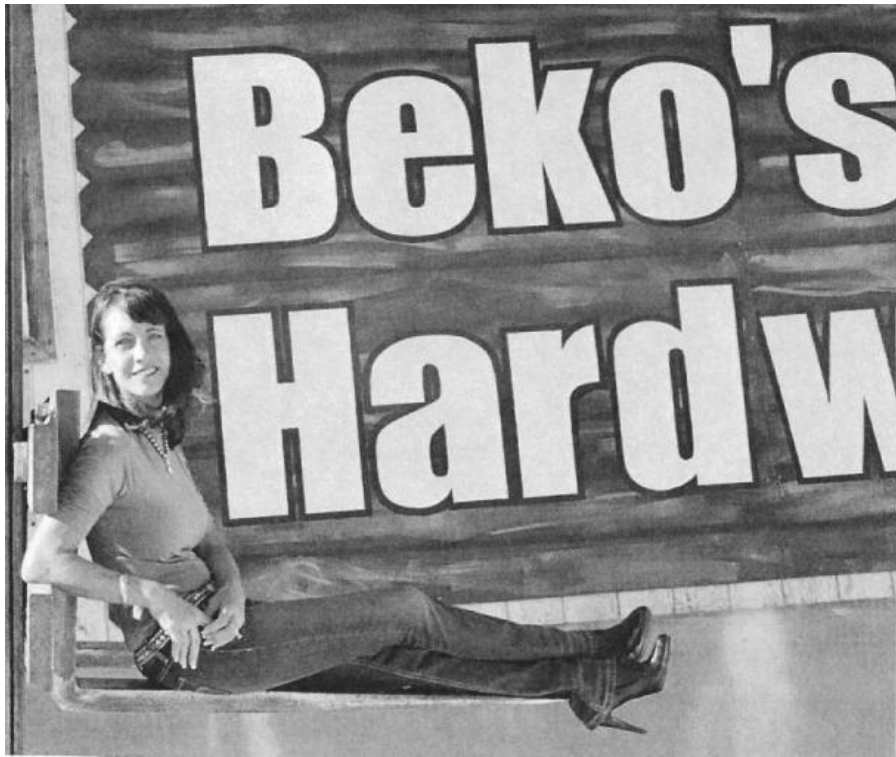


An Interview with  
VIKKI  
BEKO

An Oral History produced by  
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada  
Tonopah  
2011



Vikki Beko  
2011

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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 with Vikki Beko at her salon on Main Street in Tonopah, Nevada, June 1 and 13, 2010.

## CHAPTER ONE

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

VB: Victoria Ann Beko. Tonopah, Nevada, May 5, 1958, at Nye Regional Hospital.

RM: What is your father's full name, and when and where was he born?

VB: William Peter Beko. He was born June 20, 1921, and he was born here on Main Street at 466 South Main Street, in this house.

RM: In this house that we're in now? The house that he grew up in?

VB: Correct.

RM: And the house that is now your beauty shop. That's so cool. Who were his mother and father?

VB: His mother was Saveta Beko, and her husband was Pete Beko.

RM: And when and where were they born?

VB: Yugoslavia; Serbia.

RM: Do you have their birth dates?

VB: No, I don't.

RM: They were Serbian by descent. And when did they come to this country?

VB: 1905.

RM: And did they come directly to Tonopah?

VB: Yes.

RM: And how did that happen, that they came here?

VB: Mining, I'm assuming. I'm not sure, but I think it was for mining.

RM: What can you say about their lives in Yugoslavia?

VB: I don't know anything about their lives in Yugoslavia. What I do know is that they raised five kids here in Tonopah in a five-room house that had no plumbing. Their walls were covered with oilcloth. They had an outhouse, a chicken coop, and a place where they stored all of their cheeses and wines and stuff that they preserved, underneath this house. It was all outside, mostly.

RM: And they made all that themselves? Did they herd goats?

VB: They had some goats and chickens.

RM: And how did your grandfather earn a living here?

VB: He was a postmaster.

RM: About when did he get that job as postmaster?

VB: You know, I don't know that much about him. He had passed away before I was old enough to really know him.

RM: What can you say about your grandmother's life here?

VB: Oh, my God, I lived and breathed it. We were over here all the time. We spent all the time in the world with her. When we got out of school, this is where we came. When we were around her we spoke Yugoslavian, because to a certain extent it was the only way we had to talk to her.

RM: She did not speak English?

VB: Very little.

RM: Did your grandfather?

VB: That I don't know.

RM: Did she ever tell you stories of her coming over here, or the old country, or anything that you would recall?

VB: I don't remember. I remember her saying one time that she came over here on a boat by herself, so Pop Beko must have come over first, got the house, and then sent for her.

RM: And what kind of a life do you recall her having in Tonopah?

VB: Very hard. They didn't have a lot. They didn't have a lot of money. She made clothes, she knitted a lot, she crocheted a lot. The repairs on the house, she took care of herself. She didn't work, so any money that they had coming in was from Pop being the postmaster.

RM: Was he postmaster for a long time as far as you know?

VB: I don't know that much about him.

RM: Before that was he a miner?

VB: No, I don't think he ever mined.

RM: Oh, he didn't mine. So he probably didn't have silicosis?

VB: No.

RM: What do you recall about your mother's family? First of all what were their names—your mother's and her parents' names?

VB: Dorothy Mae Casner was my mother's name. I don't know my grandfather's name. My mother's mother's name was Dorothy Mae Casner also, and my mom was originally born in Bishop. My grandfather was a full-blown Indian and an alcoholic. He beat my mom and my grandmother and the two other daughters, and so my grandmother divorced him and moved to Tonopah and moved houses for a living. And they lived above the old mortuary for the longest time.

RM: Behind the post office?

VB: Right, right.

RM: But they weren't morticians?

VB: No, no, she moved houses. The kids went to school. Everybody of course had straight A's; they were all very smart. My mom's the only one who went to college, and she finished high school. The other two sisters got married very early. My mom went to beauty school in Reno about the same time she had met my dad. She and my dad dated for, I think, eight years. And then she came back, and she bought an old beauty salon downtown that was owned by Bob and Gloria Williams.

The only reason she stayed was because Gloria Williams told my mom that she would let her buy a house for her and her mother to live in if she promised to stay and work with her in the salon. So my mom and my grandmother bought this house, and that's where they lived.

RM: Where was the house?

VB: Right behind the Mizpah. It's still standing there. It's a little white shack down there.

RM: And the beauty salon—was that next to what became Charlie Stewart's place and where Bob Williams, in later years, had his barbershop?

VB: Yes. Right next door to it. Exactly.

RM: Right down from the Butler Theatre?

VB: Right. So Mom and Dad got married, and Dad didn't want Mom working, so she gave up the beauty shop, the hair and all that, and my grandmother remained still living down there. And then she got an opportunity to go to work for the sheriff's office, so they made her the first female deputy in Mercury. She packed a gun, and she was the first, and that's where she retired from, down there.

RM: What year did she start there, do you know?

VB: I don't have any idea. I don't know.

RM: I'll be darned. That's a story in itself. Where did she live at that time? Did she live in Mercury?

VB: She stayed three days down there and then came back up here and lived in this house. Later on in life she met a man by the name of Myron Evans, and they got married. He was an ironworker, but he was retired, and the two of them lived down there.

RM: In that house? Behind the Mizpah?

VB: Yes.

RM: What tribe was your grandfather from?

VB: I think he was Paiute. So I'm a combination of Paiute and Yugoslavian, or Bohunk.

RM: [Laughs] Did you know your grandmother on your mother's side?

VB: Not as well as I did on my dad's side. She wasn't here as much, but with Baba, as we referred to her ("baba" in Yugoslavian is grandmother), we were over here all the time. When my mother's mother was here, we would be down there periodically, but we were not as close to her as we were to this one.

RM: What do you know about your father and your mother meeting? Did they meet here in Tonopah?

VB: They met here in Tonopah. He went into the military and then went into law school. She stayed here, graduated, and then went to beauty school. When she was in beauty school and when they moved back here, they continued to date. She came back and opened up the beauty salon next to Bob William's spot. So she did that, and he got back, and I still have all the letters they wrote back and forth to each other.

RM: Oh, how neat.

VB: I mean, you couldn't call. It was all by postage, you know?

RM: Are they real love letters?

VB: Yes, yes. My mother would never let me read them until she passed away. The only reason she pulled the letters out was because she needed them, the postmark on them, to prove that she had lived here all these years and had developed cancer from the Test Site. And even at that point, as old as she was, she still would not let me read those letters.

RM: And have you read them now?

VB: Some of them, yes. I love them. They're good.

RM: Would they make a book? Would you be game for it?

VB: Absolutely.

RM: Love letters during World War II. Oh, my God, what a book!

VB: Yes, during the war and while he went to school.

RM: If we could publish these, it would be so cool. We'd need your permission and we would Xerox them and you'd have the originals, but we could have them transcribed and do a book of love letters. And you could do the introduction.

VB: They are just incredible. Whenever they weren't together, they always wrote.

RM: That would make a neat book. I'm excited. So they wrote all these love letters when they weren't together. Then what happened?

VB: Well, then my mother happened to get pregnant, so they decided to get married. They got married December 28, 1957. I was born May 5, 1958, and right when I was first born we lived in a little shack across from the mortuary. My dad bought our home now from Ira Jacobson, who happened to be kind of a family member.

RM: Now, that's the home up here on the west side of the courthouse?

VB: Right below the courthouse, yes. That's where I grew up. That's where my brother and I—everybody—grew up, up there. And then growing up, high school wasn't easy.

RM: But first, your brother came along, right?

VB: Yes. Tom was the only boy Beko, so he was kind of like the hero of the family, and Tom was more quiet. He liked to go up in the hills, ride motorcycles, shoot guns, where I was more of the socialite and, you know, wanted to be in everybody's business. He was just as happy going out with a tent and disappearing.

RM: Were you very social as a child?

VB: Yes.

RM: And kind of the center of a social network?

VB: To a certain extent. I mean, it was mostly because it was the way I was raised. When my dad was D.A., when people would come to town, like attorneys from Reno or Vegas or wherever, they would come to our house and have cocktails, hors d'oeuvres. So it was like I got thrown into the social thing—you serve the hors d'oeuvres, you serve the drinks. That's how I got to the social part. Tom—out in the desert. He wanted nothing to do with that stuff.

RM: My daughter Bambi was the same way as a little kid, very social. What do you recall about your first years in school here in Tonopah?

VB: I remember more of when my mother's sister Pauline was stricken with MS and my mom moved her three kids, her and her husband, all into our house. So we had five kids, four adults, and my mom took care of everybody. I remember a lot of times when we were packed into this house. It just seemed to be total turmoil all the time. That's, I think, when we started coming here as an escape from the full house.

RM: Down to your grandmother's.

VB: Right. So I think that went on for about nine months, until Pauline's paralysis moved down to where at least she could use her arms. And then they moved out.

I don't really have a lot of bright moments from my school years. Kids can be cruel. I grew up with five guys that I went from kindergarten through high school with. Girls were jealous.

RM: Because of your friendship with the boys.

VB: That, and because my dad was a judge. They seemed to think I had everything, knew everything, whatever I wanted. And it truly was not that way; more of a jealousy.

RM: But it didn't bother the boys? Just the girls, right?

VB: Exactly. So, for that reason, I always was a little stand-offish with women. My self-esteem was really low. I never had too much self-confidence.

When I was 12, I had told my dad that I couldn't take another breath unless I had a telephone in my bedroom, and I wanted my own number, and he told me I needed a job. [Laughter] At 12 they aren't going to hire you at too many places, but he put me to work in his law office. At that time he was D.A., so he could still have his private practice. But after school, from the time I turned 12, I worked up in that courthouse with my dad in the afternoons. I think he paid me something like \$2.25 an hour for my starting wage.

And since I had a job I could have my telephone. And I progressed. I worked for him until I graduated out of high school.

RM: How did you experience that job, and what did you learn? You must have learned a lot.

VB: I did learn a lot. I learned a lot about respect for elders. I learned a lot about how you handle yourself in a courtroom. I learned that anybody in a robe, or anybody who represented the justice system or the legal system, got the utmost politeness out of you. It was always, "Please. Thank you. May I help you? Can I help you? Is there anything I can do for you?" I was learning to do things right. I will never forget, one day my dad was in court, and he came out. I had just thrown a bunch of papers in a file, and they weren't lined up or anything. He came out, and he was hot, hot, hot.

RM: What did he say?

VB: Oh, he was just livid. "How long you been working here for? You still want to work here? Are you sure you want to work here? Then these damn files need to be done right!" He scared the hell out of me. The man was incredible. He had hands that were as big as baseball mitts. He could type 220 words a minute on an IBM typewriter with no mistakes.

RM: For real?

VB: Absolutely. When his secretary wasn't fast enough for him, he did all of his own legal work, all of it. When he needed stuff, he would go out and do all his own surveying on properties. When he did private work for people that couldn't pay him, they would have these mining claims they would give him, and I'm still the proud owner of worthless property.

But I learned a lot from him. I met a lot of people through him. I idolized him, but I was also the rebel of the family. If he said it was black, I said it was white. We clashed heads quite a bit. But I learned a lot. I really, really learned a lot.

RM: What was high school like in Tonopah?

VB: High school for me was hell because of the peer pressure from girls. I was kind of an outcast.

RM: Partly because of your father being . . .

VB: The judge.

RM: Why were they resentful of that?

VB: I'm not really sure, because God knows Tom and I were just about as ugly as you could possibly come. I mean, thank God for braces and contacts, because we were just terrible, terrible, terrible ugly.

RM: Well, you're both good-looking now.

VB: Well, you know, braces and contacts. But I hear from different people that they were jealous of our looks. I don't know how much of that I believe. I think it was more of a jealousy of who we were and where we lived and that we were considered the higher echelon in Tonopah. I don't know how high you can get when you live in a mining community, but anyway . . .

The day I graduated I was very happy to get out. I took off and fell in love with a guy that was a ballplayer in the minor leagues for the Cleveland Indians. The next day I packed up and went back East with him for spring training, and that lasted all of four months. I came back home, and I went to work at the clerk's office and worked there for four months. Then I went to college in Reno. I went up there. I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do. But one thing I did always want to do was to be a manicurist and be a beautician.

RM: You must have gotten that from your grandmother, right?

VB: From my mom. But Dad always said we needed to have a college education, so I went up and screwed off for two years in Reno and partied and then moved to Vegas. That's when I got married, and I never did go back to college. I didn't know what I wanted to do.



## CHAPTER TWO

RM: How long were you in Reno at the manicurist training?

VB: I didn't do any manicuring; not until recently. So I went down to Vegas. I went to work at the Union Plaza, and that's where I met my first husband. I went to dealing school. I got a job.

RM: Now about what year was that?

VB: 1981, '82, I'm thinking.

RM: What was it like, first of all going to Reno, but then going to Vegas, which is a really neat place?

VB: Oh, my God, yes. Money was fast and easy, alcohol was fast and easy, drugs were just becoming popular. And one thing about growing up here: in order, I felt, to fit in—if you wanted to fit in—it was a party. You drank, you cruised Main, you drank beer. I mean, it was how I felt that you could be part of the so-called in crowd. So probably around, I'd say 12, 13, I started cruising Main, drinking beer.

RM: So they cruised Main here?

VB: Oh, yes, cruised Main, honked horns.

RM: The girls or boys?

VB: Boys and girls.

RM: Together in the car?

VB: Yes. Everybody had a car or truck, pickup, whatever. Go out in the desert, drink beer, you know.

RM: Make out.

VB: Yes. Everything I shouldn't be doing but, of course, was doing because Dad didn't want me to do it. [Laughter] Then when I got out of school I moved to Vegas and got into dealing. During those years I would move back home, go back to Vegas, move back home. And then I got the job at the Test Site. I didn't like the guy I was working for so I came back home and went to work at the Mizpah for a couple of years. This was when Anaconda was going full blast.

Then the mine closed down, so I went back to Vegas. I went back to Vegas because I knew I could make money. Money was fast. Back in those days, when you made tips, the money

was given to you that night or that next day. It was all cash. You were paid a minimum wage. If you wanted to claim the tips, you could. There was no IRS involvement.

RM: When the player handed you a five or something, did that go into your pocket or into a kitty?

VB: It went into a kitty, and it was all divided up.

RM: Among the dealers?

VB: Right, just the dealers.

RM: So you, in effect, split with all the others?

VB: Right. So it was fast money, it was a party life, it was everything a 24-year-old, 25-year-old could ever really want and do and get crazy with. I got sick of it, and I went back to Reno.

RM: Tell me about dealer school.

VB: Oh, my God! First off, it was in this back shithole off of Fremont Street somewhere. It was just an empty building, kind of a room. They probably had four lights that worked. But they had table layouts of all the different games. They had some old degenerate dealer in there that would show you the game, the rules, teach you each game. Give you the basics while he sat there and drank Jack Daniels and smoked cigarettes and watched you deal. And for the nice little price of two hundred bucks, you learned how to deal.

RM: How long did it take?

VB: Three months. So I learned the game, went out, got a job. And it was pretty fun.

RM: You had to take a test, though, didn't you?

VB: I had to go out and audition. It wasn't really a test, but it was an audition.

RM: You auditioned at the joint?

VB: On a live game. It had to be on a live game.

RM: And where did you audition the first time?

VB: At the Sundance, which is now the Fitzgerald. I had this sleazy, sleazy shift boss. I mean, he was 400 pounds. His hair hadn't been washed in four weeks. He smelled bad, and his dinner was on his tie. I mean, he was the most disgusting person I have ever seen, and I'm all dressed up and clean—in white, you know? And he looked me up and he looked me down and he said,

“Uh, why don’t you come back in a couple weeks, and we’ll look into hiring you.” And I snatched him up by his dirty tie . . .

RM: Really? For real?

VB: Yes. My mom was there with me. I said, “You can take this entire casino, 32 floors of this hotel, and shove them in your ass. I would never work for you.” [Laughter] And I walked out the door.

The next day they called me up. “Would you like a job?”

“You don’t even know if I can turn a card.”

“Be here tonight at 6:00.” I mean, they had no idea if I even knew what I was doing, you know? And I was like, “Oh, my God.” So I went, and that’s when I started working down there. And it was just crazy stuff like that that would happen, you know.

RM: What shift were you working?

VB: Swing shift.

RM: Oh, it was the big shift.

VB: Yes, it was 6:00 at night until 2:00 in the morning.

RM: That’s where all the money is, right?

VB: Absolutely.

RM: Why did they start you on swing? That’s the prime, isn’t it?

VB: I don’t know. Here’s a guy who doesn’t know if I can deal a card, and he puts me on the busiest shift. I should’ve probably started out on day shift and graveyard so they could bury me. I don’t know how they found out that it was me there that night I threatened to kill him; the next day I had a job.

RM: Oh, my God. Well, how did it work out the first night?

VB: It worked out great!

RM: No trouble?

VB: No, because I was like, “You know, I know, I got the job, dude,” you know? And one night I had this really, really, really, really, really tall good-looking guy come sit down at my table. I was thinking, “Oh, my God, he’s so hot.” So I was flirting with him and everything, and then I saw him sitting over at the bar. And he was talking to the general manager. So a couple

of days later I got a call from the general manager. I was like, "Oh, God, now what?" I figured I was fired. So I went up, and here was this gorgeous guy sitting there. I'm like, "Oh, my God!"

He said, "I'd like to introduce you to Dale Sachs, who is Al Sachs's son. He played cards with you a couple nights ago, and he wants to give you a promotion."

RM: Now, who's Al Sachs?

VB: Al Sachs was the owner of the Sundance, Fremont, and the Stardust. He was part of the Herb Tobman/Al Sachs mob type of thing.

RM: Mob connected.

VB: Oh, absolutely. So I said, "Yeah, so what do I got to do?"

"I'm going to give you a van. A brand new van. I'm going to put a bunch of memorabilia in there from all these casinos. And I'm going to send you up and down the highway so you can run your mouth and tell them about our hotel casinos."

And I said, "You're kidding."

He said, "Yeah."

I said, "I'll do it."

RM: Why did you do it? I mean, you were making it as a dealer.

VB: I was, but it was fun! I mean, it was new, and it was his idea, you know. I'm like, I can't do anything wrong if I've got the bosses behind me. So I said, "Okay." They took me down, and they did a bunch of promo shots of me. They called me the "Sundance Kid," and they dressed me up in cowboy wear, and off I went to all these little celebrations and made all these appearances up and down the road between Vegas and California, which was where they were getting all their business.

RM: Where were the places you would go?

VB: Barstow, Calico, Victorville. I never went into the L.A. area because it was just too congested. Hesperia, Apple Valley, Tonopah. They have all these little celebrations, gold mining celebrations, ghost town celebrations. And as soon as they would see the truck, the van, pull in there from the Sundance: "Oh, my gosh, she's in town." I mean, it was just crazy. So I did that, and then summer blew in. It just got too hot. I got tired and burned out on it.

RM: Would you drive all along that highway every day or just some of the days of the week?

VB: I did four days out there. Then I would come in, and on those days I would call and make reservations, and I would come in and make sure the rooms were ready, reservations were made. I wanted these people happy, because I wanted them to come back. Then I just got to a point where I was just tired, and I went to Dale, and I said, "I don't want to do this anymore, I am too tired, too much."

He said, "I totally understand. Well, now where do you want to work?" [Laughter]  
And I said, "I don't know"  
And he said, "How about the Fremont?"  
I said, "Okay." So I went to work over at the Fremont.

RM: Doing what, dealing? You were dealing 21?

VB: Yes. So I went over there and dealt for a while, and I fell in love with this so-called crap dealer, and my heart was broken. I went to Dale, and I said, "I can't work here anymore." I said, "I can't stand to look at this guy every night and be around him," and I was crying and sobbing, you know.

"Well, how would you like to go to the Stardust?"

I said, "That's the Strip. So what's the deal? Don't you have to, like, wait years to get out there?"

"Oh no, no, no, I'll send you out there next week."

RM: Oh, my gosh!

VB: So here I was, dealing cards out at the Strip at the great Stardust. So I dealt cards out there for, like, three or four years.

RM: Now, what was it like working at the Stardust? That was a big deal in those days.

VB: There was a lot of money coming and going, and I was too stupid to realize where the money was going to. I mean, I was never involved in any of that so-called skimming and such. I was clueless to it, you know. I didn't know what they were doing. They came in, and they placed a gaming agent on everybody's table, and Al Sachs came walking down the pit and said, "I'm getting you out of here right now."

RM: To you? But not the others?

VB: No. And I said, "I'm not going anywhere. I haven't done anything wrong."  
And all he told me was, "Your dad is going to kill me."

RM: [Laughs] Because he was a judge, wasn't he?

VB: Yes. "Your dad is going to kill me."

"I'm not going anywhere. Until I run out of money in this rack, I'm not going anywhere."  
So I sat there and dealt cards, and then pretty soon they just closed the entire thing down, and the Boyd group came in and took over.

RM: Oh, that's when they took it over. What year was that? Was it the '80s?

VB: Yes, and I didn't like working for them.

RM: The Boyds? So you continued there after the Boyds took over.

VB: Yes, I stuck in there. I hung in there for probably six months, and then I moved back up here to Tonopah.

RM: Before we go to that, tell me about how the expert dealers can tell the difference in the cards.

VB: Okay. I got to know these old farts, as I should say, that watched these games and never cracked a smile. I mean, they watched the game. They watched players, they watched the money, they watched the cards. They could tell if you stacked a bet, if somebody slipped a bet in on you. They could tell if a dealer had taken a card off of the bottom of the deck, because they were always dealt single deck or double deck. They didn't have all these shoe machines and stuff like that. And they could see it. They could see how fast the dealer was, if they were winning or losing. I had a floorman one night in a bar, because we would always go have drinks after work, and he pulled out a deck of cards, and I said, "How can you count down a deck?"  
He said, "Well, counting down a deck is nothing."

RM: Now what does that mean, counting down the deck?

VB: Plus or minus on the kings, queens, low cards, high cards. Now, I still, today, cannot do that. But he could tell me exactly which cards, how many cards, were in a deck. He said, "I can tell by the feel of the card as it comes off, by how much ink is on there, what it is." His hands were so manicured, and that's the reason why. All dealers' hands in those days were manicured.

RM: No calluses or anything? And they can feel those cards.

VB: They were very slick at it.

RM: But it was only the old-timers, right? A young person just didn't have those skills.

VB: No, and if they did they were stupid, because they would get caught. They would get caught left and right. It was a fine talent; it was a very fine talent.

RM: Now, is this the house doing it or the players?

VB: It depends. If the floorman is working with the player, he's going to let him win. Now, if the floorman is working for the house, they're going to be skimming the money off the top, and at night they split up whatever the money is. So it just depends on whose side of the fence you're with.

RM: And who's the floorman?

VB: The guy watching your game.

RM: So it's not the dealer. The dealer's doing it, but the floorman is watching.

VB: So you have the floorman and the dealer. And if you're in a crap game you have the floorman, dealer, and the box-man. Because you aren't allowed to hustle for tips. You've got some guy out there throwing \$500 at you a hand, hell yes, you want in on that action, because you're going to get part of that money that night. So you could either have three or four people in it with you.

RM: Well, how did they rig the dice? Or can they?

VB: That I don't know. They could. Yes, they can. I don't know how.

RM: Aside from loading, I wonder how they do it.

VB: I don't know. I know nothing about the dice game. They will still show you—gaming control, when they come in, and you go through an orientation—they will show you live games where people will come in and cap their bets. And dealers are just—your game, when you come up to a game, you need to be able to keep your eyes on both ends. What they call walking your game is when you're pitching out your cards . . .

RM: When the dealer is?

VB: Yes. You're standing here, because you don't want this guy slipping you a quickie over here. You come around, you move to the deck. You get a dealer that's just standing there doing nothing, he can't see what's going on in the first and sixth spots.

RM: What do you mean slip you a quickie? He raises his bet, you mean?

VB: Yes.

RM: Or lowers it?

VB: Depends on the hand. He's got a blackjack, he's going to slip 50 bucks on it, and you're never going to know it.

RM: Ah. And the eye in the sky isn't necessarily going to catch it.

VB: Sometimes they can't see it, right. But if you're watching your game and you have good game control, none of this stuff goes on—if you know what you're looking for. You've got to have that old-time knowledge to know what to watch for, because these guys will rob you

blind. They're crazy. It's crazy. Well, they call that "game protection." They don't beat it into you as much as they used to. It was wild.

RM: You mean they don't beat it into the new dealers?

VB: No, not like they used to.

RM: Because it's not so common?

VB: Not so common, but they expect their floor people to be smart enough to do that. You get a dealer that's dealing real fast—I'm a very fast dealer. I'm a very fast dealer, I'm a very fast counter, but I'm very accurate. You know, my payouts are correct. You can read every movement I make on a game. You can read it from the sky or from anybody standing around. You can read exactly what the payoff is. I make everything very clear. But everybody says, "Well, why didn't you go on the floor? Why wouldn't you want to be a floor person?" With my luck, I'd get four dealers just like me, and I would not want to watch that nightmare. You know, not at all.

RM: Because you couldn't follow it?

VB: No, you can't, you cannot at all. It's wild. Towards the end, I was getting sick of the business. The Orientals started coming in, the foreigners.

RM: And how did that wreck it for you?

VB: Because they would get these jobs that paid big bucks. They had no personality. If you aren't talking to a customer, and you aren't doing the one-on-one, you can't speak English to talk to a customer, you've got a problem. They all look like they'd rather be having a root canal than dealing cards to you. That's just how they were. When you would go to clock in at night, you would look, and you would see that there's nobody there that's American.

RM: The dealers?

VB: Yes. You look up and down a pit, and these dealers are standing there, and they've got these sour looks on their face. They act like if you want to play cards it's like it's a pain in their ass for them to shuffle up a deck. Next time you're in Vegas, go look. Go look at any Oriental or any kind of foreign dealer. They'll never have a smile on their face; they will never greet you when you walk up to a table. They don't have it.

RM: Whereas the old style was an interaction.

VB: Absolutely.

RM: And that held the customer there. Well, why did that change?



VB: Orientals—first off, the majority of them don't drink much, so they show up for work every day.

RM: Well, why didn't they clue them in?

VB: You can't. They do not get it. They can't get the concept. They cannot get the concept.

RM: Well, why did they hire them, then?

VB: Because they have the knowledge. They can deal all the games in the building. They can deal the Pai Gow tiles, which is Oriental. They can deal baccarat, which is real high Oriental, Chinese. They can deal these games. You don't have to have personality to deal during Chinese New Year's, okay? You've just got to be able to stand all the smoke.

RM: Oh, they're all smoking! How did you deal with the smoke, speaking of that?

VB: Not well.

RM: I've heard people say that when they got home at night they'd have to hang their clothes up.

VB: I would take my clothes off in the garage, go in, and shower.

RM: That's the way it was at the Stardust?

VB: Terrible! Terrible.

RM: Tell me about the culture at the Stardust. What was it like? Because people remember what a neat place it was.

VB: Elvis was part of the Stardust! When I dealt at the Stardust was, like, towards the end of the era of all the real high rollers coming in. It was at that point when they started putting minimums on tables. You could only bet \$25,000 a hand or . . .

RM: They didn't have minimums before that?

VB: No, you could bet whatever. I think you could still do that.

RM: Oh, maximums.

VB: Yes. I think you could still do that at the Horseshoe, but I'm not sure. So when I left there and . . . where did I go from there?

RM: Did you part on good terms or quit in anger?

VB: Oh, yes. I've always parted on excellent terms.

RM: And Herb Tobman? Who was running it at that time?

VB: Al Sachs and Herb Tobman both had that one. Dale Sachs had the Sundance, and the other Sachs kid had the Fremont, so it was kind of like a family.

RM: Do you know anything about what went on in the count room? I've heard that's where a lot of it took place.

VB: No. So when the gaming control board came in and the Boyd group came in, they immediately slapped limits on the tables. Well, the tips went down, everything went down. I mean, the attitude was bad. So I moved home.

RM: What were the limits they slapped on there? It was unlimited before? You could come in and bet \$10,000 on a hand?

VB: Right. They turned their limits into \$5,000 dollars maximum.

RM: And that really hurt the dealers?

VB: Yes. Hurt the dealers, hurt the business, because you have the same chance of winning that money as you do losing it. Plus, they lost all their marker business, their credit business. So it made a really big difference then.

RM: And they could usually collect on credit, right?

VB: Yes. Well, yes, especially if you've got the mob behind you. Pay up or you're dead. They're going to get you one way or the other. [Laughter]

### CHAPTER THREE

RM: What was it like coming home?

VB: It was weird. I was a hell-raiser when I was here. I drank. The perspective is: I've moved home, I've worked at the Mizpah, I've left and gone back to Vegas. When I went back to Vegas I worked for Bob Miller at the D.A.'s office.

RM: Oh, Governor Bob?

VB: Yes, but he was the D.A. then. So I worked down there for five years, and in that time I went from just a casual drinker to a full-blown alcoholic. I drank, drank, drank, drank, and then I found the wonders of cocaine, and I just was crazy.

RM: When was this? Early '90s?

VB: This was in 1984 or '85. I moved down in '85.

RM: The second time?

VB: Yes, and I drank quite a bit. After work. And then it escalated, escalated, escalated. My dad, over the years, had kept telling me that I had a problem drinking, and I told him he was the one with the problem. It just went nuts. So I worked for the D.A.'s office. I ended up landing a really good job in the secretarial pool. I was making great money, but I would get up in the morning, like at 5:00 in the morning, and I would start drinking all day long. It was like I was a functioning alcoholic. I would go home at night and drink until I passed out. And then I found the wonders of cocaine, which could keep you going for days.

RM: And it was easy to get in Vegas at that time, wasn't it? It was everywhere.

VB: Oh, my God, yes.

RM: The singers I hung out with used it.

VB: Everywhere. I don't remember what happened, but the first time I had ever called in sick to the D.A.'s office I had gotten just totally smashed one night and I called in sick. I woke up one morning, and there was a message on my answering machine. Well, there were only two people living there, and one was a dog and one was me. There was this guy on the phone. He said, "Vikki, this is so and so from Betty Ford Center. Please call me back. I know we can help you."

And I thought, "Maybe I do have a problem."

So I called him up, and he said, "We can help you. You called and said that you thought you needed help. Then you must have gone into a blackout, because that was the last that we had as far as conversation goes."

So I said, "All right, so when can you get me in?"

He said, "It will be probably about three weeks. It'll be probably around the first of July."

"I can't come on the first of July, I have a party to go to on the Fourth." No, I don't have a problem at all. I said, "Oh my God, I can't believe I just said that." So I said, "I'll make you a deal. If I'm alive on the first of July, I'll be there." At that point I knew I was bad. I went to work, and I told them about it. This is what I'm going to do. My insurance covered everything but five hundred bucks of it. My dad was so proud of me that I had made the call. He was just elated.

So I went down and checked myself into Betty Ford around the first of July, and I was so wasted, it was just ridiculous. Took me probably about three days to really realize where the hell I was, but I got down there, and I didn't really think I would stay sober. I think I just wanted 30 days to see if I really thought life was as shitty sober as it would be if I was drunk all the time. I just needed the time away to think.

And they kept trying to run this "higher power" down your throat, and, you know, they give you your 12-step program.

RM: God stuff, you mean?

VB: Yes, you know, whatever. Well the first thing I did was piss them off. I told them that my higher power was my microwave, whether they liked it or not. [Laughter] And that's the way I was going. We didn't get along real well or anything, but we were only allowed to call home. You had 20 minutes on the phone a night to your parents or whoever you wanted to call.

My mom was over in Bishop while my grandfather was dying. So I would get on the phone, and I would do nothing for the first week but cry to my dad. He kept saying, "It'll be okay, it'll be okay, and all I would do was just sob, sob, sob, sob. They came down the third week. I was down there for four weeks, and they came down the third week to go through a family week where they teach you how to deal with your family, kind of like an Al-Anon type of thing. "This is what you're going to have to do."

I will never forget this as long as I live. I got up that morning; I got dressed up. I had on a red dress, and I had on white shoes, and my dress had white buttons on it. I walked across the courtyard to see my dad and my mom. My dad walked out, and he had on red shorts with a white shirt that had red polka dots on it, and he held me so tight, and he cried, and he said, "I am so proud of you." At that moment, I knew that I would never drink again. It was at that point that I knew that I would never touch it again.

RM: That almost brings tears to my eyes.

VB: Oh, it was the most incredible moment. He was my higher power, you know. So I went back to Vegas and worked at the D.A.'s office again for a while. And then I got back into dealing. Or, no, I didn't go back into dealing, I went to work for Frank Scott. I needed to get out of the D.A.'s office. It was just too much, because I dealt with the criminal division, and I couldn't stand all the blood and guts and gore. So I went to work for Frank Scott.

RM: And by then he owned the . . .

VB: Union Plaza. But he was also working on that high-speed train they were trying to get in. It never got off the ground, so I went to work for rebar fabricators who fabricated steel and stuff, and I decided I kind of missed dealing. So I got a job dealing cards. I went to work at the Golden Nugget.

RM: That was top of the line. Downtown, I mean.

VB: Oh, my gosh! Yes. So I went in to interview.

RM: Did Wynn still own the thing?

VB: Yes. So I went in to talk to this little guy. I can't remember his name, but he was connected up a long, long time ago. I went in and talked to him to see if he could get me in there, and he said, "I'll call down there and let you talk to this guy by the name of Frank Toddre.

I said, "Okay." I went down and talked to this guy, and he was probably about four foot six or seven, right?

I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me." I said, "I need a job. I need a dealing job."

He said, "I don't care if you can deal a card, I don't care if you can count, as long as you're nice to my customers, you've got a job."

I said, "What time do I show up?"

He said, "Tonight at 6:00."

RM: Oh, my God. Again, the best shift.

VB: Yes. So there I was, dealing cards at the Golden Nugget. They immediately put me into the high-limit pit, and I started dealing in there. I dealt there for years. My favorite player at that time was George Strait. I loved George Strait.

RM: What was it like, working at the Nugget?

VB: Oh, it was classy. They had a classy clientele. They were building the Bellagio at the time, and the hype was there.

RM: They already had Mirage and Treasure Island?

VB: Right, they were already there. The deal was that you worked your way up. You started at the Nugget, then you would transfer to Treasure Island, then you would go to the Mirage. I was really kind of happy at the Nugget, because I kind of had my niche there, and I enjoyed it, I liked it. But what I liked about it was the way they ran things. The place was immaculate. If Steve Wynn or the guy, Barry Shear, who ran the place, saw you walk by a piece of paper on the floor and not pick it up, he would fire you immediately. Immediately. If you walked by a cigarette thing, and it had a glass in it, and you didn't take it to a bar someplace, you were fired immediately. It was just immaculate; they kept it clean. I loved it.

RM: Just as an aside, the Nugget also had the best buffet in town.

VB: Absolutely. And you made great, great money.

This is where the IRS kicks in. Now they want a part of the action. What they're willing to do is to let you pick up your money at night, but you have got to claim it on your tax forms. So you're making \$5.00-something an hour, if that, and you're pulling in three or four hundred bucks a night in tokes. So you're going to be in arrears with the IRS, which really sucks. But at least you get a shot at the money first, and that works out pretty well.

Well, then that isn't good enough; then they want it all. Now it all goes into one big till, and then you get a check, so you're not in arrears anymore, but you get no use of that cash.

RM: Did the net go down that you took home?

VB: No, it still stayed the same, except at first they took all your taxes out of it. I mean, you couldn't lie about it, is what you couldn't do. So then I went to Treasure Island. Treasure Island, I liked a lot. It was okay. It was a nice little change there. I tried doing day shift there, but I didn't like it. I liked having my days outside by my pool with my dogs. It was good there. But then I got into the Mirage.

RM: The top of the line!

VB: That was my dream, to deal at the Mirage. That was the place. I didn't care if I went any higher as long as I got to the Mirage.

So I got to the Mirage, making great money and dealing. I loved going to work there. Then I started looking around, and I noticed I was dealing high limit, I was making a bunch of money, but I was not taking a bunch of money home. So something was wrong somewhere. Somebody wasn't kicking in the personality aspect of this whole thing, during the night.

One night I had a guy come in, a regular player there. Everybody hated dealing to him because he could be such an ass if he got too drunk. But he didn't bother me at all. The guy was crazy. Well, he wasn't crazy, but he had a lot of money, and he loved to gamble, but he also liked to drink. Dealers couldn't handle him because they thought he was obnoxious. Well, of course, he was obnoxious, you know?

RM: Why do you say "of course"?

VB: Because players, when they think they have a lot of money and they get on a roll, you know—not everybody's a happy drunk, that's for sure. And if you're losing a lot of money you're going to be a little sour, but you've just got to be tough enough to understand and let it roll off your shoulders. You can't let it bother you. It's just a game to you.

So he came in one night, and I was on a dead game and standing there. Dennis had just pretty much enough liquor in him where he was in a happy mood. And he was just out kind of cruising. So we got to playing, and he was a big player. He was playing \$10,000 on all six spots.

RM: For a total of \$60,000?

VB: Yes, he was playing \$60,000 on the six spots, and he was busting my chops left and right. "Why do I play with you? I can't stand being around you. I don't know what it is about you that I like."

And I was like, "Probably because nobody else will put up with your crap."

RM: You told him that?

VB: Yes, that's how he worked, you know. I mean, we were friends on a business basis. I knew he drank, I knew he was a jerk, so did he, and we got along great.

And I was dealing to him—it was a double deck. And I was killing him. I had him beat out of about, probably, \$750,000. He was like, "Give me a hundred thousand, give me another hundred thousand, give me another hundred."

I was like, "Dennis, get away, I'm killing you."

"Nope, nope, I'm going to get it back."

I was like, "You're crazy, you're crazy."

So we went on like that probably for an hour, and then all of a sudden the cards changed to his advantage. Now he had everybody's attention. They were all watching him. He was having just a field day, because he knew he had everybody's attention. And now he was a little bit drunker, so he was a little cockier. I pushed him around a little bit more, and he started betting \$10,000 on each hand and \$5,000 on each hand for the dealer.

RM: I don't understand that.

VB: The \$5,000 was a tip for me if I won the hand so if he won the hand I paid my tip to the tune of \$10,000. He had 60 grand riding out there, plus another \$30,000 for me.

RM: Is that a tip?

VB: For me. Because now he was getting close to being even, so he was happy. He was happy, and he was drunk. He was just loving life now, because he knew he was not going to have to go home and tell his wife he just literally got his butt kicked.

But this is where casinos get really touchy about this kind of stuff, because they do not want that money walking out the door. So they came up with this new rule all of a sudden that he can only bet 10 percent of what he's playing for the dealers. So he could only bet like a thousand bucks for me or something like that. Well, now he was even, plus he was up almost another \$500,000, so he was not going to let some pit person tell him what he can and cannot bet for his so-called favorite dealer. So he took \$5,000 off of his bet and left my \$5,000 out there for a tip. He was taking money away from his pot just to piss them off. And then, like, if he would get a hand where he could double or split, he would add it up for me, too, so like in one hand I could collect \$40,000 if the cards went right just from one hand, not including the other five in the layout.

RM: On the side? Oh. So the dealer gets the winnings?

VB: Yes, if I win the hand, I get that. I get all that. It was just the most incredible game. And it was fun. As soon as he saw that the deck was starting to turn, he called for racks, and loaded up his chips and left.

RM: A rack is the thing you put your chips in?

VB: You stack all the chips, yes. It was just crazy. So, in probably 25 minutes he beat me out of \$1.5 million, and then I ended up with \$132,000 in my tip box that night.

RM: But when he gave you that tip, that went into the tip pool, right? Or is that all for you personally?

VB: No. Good God, I could have retired at the age of 35. No, it went into a tip pool, and I think that that was the one time that I had really realized that I needed to get out of the business. I look down the pits, and there's not a dime dropped in anybody else's tip box. So the next night I go in to pick up the tips that I made. I made \$132,000, and the next night when I went in, I only got \$500 out of that. That's when I decided it was time to get the hell out.

RM: By the time it was divided up, you got \$500? Well, how'd they justify that?

VB: Because you have to split with every dealer every shift.

RM: There were that many dealers, and they weren't contributing anything. So basically you were cheated?

VB: Right. And this is where I realized that the gaming business had turned so much, where they had so many Orientals and so many foreign people who could not speak English and had no personality. Then they realized when they have a dealer who's making this kind of money for them, they don't need to work, because they know they're going to have a couple hundred bucks, you know? I did that time and time again. There were so many nights that my tip box would be overloaded. I'd be in the \$100,000 range.

RM: That happened to you a lot? In the \$100,000 range for tips?

VB: Yes. Out of all the nights that I dealt and made high money like that, I probably made over half a million dollars, just in tips. I realized that I was making everybody's mortgage payments, and I wasn't doing it anymore. You know, I was sick of it. I just walked out of there and said, "It's time to go home. It's time to go home."

By then, my mom had started getting sick, and when I was working at the Nugget was when my father passed away. I knew my mom was going to be a big responsibility because she and my brother didn't really get along too well, and he didn't have the time to take care of her. So I did, and I was back and forth all the time with her.



RM: Was it difficult for you when your father passed away?

VB: Yes, the worst day of my life. The worst. I figured my dad would be around forever, because he was never sick. My mother, when she saw something on TV, of course the next day she had it, and a fistful of pills here, a fistful of pills there. So Dad passed away, and I had the care of Mom. She'd won her first battle with cancer, but I could tell she was failing with the second.

And I was sick of Vegas; I had really gotten tired of it. I wanted to sell my house and move home, but I didn't know what I wanted to do here. I came up to look at some property. We have a whole lot of property around here. I wanted to open a Curves for women. It's like an exercise gym for women. But I needed somebody to build me a good building; I didn't want one of these rundown places. So that was basically my only holdup. I didn't want a county job.

I needed a bathroom repaired in my house in Vegas so I could put it up on the market, and the guy who came over to repair my bathroom, I fell instantly in love with. This was back in 2005, September 2005.

RM: Love at first sight?

VB: Absolutely. So I met Tim.

RM: After all these guys that you would have met.

VB: Exactly. I'd dated. I was done being lied to, dumped on, you know. I just didn't want more of the heartache.

So I met Tim. He came and did my bathroom for me, and then he asked to come up here to Tonopah, because I'd been up here for a while. So I brought Tim up here, and my mom instantly fell in love with him. And she needed a bathroom fixed. He went out to the hardware store to get a part, and he was gone like two hours. I figured, "Christ, he had to drive to Ely for it."

He came back in, and he sat down, and he was real serious. He said, "Are you serious about moving back up here?"

And I said, "Soon as you get that bathroom fixed, I am."

He said, "Well, you know, the hardware store is for sale."

And I said, "I don't know anything about hardware."

He said, "No, but I do, and I think it would be a great opportunity for us."

I said, "For us? After only two months? Well, let's go look at it." [Laughter] Sure, whatever, you know? So we went out and looked at the hardware store—that was in October—and we bought it, and I quit my job and moved up here. We opened up January first of 2006.

RM: That was Wolfe's hardware store?

VB: No, it was Ketten's, out here off Highway 6. So we opened that up, and we were doing really well. The economy was good; everybody was supporting us really well. Things were going

well. Mom was getting kind of sick, and Tim asked me to marry him. In my mind I was thinking, “That’s cool, I’ll wear that diamond around. It looks pretty sporty, you know.”

And he told me that night, “We’re not going to do this eight-year relationship thing like your mom and dad did. Pick a date.” So in September we got married, and that next June my mom was stricken again with cancer. But previous to that, in March, I had signed up to go to manicuring school. So I was going to manicuring school Tuesday through Saturday down there. I would come home Saturday night, and I would do all the bookwork and stuff for the hardware store and then go back to school during the week.

RM: The school was in Vegas?

VB: Vegas, right. So I got out of manicuring school, I passed everything, and then I needed a place to work. I had opened up my mom’s old house down there, and I just wanted a place for myself to do nails. Mom got really, really, really sick, so I ended up spending three or four months down in Vegas in the hospital with her. I came back. I just couldn’t get back into it. It was just me and Tom now—me and my brother—and I was really hurt, and Mom, and I just—I wanted away from it all. But I had a couple of women come in and beg me to start the nail thing up again.

My other cousin, Cindy Warrick, said, “Well, you know, you own Baba’s; let’s open it up.”

I said, “Do you know how much work would have to go into that?”

She said, “We could do it, we could do it, we could do it.”

Well, from doing a little bit of work it just escalated into—oh, my God—so much work. But I opened the doors, and it has been literally a gold mine. I started out with just me and a hairdresser. I have two manicurists now, I have two hairdressers, I have a masseuse, I have a facial person, and we’re booked solid.

RM: Just based on Tonopah?

VB: Tonopah, yes. It’s just unbelievable. And then I moved back into my mom and dad’s house after my mother passed away. I moved in back up there, and that’s where I intend on dying.

RM: Wow, what a story. Neat.

## CHAPTER FOUR

RM: One thing I want to back up on is, what was it like to come back to Tonopah after working in Vegas? What was that like?

VB: Money was excellent. Money was outstanding, because who's going to audit you working in a small town like this? And it was all cash. Your tips were paid in cash. You know, you picked up some chump change for a paycheck, but these Anaconda people were paid great money. They had nothing to do but gamble, drink, party. Downtown, life was crazy. They had four bars that were open; they had a bowling alley.

RM: Can you remember the year that you came back?

VB: No. I'm going to want to say something like '85, '84.

RM: Or maybe '83?

VB: That might be kind of pushing it, but as soon as Anaconda closed down, the money did and I needed out. When I lived here before, I was your basic shit stirrer. I mean, I was a party waiting to happen. I drank, I partied, I carried on, I ran amok.

RM: When you came back here?

VB: Yes. Well, even when I was a kid, even before I left, I mean, I was just a renegade, you know. I think a lot of it was rebellion towards Dad.

Then when I decided to move back here for life, I told Tim, before he married me, "You're going to hear a lot of good stories; you're going to hear a lot of bad stories. You're going to hear a lot of stories that I'm not going to remember to tell you whether they were good or bad or they're true or not. So you've got a big thing to face up to. I'm okay with the way I am."

I was. I accept total responsibility for the way I acted. I look forward now instead of looking backwards. I do everything I can now to help whoever, whatever. But—you are holding a grudge against me for 20 years? That's your problem. I'm not wasting my time on it.

And he did. He heard a lot of stuff, and I said, "If you think you're tough enough to deal with that, then you might have a shot at this, but you're going to hear some stuff."

So far it's been pretty good. I have a good response from the people of Tonopah. They seem to have accepted me back into the community. I like it. When I first opened this place I turned it into more of a party place for women to come, and, like at night, have a glass of wine, drink. If they want to have their little Candle-Lite parties and stuff like that, they're more than welcome to have the place. And it kind of circled around the party atmosphere. But then I realized I had a lot of young teenagers coming in here, just like this one, to talk to me, because they can come to me, and they know it's not going anywhere. But it's stuff they can't tell their parents.

I get a lot of that. A lot of that. So I have cut out the party part of it. This is their place to come if they need to find me or talk to me, be a part of me. My door is always open to them.

RM: Without breaking any confidences, what kinds of problems are teenage girls—it's girls, right?

VB: Girls and guys.

RM: Guys, too. What kinds of problems are they dealing with in Tonopah now?

VB: Peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, and sex.

RM: There's quite a bit of drug activity in Tonopah?

VB: Yes. Kids having sex at the age of 12? That's ridiculous. I mean, a little girl gave birth to a child at the age of 13, and she didn't even know she was pregnant for eight months. This is crap. So when they come in here, I keep telling them I'm going to have T-shirts made up that say "No Sex." Or you get these little couples that come in here that are newly in love and dating. No sex. You don't need it. And I preach that. If you're going to come in here with a broken heart, and you're going to cry the blues to me because some guy you're dating is a jerk, I'm going to tell you. You're not going to get it sugar coated. And they like that. They're okay with that.

RM: So the girls are under a lot of pressure for sex from a very early age?

VB: Oh, yes. And trying to fit in. You know, the peer pressure today is just crazy.

RM: It's savage here? Okay, let me bounce an idea off you. It's my impression that kids who graduate from Tonopah, a lot of them (and it seems like a higher proportion than in other places) do really well out there in the world—doctors, lawyers, and whatnot.

VB: Here's one. This is Garrett Perchetti. He came to me. Well, actually he did not come to me. When Tim and I got married, I needed somebody to videotape my wedding. I had a brand new video camera and had no idea how to use it. I needed somebody who I knew had a little bit of art talent or something. Diane says, "Well you know Garrett's in town. Why don't you use him?"

All right, give him a video camera. "I want you attached to me everywhere I'm at. And I want you to do my wedding." Well, he's so scared of me, and he's so shy, right? He did a tremendous job.

The next year he blew into town—he lives in Reno with his mother. He blew into town and said, "Well, what are we going to do this summer?"

"You are going to paint and clean out my new little salon."

"What am I going to paint it? White?"

“I don’t care what color you paint it; this is going to be your place to paint. You do it however you want it, whatever you want.” Okay, opened the doors. He and I mucked all the stuff out, and it was literally his little place to go to draw, to write, to explore his music. I would go in there, and he’d be asleep on the bed, or he’d be cooking or something. It was his place, but it was beautiful.

RM: That was here in your shop?

VB: No, it was in my other house down there. It was beautiful, but it was his place. That’s where he hung out. That’s when he decided he was going to start putting his effort into grades and to getting a future. The kid not only went from a C average, he’s straight A. He carries like a 4.8. He went to Harvard last year and did an internship between his junior and senior year. And this year, he graduates on the ninth, and he’s going out to Washington State up there. He wants to be an architect.

RM: This is the kind of thing I mean. So I asked Tom, “Why do you think that is? What is it about Tonopah that makes so many of these kids successful, when you would think that out here in the middle of the desert they wouldn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell?”

And two things he said that I remember. One, he said it’s a “can do” place out here. When you want to do something you almost have to do it yourself. There’s nobody to call to say, “Well how am I going to fix my motorcycle?” or whatever. You’ve got to fix it.

The other thing he said—and see if you agree with it—is that there weren’t terrible status divisions in school. You’re talking about some, and whenever you get human beings they’re going to grade you. But, for example, at the high school I went to with 3,000 kids in Denver it was savage—the status between the rich and the poor and all of that.

VB: I agree with that. There were 26 kids in my graduating class. I think it was more of a peer pressure thing from female than male. Guys will always get along, but women—they’re women.

RM: Well, what was the basis of the gradations and the pressure and everything? Who was prettier? Who was richer? Or what?

VB: You had a bully. There was a bully that had her little group

RM: A female bully?

VB: Yes, and she had her little group. If you didn’t fit into that little bunch, then . . .

RM: You were nothing?

VB: Right.

RM: And were there more than just one of these little groups?

VB: Yes, you had, like, the little pretty one that, when she decided she liked them, they were part of it. And then there was the ugly bunch, who I usually hung out with, or the guys were. But I didn't care, because I worked all the time. I got out of school. I worked. So whatever they did after school didn't really affect me.

RM: So what you're saying is there were cliques?

VB: Yes, exactly.

RM: Well, do you agree with the idea? I mean, you're very successful. Really. Do you agree that the kids from Tonopah tend to be successful? Not everybody, but in general?

VB: If they put their minds to it. If they have the direction and they have the push. Like me—every kid that walks in here, I'm asking, "How's your grades doing? How's your grades doing? How come this is failing? Why are you failing here? What's the problem?"

RM: That's what you ask them?

VB: Oh, yes, I'm on their ass all the time about grades. "How do you think you're ever going to get out of here if you don't get your grades up? You know, you're not going to make it on a D average. It's not going to happen." You have got to keep on them. I have a little girl who is in first grade. She's had straight A's this entire year. She's just going to be one of these kids who's going to go places.

RM: You can tell even at that early age?

VB: Right.

RM: Getting back to the Mizpah, what was it like there? Do you recall any stories or incidents? Because that was an interesting era in Tonopah, when the Mizpah was kind of jumping.

VB: Oh, my God. My grandmother, my mother's mother—crazy as they came. But when she got liquored up she loved to gamble. So she would come over, and she'd play blackjack with me, right? I literally cleaned her clock one night, and she was all pissed and went home or whatever.

So she didn't talk to me for a couple days, and then she came over one night. There was a dead game, and she told the pit manager, "I want her on that game, and her and I are going heads up." And she was sober. Usually they wouldn't do that. I don't even know why they let that happen, but they did. And she cleaned my clock. She got everything back plus a couple hundred bucks, and she was happy.

Then I had an old man; he was 89, 90 years old. He had probably two teeth left in his head. He worked as the county watchman down at the yard, and he and his old dog would walk down to the Mizpah at night. When he got paid on Thursday, he would come in there, and he'd

blow his paycheck and absolutely get blasted. Well, when they would cut him off at the bar, he would pull his flask out, and he would drink and party. He played a blackjack game that was just terrible—the guy never won. But he loved being around me. So I'd get off work, and I'd haul him and his motley dog home and take care of him. Just little stuff like that. You were on a one-name basis with everybody.

RM: Were most of the customers locals, or were they tourists?

VB: Locals, mostly.

RM: Of course, none of the high rollers like you were used to in Vegas.

VB: Oh, God, no.

RM: How many blackjack tables were they running there?

VB: They had three on the weekends and one small crap table.

RM: Is there any way you can tell me what year you were doing this? Because that's where I met the first singer. She was playing at the Mizpah.

VB: And who was the singer? Was it Denise?

RM: Kathy Lee.

VB: Oh, Kathy Lee? Did you ever know Denise Darcel?

RM: Damn, that name's familiar.

VB: Let me tell you a little story about Denise Darcel. Okay, so Denise Darcel worked at the Mizpah. I got married in '81, and she was invited to my wedding. Denise Darcel was an old—I mean, she wasn't old, but she'd been out there a few years. She showed up to my wedding in a beige lace see-through gown. [Laughter] With nothing on underneath it.

RM: You could see through it? At your wedding?

VB: Oh, absolutely. At my wedding.

RM: This was here in Tonopah?

VB: No, it was in Vegas.

RM: What did people say?

VB: They were like, "Oh, my God, how could she do that?"  
I was like, "It's Denise. What do you expect?"

RM: She was a singer, right? On the lounges on the Strip?

VB: And here. She sang here, too, for years.

RM: The name is really familiar. I can't put a face on it.

VB: I may have some pictures of her somewhere.

RM: Well, you know, during the era you're talking about there were lounges in Vegas. Every casino had at least one lounge, you know. Like, the Dunes had two.

VB: Top O' the Strip.

RM: Three, if you count the Top O' the Strip. And now you can hardly find a lounge in Vegas.

VB: We would go to the Chateau Vegas, which was out on Paradise. It was a real plush dinner house, but at night they kept it open late for singers, entertainers, dealers. I remember Sammy Davis, Jr., coming in there and singing after work. Just a bunch of them coming in there and hanging out there and drinking. Having a couple of drinks after work. That was the hangout there. There and the Peppermill. You know the Peppermill in Vegas? That was a big one.

RM: After hours?

VB: After hours. And their afterhours started from, like, say, 2:00 to 3:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, you know? That's when they started cranking up.

RM: Drinking and cocaine and the whole thing.

VB: Yes, it was wild.

RM: It's like it's a scene that's totally gone, I guess. The lounges aren't there.

VB: Yes, I know. It's not like it was.

RM: In fact the music scene is dead.

VB: Now you have the disco rooms, the loud disco lounges.

RM: High-end things like XS and places like that.

VB: Yes. Where there's a lineup to get in there.



RM: That's right, and it costs you 200 bucks for a seat and crap like that.

VB: Where before, you just went to listen to music and enjoy it. I mean, you could actually talk to somebody in a lounge, where now the music is just so stinking loud you can't hear anything.

RM: Yes. And before that era that we're talking about, there was the era where every show had a whole big band. They had the Musician's Union in Vegas. That was gone, basically, by the time I started hanging out there, which was really in about '83. And for about four of five years, maybe six, I knew a lot of people in the lounges and everything. It was neat.

VB: It was. The Ink Spots. Remember the Ink Spots? I think they're still around.

RM: Are they?

VB: Temptations were down there for a long time.

RM: Do you remember, like, Carline Toronto?

VB: Yes. Do you remember Paul Lynde? There were so many people I wish I'd seen before they died, and one of them would have been Paul Lynde. Have you ever watched the old "Hollywood Squares?" This guy had some fantastic one-liners. I mean, what a sense of humor this guy had. I love anybody that can think fast on their feet like that.

Those were definitely the days.

RM: What's your overall take on Tonopah? You've got extremely deep roots here. How do you view it, looking back? And then, how do you view the future of Tonopah?

VB: Right now, the way the economy is, the hardware store is struggling. This business here pretty much takes care of itself, because I rent out the space. If these girls want to do hair at midnight, they have the key. They come and go. They're pretty much on a trust basis. Right now I'm cutting back on my clientele so I can be at the hardware store more and try and pull it out of the bind that it's in. Tim went to work out at the Test Site to try and bring in more money for that. But I think he's to a point where he's just done with it. With the hardware store. He thinks it's going to fail, where I see hope in the mining coming back. You know, I don't give up. That's just me. I don't give up until I really see that there's not going to be an end to meet. I'm not giving up. If I have to give up nails for four or five months to get that going, okay, so I do it. It's not the end of the world. You know, I can do that.

RM: Do you see Tonopah ever kind of blossoming again, with a real vibrancy economically?

VB: I hope so. I think, if the gold mines go and things start picking up, there could be a real big influx there. Like this solar plant they talk about. If these things take off and start producing

some decent jobs, I think that they could hold their own for a while. If not, I mean, people are being laid off left and right, you know. Our first year here, we came in and made \$650,000.

RM: Really? Gross, you mean?

VB: Yes. Put everything back in the store. Next year we were at \$800,000. That's when the depression began. But back then, people were building additions on their houses, building new homes, money was there. The gold mines were employing people; weren't having them laid off. Stuff like that. Now everybody's scared to death. Do they put any money into their house in case they don't have a job tomorrow? I think fear has got the best of them now, when they see the depletion in the jobs.

RM: Do you see any possibilities of nuclear power here?

VB: I would like to.

RM: You would? I've talked about this for several years and never really had too much of a reception, but do you see possibilities of a real community activism to try and bring in one or more reactors?

VB: Well, I think we'd have a real plus. For example, with Jim Butler Day celebrations. They used to be absolutely huge. Over the years, they have really depleted. This year was the fortieth, and they had a whole new bunch of people, like Joni and Bob Perchetti and people that were really pushing for it. I think they had a pretty good turnout.

I think knowing how to get things done is the biggest thing. Joni is incredibly intelligent and knows how to get things done. She knows the buttons to push; she knows the people to talk to. That's where Tonopah lacks—they don't know how. We've got some real morons running some of the county seats now. And I think that if we could get some of that stuff going on, I think it would pull out.

RM: Personally, I think this area is ideally suited to become a power-producing center for the West. Not just solar, but I mean some real power like nuclear. A 1,000-megawatt reactor generates 800 jobs, actual jobs, at \$60,000 a year.

VB: Wow.

RM: Put a few of those in the region, and so on, and then you've got some real economic development.

VB: I always say there's always going to be another opportunity. If the hardware store fails, or if this fails, there's always going to be something else out there that I'm going to dream up or come up with. You know, I'm not going down without a fight.

RM: Where do you get your buoyancy?

VB: I don't know. I don't know.

RM: Was it inborn?

VB: No, I got it when I sobered up. And I have a real problem, still today, even after 22 years, and I try to live each day to its fullest. I don't get crazy about what's going to happen next week, although I have my moments where I do. I don't worry about what's going to happen next month. I don't worry about what some jerk down the street says. I don't listen to the gossip that goes around until I actually see it. Even, sometimes, if I have to put myself into the moment, I do that. I need to do that. Otherwise, my other alternative, you know, would just be to go out and get all screwed up and say, "Screw it, I'm done." But my glass is always half full. There's always room.

RM: Was your dad that way?

VB: Yes.

RM: He was a half-full type of guy.

How do you think Tonopah shaped you as a person, as opposed to, say, if you'd been born in Santa Monica, California, or Memphis, Tennessee, or somewhere? What did it do to shape you as a person?

VB: It toughened the hell out of me, I'll tell you what. It made me tough. It made me tough, because I didn't let what people said about me affect me. If somebody has said something about me, I go to them face to face. You know, "If you've got a problem with me, let's get it out in the open." I don't go for that. And the same thing here with these girls. "You've got a problem with something that's going on here, let's get it out in the open. Let's get it fixed." I don't want to carry it around and let it balloon into something that's going to be unfixable.

I look at things, and I tell this to a lot of these kids, you know, that come in here crying, "Well, so and so said this about me."

"Does so and so pay your rent? Does so and so pay your car payment? Do they do any of this?"

"No."

"Then what do you care what they say about you? Honestly, does it really affect you?"

"Well, yeah, at school it does."

Okay, so there's your peer pressure. You either like me or you don't. If you don't like me, don't be in my presence. And I got a lot of that, I think, from living here, being brought up here. I can pretty well size up people. When somebody walks in, I can get a pretty good read on them. You know what's going on. I have a good feeling. Stuff like that.

RM: What was it about your father that made him easily in the top five of Nye County history? What was it that made him who he was, the important and prominent figure?

VB: He cared. He loved Tonopah. He loved people. He cared about what happened to the county. He cared about what happened to people who didn't have money. He cared about

bringing interests into Tonopah. You know, he cared about making things come true for people, making their dreams come true if he could. If you only knew the kids that he helped get an education. It's phenomenal. Any kid that had a problem getting into a college, getting into anything, he was there, on the phone. "Get them in there. Get them in there. Get them in there."

RM: Where did that come from?

VB: I think it was because he had to work so hard to get through school himself, and he realized how important it was.

RM: You mean financially? He had a hard time making a go of it?

VB: Yes. His brother Tom was in the air force, I think it was, and Tom would send my dad money when he was going back to school to help him out. And I think that's where a lot of it is.

RM: His experience with his brother. And then he was going to help other people.

VB: Right.

RM: What happened to Tom? What kind of a life did he have?

VB: Tom was kind of an introvert. He kind of went and did his own thing. He would go out and hunt and fish and do all that man stuff with Dad all the time.

They loved to play golf, but it was more the two of them, or going out in foursomes and stuff like that. Tom at one time did not want to be an attorney.

RM: You mean your brother Tom?

VB: Yes. He went to work for Reno P.D., and he was happy being a cop. Dad said, "No, you're going to go to law school." And he put his foot down on it. He said, "You have your lifestyle right now." Now, Tom and I, both, anything we've ever had, we've always worked for. He said, "Your taste in stuff is not going to cut it on a cop's pay. You need to be an attorney." So that's when Tom went to law school.

RM: So he was pushing Tom. Who pushed your dad, if anybody?

VB: It was just him, just him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

RM: I would like to know more about the gaming scene in Tonopah as you experienced it at the Mizpah. What was it like, the difference between dealing in Vegas and dealing here? And who were the people you knew at the Mizpah? Was Scott the owner at that time?

VB: Frank Scott owned it at that time. He was the owner of the Union Plaza Hotel in Vegas, and he knew my dad real well, so that was the connection. I had worked for him when I was a young kid as a lifeguard down there at the Union Plaza. When I came home and went back to work down there, Frank still owned it, but Bobby Walker was the casino manager. He ran the whole show down there.

RM: What year was that?

VB: That was probably somewhere around '85. Anaconda was going full blast. It was more like dealing to your family, because in a small town everybody knows you. You had your regular morning people that would come in. They had a big round table in the back of the Mizpah where they served dinners and the restaurant part, and they had the old table in there. Every morning all the old guys would come in—Bob Perchetti, my dad, Duncan Shinn, Solan Terrell, Joe Maslach. That's the ones I can remember right now. They would go back there, and they'd sit around and have coffee and talk about what was going on in town. That's where they'd hang out in the morning. Then you'd have your afternoon lunch bunch that would come in and eat. And then at night it was, like, all of the mining people. When their shifts would end, it was their time to be down there.

RM: So it was like three different crews?

VB: Yes. Anaconda was extremely good for Tonopah. We made excellent money down there in tips. They were always paid on Thursday, and they gambled like there was no tomorrow. They had a good time; it was just like a party. And everybody met at the Mizpah. At that time they had three other bars across the street, so you could come and go, and you just knew everybody. Weekends were a little quiet, because the local people went out of town, and the older guys did not come in that often on the weekends for coffee. But it was still entertaining. Then you had the traveling people that would come in and ask you questions about the town. You know, "What brought you here?" It was fun.

RM: What time did the morning bunch come in?

VB: They came in around 9:00.

RM: And how long would they stay?

VB: 10:00, 10:30. Back then they had no cell phones or anything. So they came in there, and they had all that time to talk. The waitresses all knew them and took care of them. Some would come in and have breakfast. And that's where they all collected.

RM: Do you have any sense of what all they talked about?

VB: Politics, mostly. Nye County business. They would talk about who was coming, who was building, who wasn't, what was going on down at Anaconda. And then there was a lot of needling that went on between them all. They would pick on each other.

RM: Kidding around?

VB: Yes.

RM: The afternoon bunch—were they different folks?

VB: Yes, they were, like, the people who did shift work, like at the Ramada. Or some of the earlier Test Site people would come in early. They would come in in the afternoons and have a couple of beers and stuff before they went home. And then it started picking up around 5:00, 5:30, with people coming in for dinner. And then they had the Jack Dempsey Room, so when the Jack Dempsey Room was open they would go down and have a dinner and come up and hang out at the bar.

RM: At that time you had live music there at night, didn't you?

VB: Yes, we usually had a singer. I remember a couple of them. One of them was Denise Darcel.

RM: She played in Vegas, too, didn't she?

VB: Oh, yes, she was a classic. Yes, I invited her to my first wedding. I don't much remember it, but, as I mentioned before, everybody said that Denise walked in in a dress that was nude color with nothing on underneath it.

RM: Was she a movie star, or was she a singer?

VB: I don't know. I think she was just an entertainer. She had a way of catching everybody's attention, though, that's for sure.

RM: Do you remember a girl named Kathy Lee that played the piano there for two or three weeks?

VB: Yes. I didn't know her that much because she wasn't as flamboyant as Denise was. Denise was everywhere. When she was on break, she was out talking to people and carrying on. A lot of them didn't get into that socializing.

RM: Well, I got acquainted with Kathy there, and that's when we started working on this novel on Vegas.

VB: Oh, really?

RM: And I'm still working on it 30 years later. Then I started hanging out with her and some of her friends in Vegas. That was the same era that you were in Vegas.

VB: I bet that was very entertaining, hanging around.

RM: It was, because they were playing in all the lounges. That was when they had lounges. Every casino had at least one lounge, with live music most of the day.

VB: Yes, all day. Used to start around noon.

RM: Yes. Did you ever run into Kathy down there? In Vegas?

VB: No. The only time I really had anything to do with the entertainers and stuff like that was at the Union Plaza. The entertainers that would play had this little circular lounge there before you went into their gourmet room. And that was pretty much the only time. You know, they got to know me that way.

I knew a few of the entertainers that would come into the Chateau Vegas when it was still going. After hours when we would get off work, like between 2:00 and 4:00, that was their hangout. It was a 24-hour place. But I remember Sammy Davis, Jr., coming in there a couple of times. And Keely Smith. It was just a place where the casino people would go at night, where nobody knew them. You know, it was just pretty much a local type of thing.

RM: I was fascinated by your telling last time about the old-time dealers who could feel the cards. That's really true?

VB: Very true, very true. They were classic. These guys turned it into a fine art. Dealers today are not trained to watch for that, but then, there aren't that many of those old guys left anymore that they really worry about. Now it's mostly computerized or, you know, they always kind of have some kind of method of it. It's mostly counting cards now.

It's mostly the players that they're more worried about now, as opposed to the dealers and the casino help. Most of the dealers that train these days—they don't even teach them game protection.

RM: They don't? Now, what would game protection involve?

VB: Watching both sides of your table at the same time. You don't stand just in the middle of your game, you move as the table moves. You do not want to lose sight of either your first space or your sixth space, because once you turn your head they can cap their bets.

RM: "Capping your bet." What does that refer to?

VB: Capping your bet? Changing the amount of your bet. If you have, like, two or three different colored chips under there, and then you've got a couple of hundred dollars under there, and then you get a garbage hand and you want to switch that, if you've got a dealer that's out there in nowhere-land, turns her back, the player reaches out and changes his bet and, you know, all he loses is the first couple of bucks on it.

RM: And that does happen, huh?

VB: Oh, yes.

RM: And it happens nowadays?

VB: I don't know so; it may still happen. I've been out of it for so long that I just don't know. I think the security now in gaming is so intense that I don't know if there are that many people now that would really, actually challenge the security of the gaming control board. Whereas before, they didn't have the eye in the sky.

RM: When you were dealing they didn't have an eye in the sky?

VB: No, but the Union Plaza had a catwalk, and people would go up there. Their security systems would go up and catwalk the roof, where you could look down onto the game.

RM: Could the player see them on the catwalk?

VB: No. None of that.

RM: But the eye in the sky is what? Cameras?

VB: Right, right. And they're everywhere. They are everywhere.

RM: So when you first went into Vegas, they didn't have an eye in the sky?

VB: No. That was when I was, like, 18, 19. I went to work for Frank Scott as a lifeguard. And then during the winter I went in and worked for him in his accounting offices. That's where I got to see the . . . I want to say the "inside" or the "back side" of the casino business.

I mean, I was always curious, so if there was a door I could go through, I was going to go. If there were stairs I could climb, I was going to climb. You know, I was up there on this catwalk, and I was watching, and I was thinking, "Wow."



Of course, a couple of times security tried to throw me out, and I was like, “Just tell me, explain to me, what you do up here. You know, I work here. I just want to know what you’re doing here.” They’d say, “When we have somebody suspicious on a game, we watch the game, we watch the dealers—make sure that they aren’t trying to pull anything funny.”

I was working at Golden Nugget, and there was a guy that I worked for there who I still today highly, highly admire. His name was Frank Toddre. I mentioned him earlier. When he hired me, I went into his office. I had heard about the guy, but I had never seen him, and I was scared to death. I went in, and he stood about five foot five—and just as stocky as they come.

He called me into his office, and he said, “I don’t care if you can deal a hand. I don’t care if you can count. I don’t care if you do or don’t know your game. As long as you’re nice to my customers, you have a job. Customers need personality.”

“Hey, I’ve got that.” You know, no problem.

He said, “And the one thing I do watch for is if you can handle a game, have contact with your customers, and still have game protection.”

That’s when I went down and auditioned on the game. He watched and said, “You’ve got it down. You can have it.”

Then I remember him coming in one night with about four security guards. They looked like the Incredible Hulk walking down there. He was so mad, he was just ready to pop. And they jerked this dealer off of the game and hauled him out. When he was making a payout he was coming out with \$25 chips. He was making the payouts, and when he came around, he was dropping 50 bucks into his own pocket. And they caught him on tape. So, there are dealers out there that are that crooked.

RM: What do they do to dealers like that?

VB: They fire them, and then they take their gaming cards away so they can no longer be in the gaming business.

RM: They don’t take them out and beat them up and things like that?

VB: I don’t think they did then. I know that back in the era of Benny Binion they’d go out and hang you out the top of the parking garage, but those days are long gone. You know, you’d just be stupid to try and do that anymore.

At night the dealers have what they call the tip committee that goes around and collects all the tip boxes off of all the games. Then they go back in this room, and they count everything up, and they divide it up. They get a certain percentage for doing that, because, I mean, it makes for a long day. You’re working eight hours on a game, and it takes you another hour and a half to do the tips. And then it’s all hauled down to the cage. The cage counts it.

Once it gets to the cage, then they have to do it under camera surveillance. Well, they caught a few dealers taking actual tip money out of the dealers’ pockets—well, out of the tip money. It was that point that they started putting cameras in the dealing count room. But I know that when the dealers got wind of the fact that there was a dealer that was stealing from them, the dealers themselves would personally take care of them. They’d go out and just beat the living shit out of them. “You’re stealing our money? Not happening.”

RM: Forget the police.

VB: Right. And then, once the company would find out, then they would of course fire them because they are stealing. It is still stealing.

RM: Sure. A recreation of mine is just to walk the Strip and observe; take notes sometimes. I look at the dealers, and I wonder, is it tough to deal eight hours a day, interfacing with people and everything? Could you talk about that, particularly in the context of the Mizpah?

VB: Yes, there's a big difference. It isn't a hard job to deal. It isn't a hard job. Some places are different—you're on a game an hour and then you'll get a 20-minute break, or you're on a game 45 minutes and you get a 15-minute break. And if they have extra dealers they'll send them around so you get shorter breaks. The main thing is if you can talk to them and get a feel for what kind of a mood they're in. If you have a player that walks up and doesn't really want to chat, then you leave him alone. They're there just to play cards. You have to have the common sense to be able to read a person.

Here in town, everybody came in to bullshit. You know, they wanted to bust your chops, drink, party, carry on. Tell them what's going on. Who's doing who, you know. It was that kind of ritual. I mean you knew everything that was going on in everybody's life in Tonopah when you dealt, because they would come in there, and they wanted to relax, they wanted to let their hair down, have a couple of drinks, throw a couple of bucks around, you know. They never really took it seriously.

But I do remember working with a guy who passed away a few years ago; his name was Jimmy Shea. He would be one of those old-time dealers that could do that dealing, slipping the dealing. He was incredibly smart. He dealt back in the days where it was no women, black and white, and your shirts were ironed, everything was pressed. When you ordered a glass of wine you didn't get some cheap glass, you know. You got good stuff back in the really early days. So he knew a lot of the background in it.

But on the same hand, when he would come up here and work for Frank Scott, if his so-called shift was losing money he was ballistic. He just couldn't stand the loss of a day, you know. You've got to take the wins with the losses and stuff. Just watching him on a night where he was getting his ass kicked, it was just, you know, so funny. Those were the old times; that's the way they were in the old times. Pit bosses sweated a game if they were losing real bad. I don't think it's as bad now.

RM: When a dealer is on a losing streak, do they change the dealer? How was it when you were doing it in Vegas and here?

VB: Depending upon where you worked. Not here so much, because during the day there were only two dealers. When I worked with Jimmy Shea, he would jump in and try to change the cards around, but, I mean, if a guy's on a roll, he's on a roll. Has nothing to do with the cards.

RM: Oh, tell me about that.

VB: He would be in there, and he was already pissed, so his cards weren't going to go any better than they were before. If anything, he was going to give more money away.

RM: Do you have a theory on that? I mean, it sounds like you're saying, "When you're hot, you're hot. It's not random."

VB: You are. No, if you're on a roll it's going to stay until it blows. If the guy's smart enough and he realizes his run's over, he's going to get up and walk on you. And that was Jimmy Shea's biggest fear, that this guy was going to walk out the door with the money.

## CHAPTER SIX

RM: Going back to how you did so well on tips, what was it in you that enabled you to get those tips, whereas the others couldn't? What are some of the factors?

VB: I had a personality. I had a good sense of humor. I could read people really well and I would go with the flow with them. You know, if this guy was able to take a joke, or you could bust his balls about something, or keep him interested in the game: "You're not going to bet that. You're going to lose your pants." Stuff like that. You have got to keep a person interested in the game. Keep them there. If you just stand there dealing cards, who wants to sit there and do that? Nobody. Nobody. I had people follow me from the Golden Nugget to Treasure Island to the Mirage; they were all high-limit players.

RM: So dealers bring high rollers with them.

VB: Yes, I had my own following.

RM: I was wondering if you could talk more about this ability you had. That's pretty interesting, that the high rollers liked you. What were you doing that some of the other people couldn't do to hold the high rollers? What is the secret of the success of that?

VB: I think a lot of it was my upbringing with my dad. I was raised at a very young age around adults. I was always an adult. After he got off work, and all the attorneys and people would come down to the house, they'd have cocktails, and I was always in that environment. But I always listened when they would do one-liners and their jokes and stuff like that. My dad referred to it as "needling." You know, how they would needle them. I liked that part. Dad's entire family was like that. They all had a great sense of humor.

I grew up with Milka; I was always over here with her. I wasn't around Rosie very much because she, of course, worked all the time. And then I was with my dad; I worked up in his office from the time I was 12 on. And I loved his sense of humor. I thought that if you could have a sense of humor about something, that it just made things so much easier. Of course, I didn't think that that sense of humor did me a bit of good when he was reaming my ass about something.

RM: You would try to use it?

VB: Right.

RM: But it didn't work?

VB: Right, but I learned a lot of that. Plus, I think back, and when I was drinking real good and partying—I mean, you pick up that bar humor, that one-on-one with people.

RM: Can you give an example? I know it might be hard to recall, particularly an example of how you would—I don't want to use the word "bond"—but how you would interact with a high roller there such that he would be a client for you.

VB: Well, this guy that I dealt to all the time, the one I just talked about, would always come in, and he'd walk by my table, and he'd say, "Are you running hot, or are you running cold?" I'd go, "Well it has nothing to do with the cards, it's my mood." He'd say, "Well, which way is your head spinning today?" You know, "Are you in a good mood or a bad mood?" Whatever. So then we would laugh about that, and then he would say, "I'm going to try you out. I'll give you a couple thousand, and we'll see where it goes." Then you get going, you know, because now it's a challenge.

RM: So, what would you say then, to keep this going?

VB: "Dig your money out, let's go. Let's see what happens."

RM: So you take him a couple of times? You take him on a couple of hands?

VB: Oh, yes.

RM; Then how do you keep it going?

VB: You know, like, I would tell him, "I'm only going to write you \$10,000 in markers. After \$10,000 I'm going to throw you off my game." [Laughter] The guy didn't go anywhere. You know, because now the grudge match is on. "I'm not dealing with you anymore. You can't beat me tonight."

"Yes, I can. Yes, I can." And the challenge is on. The jokes will start, you go back and forth, back and forth.

RM: And what would he say as a joke?

VB: "I'm still going to get even with you. I can still win." And then when he would win a hand, or they would win a hand, you know, they would think they're all cocky and everything, and you come back around. But then when the deck will change and they start winning, oh my God, then they're shoveling it right back at you.

"I'll take that marker back, 'cause you said you could keep."

One person I dealt to who was really, really famous was George Strait. My funniest story about George Strait is, when I worked at the Golden Nugget, it was during the rodeo, and he always stayed at the Nugget during the rodeo. When I found out that he was in the building, it was my first year at the Nugget, and I had no idea.

So—oh, my God—I'm running all over the casino. I'm talking to the shift boss. I want to be on a game with George Strait. I just want to deal a couple of hands to him, you know, I just want to meet him.

Well, these shift bosses and stuff are messing with me, “Yeah, sure, whatever,” you know. So I’m dealing to a guy whose name is Roy Cooper. He was a roper or something. Some kind of championship thing with that rodeo. And he’s drunker than 40 Indians one night, and he comes in and sits on my table, and he’s talking. And who walks up and stands right next to him, sits down and plays my game, but George Strait? I mean, I lose total control of the game. I’m winging cards off the table. I can’t think. You know, I’m just like, “Oh, my God.”

So it’s, like, 1:30 in the morning. As soon as I go on break, I go to the back to the dealer’s room, and I call my mom. And of course my dad answers, right? “Oh, my God, I just dealt to George Strait!”

And my dad’s like, “Who the hell is George Strait?”

“Get Mom, let me talk to Mom.” You know? So he goes and gets Mom, and Mom gets on the phone.

“You’re kidding!”

I’m like, “No.” And I’m all excited and everything.

And my dad gets back on the phone, “Unless you’re dealing to Jesus, don’t call this house.” [Laughter]

RM: Now he was just using humor on you, wasn’t he?

VB: Yes, it’s got to be an absolute emergency. And Dad was in bed by 8:00, you know. But, oh, my God, I was just all over the fact that I had George Strait at my table. Off and on throughout the week I would see him, but I never really got to deal to him that much. It was just that one period, that one time.

So the next year, the rodeo rolls around and now I’m dealing in high limit. I’m also dealing roulette part time and stuff, so I tell our shift manager—his name was John Martin, and he had a really good sense of humor—I said, “I don’t care where George Strait’s at. Wherever George Strait’s at, I’m going to be there.

And he’s kind of like, “Yeah, okay, whatever.”

I say, “No, I’m serious.”

He goes, “Yeah, I’ll see what I can do for you.”

I say, “John, please. I’m telling you right now. I live and breathe for this week. This is the only time I work 40 hours a week. I work 10 hours a day. I’ve got to deal to George Strait.” So I’m down dealing roulette, and I go on a break. I go find this shift manager, and I go, “How in the hell do you expect me to deal to George Strait when I’m dealing roulette? He does not play roulette.”

John’s like, “Go back to the roulette game.”

Now I’m mad. Don’t even talk to me because I’m mad, right? So I go back, and I’m dealing on this roulette game. So they come down and take me off the roulette game and send me down to high limit. And I’m still mad. When they open up a reserve game, they open up a brand new game, and then you get your own floorman. But then you have to count the cards out and get the rack ready and everything. And so I’m talking to the floor person who’s standing there, who’s going to be watching the game. I go, “Who are they reserving this game for?”

She’s like, “I don’t know. I have no idea.” So the pit manager comes over and starts getting everything all lined up for the table. And there are, like, four guys standing in front of

the game there. They've all got ball caps on—baseball caps—and I know a couple of the guys that are standing there. I'm not really paying too much attention.

I'm standing there, and I ask the pit manager, "When you see John Martin, will you send him over here and tell him I need to talk to him?" Not only am I going to be dealing roulette, which George Strait never plays, but now I'm stuck on a reserved game. I'm going to probably be dealing to somebody that's got no personality, period. And I'm so mad I can't see straight.

So I ask the pit manager, "Well, who's the reserved game for?"

And she goes, "George Strait." And I just—oh, my God—I'm counting cards, I'm counting the rack, you can't shut me up. I'm making a total ass of myself. So I get the cards all spread, and I'm all ready to go, and I say, "Okay, well where is he?" And the guy standing right in front of the table in a baseball cap is George Strait.

He goes, "I'm right here, Red." My hair was dyed.

I'm like, "Don't think I'm happy to see you or anything." Oh, my God, I was so embarrassed. So he plays cards with me, and eventually I get over the flutters and the jitters, you know, of him being there. And he looks so different in a ball cap than a cowboy hat. It's just him incognito, because you have to be like that.

RM: Did you do the repartee with him—the joking and all that? Can you remember any of it?

VB: One night on the table he said, "If I sing to you, will you let me win?" [Laughter]  
I said, "I don't know. Let's see what you can sing."

So I dealt to him quite a bit; he was a lot of fun. And then when I went to Treasure Island, and he came over to Treasure Island, he said, "Man, you are just like a returning nightmare."

RM: He remembered you?

VB: Oh, yes. I said, "I missed you, too."

He said, "You are the dealer from hell. I cannot beat you."

And I said, "Well, don't play on my table."

And he looked at me like, "What do you mean, don't play on your table?"

I said, "Well, if you can't beat me, you're never going to beat me. You will never beat me, because I think you are flat gorgeous, I listen to your music all the time, and I'm always in a good mood. If I'm in a good mood, you can never beat me. Now, you come in here one day when I'm in a raggy mood, you can own the joint."

RM: Is that how it was?

VB: Oh, yes. If my mood was in the gutter, you could beat the socks off me. If I was in a good mood—untouchable. Untouchable.

RM: What do you make of that?

VB: I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, I've believed, to a certain extent, in the psychic stuff. I think it's all in your spirit and what kind of a mood you're in.

RM: Is that your theory of luck?

VB: That's just my theory of how I am. I don't know if it's that way with any other dealer, but that's just, over the years, how I've dealt. I was like that. I could be doing really well on a game. And I handled drunks really well, which a lot of people can't.

RM: Now, what's your secret there?

VB: I was one. I could probably relate to them a little bit, so I understood. I didn't have a whole lot of tolerance for hookers, though, especially if they were the type that came in there and were real mouthy and thought they were so much better than me. Especially when they'd just been picked up off of a barstool for the fifteenth time that day.

RM: You saw a lot of that?

VB: Oh, yes. Some of them were okay. But when they would come over and start, you know, acting what they were, I had a hard time. I had a hard time respecting them. I mean, I understand your profession, okay? This is how you make your living. You go out, you sleep with men, you get paid for it. But don't make my job hell because you aren't happy with yours, okay? I respect what you do, so respect what I do, and don't treat me like crap, because I won't treat you that way.

RM: Did you find a lot of them unhappy?

VB: Yes. You had some real nasty, nasty women out there.

RM: This is out of the Mirage?

VB: Yes, anyplace where they were, yes.

RM: They didn't kick them out?

VB: No, not unless they actually caught them exchanging money on camera, you know. I mean, they knew who they were. They weren't stupid.

RM: I thought they could eighty-six them—just say, "We don't want you around here. Don't come back."

VB: They can. They can. Sometimes it would get to be what we referred to as the "hooker bar." It would get so thick with hookers over there that they had to throw them out, because



they aren't paying customers. They're over there drinking water and waiting for somebody to sit down at a high-limit table. Then the security would come and clean them out.

RM: There were so many at the Mirage?

VB: There were a lot, at one time. So they pretty much put the hustle on them.

RM: What was it like? The Mirage was top of the line, wasn't it?

VB: Oh, it was beautiful, yes.

RM: It must have meant a lot of status for you.

VB: It did. That was my dream. As long as I was going to be a dealer, I always wanted to deal at the Mirage. Once I got the Mirage, I was good. You know, I made my goal. I enjoyed going to work there. I liked the people that I dealt to. I actually even liked a lot of the people that I worked with. I never got really close with people.

RM: You mean your fellow workers?

VB: Right.

RM: Is that atypical?

VB: I don't know if it's atypical. It's not that I didn't trust them, but I didn't want them in my business. I had my home, my animals. I was nice and congenial with them at work and treated them well—the employees. I mean, I had acquaintances there. I never really considered too many of them friends. I have a couple of really good friends that I've known over the years, but for the most part we were just there doing a job.

RM: Was that true at the Nugget and the Union Plaza?

VB: Yes. I'm just very quiet. I would never make a good salesman, because, if you don't want it, I'm not going to run it down your throat.

RM: You're not manipulative, for example.

VB: No. It's not that I don't care what goes on in your family life, but I'm not one to sit around and gossip about what goes on with this dealer and that dealer. This one got fired for this, you know. I don't care about that stuff.

RM: And there was a lot of that?

VB: Yes. You had your cliques, and I pretty much just stayed to myself. I was okay with that, and I've always been okay with that.

Quite a few of them were pretty tight. I was never one to be really open about things. I never just went and started spilling my guts about what was going on. I really pretty much just stayed to myself. I was kind of like that with players too, you know? Unless they asked something. I would answer and tell them about my personal life and stuff.

RM: Did the players ever try to pick up the dealer?

VB: Yes. It happens a lot. You can be fired for it. It's called fraternizing. You can be fired for it. They don't want you meeting these people out in the back, because you're taking money from them. It's pretty much a form of stealing from them. And most of these people you meet—those guys are in town for a night or two nights. Chances are they are going to tell you they aren't married. They are married. They've probably got a wife and six kids at home, you know? So you just never know. People are just so transient there. Why do you want to get tangled up with somebody that lives clear across the country? Because you're never going to see them again.

RM: How long did you work at the Mirage?

VB: I was there for five years.

RM: When did you leave?

VB: My last day was January 7, 2006. Tim actually ran the hardware store the first week without me, because I gave them my two weeks' notice. Did it right. I helped out during the New Year's, because it's always crazy for New Year's. When I walked out, I never looked back.

RM: No regrets?

VB: No. It was changing—the bigger hotels.

RM: But you were at the Mizpah before you went to the Mirage, right?

VB: No, first I was at the Horseshoe. Actually, first I was working at the DA's office. I got tired of that, and then I went to work for a steel fabrication place. That didn't last long. And then I went to the Horseshoe. I got into the Golden Nugget from the Horseshoe.

RM: And then from the Golden Nugget you went to the Treasure Island and then to the Mirage? I don't want to whip the dead horse here, but the contrast between the Mizpah and probably the top casino in the world at that time is striking.

VB: The Mizpah is more like dealing to your family. Mirage was dealing to celebrities. You knew people here. That was pretty much the difference; they were pretty laid back. You know,

if you had a big game going on in Vegas, they had a lot of people watching your game. You have a big game going here, they're just worried about who's going to end up winning and losing.

RM: And they didn't have eye in the sky or catwalk or anything like that?

VB: I think they did have an eye in the sky after Frank Scott came in and remodeled it. But for the most part, they had the catwalk down there when Shorty had it.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

RM: I should mention that you're having your nails done while we're talking.

VB: By my trainee, yes. Here's another one who's got a lot of passion. This has been her passion. My passion, when I got out of high school, was to go to cosmetology school.

Dad said, "No, you're going up and getting an education."

So I blew two years up in Reno, not knowing what I wanted to do, but partying. If I had followed my heart instead of what he wanted—I mean, I know he wanted more than a cosmetology degree or whatever. I wish I would've had the balls enough to say, "No, this is what I want to do." But I admired him and figured he knew better, so that's what I did. So I waited until I was 48 years old, and then I got my manicuring license. But it's always been a passion of mine. I always loved doing it and enjoy doing it.

RM: People should follow their passions.

VB: They really should. Follow your dreams. I don't care what your parents say. If you have a passion for something, you need to do it. And she's good at it. This kid is an artist.

RM: Natural-born, right?

VB: Yes. I had a girl working for me last summer who wanted to do nothing but hair, makeup, and photography. And she wanted to go to cosmetology school. Another straight-A student. Wanted to go to cosmetology school, and her mother said, "No, you're going to college. You're going to college."

So she went up there; she hated it. And I told her mom, "You know, cosmetology school is just a backup, okay? She could turn out to be the next Paul Mitchell. With her brains and her smarts, she gets her license, God only knows where she could go." But, you know, she couldn't see the big picture. I mean, Paul Mitchell needed a hairdresser's license before he got kicked into the whole world of it and everything, you know? That's what this one wants to do. As soon as she gets out of school, she's going to beauty school.

RM: Well, getting back to Frank Scott, tell me more about him as a person, and his management there. How did he get up into Tonopah? He got to Tonopah via your dad?

VB: Yes, and there was some other connection that he had besides my dad here. He knew somebody else. I think most of it, though, was because of my dad. He wanted to get this airport project. He wanted to put a golf course out there at the airport, and that's kind of how he got mixed up in that.

Then when he remodeled the Mizpah, he got to know my dad real well there. And they became very good friends. Frank needed someplace for his employees to live when they were up here working, so my dad designed that Mount Brock Estates, the trailer court. Frank brought those trailers in so Frank could have someplace to put these people he had. I worked for him as a lifeguard, and then I went and worked for him down here. He was always very easygoing. I

also worked for him when he was working on the very first HSST system that they tried to put in in Vegas.

RM: What's HSST?

VB: It's that high speed super train from Japan. They wanted to put the first one in down there. I was a secretary for him there for two years, and I found him very easy to work for. Very easy.

RM: Did he live here in Tonopah?

VB: No, he's always lived in Vegas.

RM: So he would just visit here occasionally or something?

VB: Well, he had a plane that they would fly up here once a week, and whoever needed to come up, whether it would be accounting people or whoever, they would fly them up. He was an incredibly intelligent man for not graduating. He read everything. Anything he got in his hands, he read. He said, "I learned by mistakes." I don't know how he and Jackie Gaughan got tied up together.

RM: They were tied up together? In what property?

VB: They had the El Cortez, and he had part to do with the Union Plaza.

RM: Oh, the two of them had the Union Plaza? Did they build it?

VB: I think they did, yes.

RM: I remember when it was a park.

VB: Yes, before.

RM: And then they had the El Cortez?

VB: Right.

RM: I hung out there in the summer of '58.

VB: In '58? My God, I was born that year. [Laughter]

RM: Yes. I was underage, but they let me drink at the bar and watch the girls sing.

VB: Oh, my God, yes.

RM: That's where I got hooked on it.

VB: Well, look where Wayne Newton started out.

RM: Wayne Newton used to sing when he was a kid, and he had to leave the joint during the break.

VB: Yes, because he wasn't old enough. My mom knew all about that—going down there, and he'd have to leave because he was too young.

RM: Wayne Newton and his brother. I'm trying to remember where they played. Was it the Frontier?

VB: It was the Fremont.

RM: The Fremont. That's it. He and his brother played at the Fremont. He was just a kid. Maybe 16? 17? Something like that.

VB: Very young. Very young. I remember that very well.

RM: But that's where I got hooked on lounges and lounge music.

VB: That was good music back then, though. They were great.

RM: It was. It was the best. You could go in there, and you didn't necessarily have to buy a drink.

VB: No. Go there and sit.

RM: You could go up and down the Strip—one lounge after another. Now it's all dead; it's all gone.

VB: Yes, now they've gone to the nightclubs.

RM: That's right, and they converted the old lounges, like somebody said, to keno parlors. They make more money. Why pay musicians \$5,000 a week?

[Joni Eastley brings in copies of Vikki's parents' love letters.]

RM: Could you discuss the letters that your father wrote to your mother? What you know about them and when and all that.

VB: My dad was not a real lovey-dovey huggy type. He wasn't one to show a whole lot of affection—in person, I mean. In his later years, he was. And I think that was because of the politics. I think that's where a lot of that came from. He mentioned a little bit more about his feelings, but it was mostly just stuff like when she would come up and see him in Reno, or they had made plans and talked.

Every once in a while they would get a little serious in there, but he did write her a poem, which I thought was pretty cool. I don't know. How do I remember him? He was very God-like, I guess. I mean, he was an icon. Well, he's still an icon to me. I'll come up and give you a hug no matter what. And Milka was the same way, and Rose, to a certain extent. But Dad and his brother Tom—I guess they just didn't do that in the old days.

RM: Men didn't show affection, maybe going clear back to the old country.

VB: It very well could be. It very well could have been.

RM: It wasn't a masculine thing to do, whereas women were permitted.

VB: Yes. After I had sobered up and really got to spend some quality time with my dad is when I really made him be a more huggy, lovey-dovey type. My mom was kind of jealous of our relationship. I don't know why that was. It kind of caused some problems to a certain extent with us, every once in a while. When my dad and I were together we always had a great time. When you threw her in the mix it was like she was kind of envious of our relationship. I remember the last 10, 12 years or so, they argued—typical marriage things, I guess. But, you know, I used to say, "If you're unhappy, why do you stay in this marriage?"

"Because I married your mother till death do us part, and that's how it's going to be." And that's exactly how she felt. I don't care how miserable they may have been together, but they were going to be together forever. Even after he passed away, there was nobody else.

RM: The letters begin during World War II, when he was living somewhere else. And they were not married at that time, but apparently knew each other. So then the war ended, and what happened?

VB: Dad came back and went to school.

RM: To college or to law school?

VB: College. I'm not quite sure how that went. I could find out, though, for you. If you remind me, I'll call my Aunt Pauline. She would know.

RM: Okay. Well, I noticed that some letters lower in the stack are postmarked 1950, and he's still addressing her as "Miss" Dorothy, so they're not married at this time. There's another one postmarked "Reno" in 1950. Again to Miss Dorothy Casner. That was her name, right? And your mother is related to the woman at the ranch out here with the two brothers. I'm trying to get her to do an interview—Doris Clifford.

[Vicki calls Pauline Noyes on the phone.]

VB: Hey, Pauline, when Mom and Dad first started dating, Mom was where? Was she in beauty school then? How did that whole thing go? They were both out of school though, right?

RM: So you're on the speaker phone now, Vikki.

VB: Pauline, can you hear me?

PN: Yes.

VB: Bob McCracken is doing a book and stuff on Dad, so we've been doing these interviews. I don't know the sequence on that, so go ahead with "she came running in. . . ."

PN: Well, she came in the house, and she said, "Bill's been here."  
I said, "How do you know Bill's been here?"  
I was standing outside with her, and she said, "Only Bill has footprints that big."  
[Laughter]

VB: And was she in school then?

PN: Oh, God. Oh, that's going way back.

VB: Was she in beauty school or high school?

PN: Oh, she was out of high school. I think she was back home from beauty school.

VB: When did she and Dad start dating then? Was it during World War II?

PN: Oh, yes. It was after. Bill had gone to school in San Francisco, I think, and had gotten back home. Oh, boy. I'm trying to think, for verification, who you could call.

VB: Well, I have letters from Mom that she kept, that Dad had mailed to her. Some of them are from Reno and they talk about him being in college, so they must have been dating while he was in college. Do you remember any of that?

PN: Where were the letters from? San Francisco?

RM: Some of them are, yes. But at least one of them is postmarked "Reno." And some of them don't have a date or postmark at all.

VB: He was a Sigma Nu, and I remember she used to go up to his Sigma Nu parties, so he must have been in college in Reno. How did they meet?



PN: I'm not sure about that, either. You would think I would remember that.

RM: But they would have met in Tonopah, right?

PN: Oh, I'm sure she'd known Bill. We'd always known them.

RM: But he was older than she, right?

PN: Oh, yes.

RM: Did he just wait for her to grow up?

PN: I guess they just must have known that they were right for one another.

VB: After he got out of law school and he came back here, how long was it before they got married?

PN: Well, I really can't remember. But I remember he was practicing up in the old bank building, because we used to walk up there and see him from time to time.

VB: Oh, so he was out of law school then?

PN: Oh, I wish I could give you more information on that. I'd hate to be quoted and be wrong. Nothing worse than being wrong and having to eat crow.

VB: Well, we're just kind of trying to figure it out, because I don't really remember. And I know that you were still living with Granny at the time, too.

RM: We might get some clarification from the letters. I'm pretty sure in 1950 he was in law school in San Francisco. That's what it looks like from the postmarks.

PN: But, see, Dorothy graduated from high school the same year I graduated from eighth grade, and that was in '49.

RM: So he wasn't in World War II?

PN: Bill was in World War II.

RM: Okay, I got you. He was.

PN: Bill, I think, was in some kind of special service like communication and that type of thing.

VB: I don't think he was ever overseas, was he?

PN: Just a minute. Gary, do you know if Bill was ever overseas? He said he couldn't remember. He really didn't know.

VB: Well, if you think of anything, call me back down here at the salon.

PN: Okay. If I can recollect any of that and give you, you know, honest answers, I will. But gee, Vikki, I'll have to go through my little time span here.

VB: Okay.

PN: All right, honey.

VB: Thank you.

RM: Thanks a lot, Pauline.

PN: Thanks for calling.

VB: Bye bye.

PN: Bye bye.

VB: That was my mom's sister Pauline.

RM: And then Doris is a sister, full-blooded sister?

VB: Yes.

RM: And they started out in Bishop, right, and then came over here? And your grandmother was a beautician, right?

VB: No, my mom was. My grandmother was a truck driver. She moved houses when they first moved over here. I have a picture of her somewhere moving a house. And then at night she worked at the Tonopah Club as a waitress. My mom had the beauty salon, and then at night she worked with Granny over at the Tonopah Club doing cocktails. And for some reason I think somewhere in there that might be where she and Dad started seeing each other. I will find somebody who knows the whole story.

RM: And what was your grandmother's name?

VB: Dorothy Casner.

RM: Casner. Oh, of course, that's your mother's maiden name.

VB: Yes. Now, Pauline, the one you were just talking to, was stricken at a really young age with MS. In fact, that house that they just flattened over there is where she and Gary Noyes and her three kids lived.

Well, when Pauline was stricken, my mom brought the entire family up. So there were five kids and four adults living in our home. She took care of Pauline, because the paralysis came from her neck down. Gradually, with physical therapy and stuff, it actually moved down to half through her waist. But she has the movement of her hands. She's been in a wheelchair now for forty-something years. She never goes out. She and Uncle Gary are very reclusive.

RM: And she married Roy Clifford. We used to know them back in the '50s. We knew old Joe, and that's how we knew them.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

RM: Well, I'm deeply fascinated by anything you can say about being a dealer and all that.

VB: I've got some great stories in dealing. You know, when I got in it, it was on a cash basis. Our minimum wage back then, I think, was four bucks or something like that. Dealing on the Strip, of course, was always more fascinating than being stuck downtown, but you always had to start out downtown to get the experience.

Back then, it was who you knew to get a job. You had to have what they referred to as "the juice." If you had juice to get into a place, then you pretty much got a job. They say that a lot of those places down there were mob oriented. Do I believe it? Yes. Did that scare me? Not a bit. I was fascinated by it.

RM: Did you ever see any mob figures or anything in any of those places?

VB: You know, they say that Al Sachs and Herb Tobman were mob. I never saw anything that backed that theory up. I was there at the Stardust the night that the gaming control board came in and locked them down for skimming and stuff like that, but I never saw it. I was never a part of it.

I mentioned before that Al Sachs had come down into the pit as soon as the gaming control board came in, and he told me he was going to have me taken out—security was going to take me out the back. I told him I wasn't leaving. He and I had a little bit of an argument, and I said, "I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm not going anywhere. I'm standing behind you 100%."

And all he told me was that my dad was going to kill him. [Laughter] But I finished my shift, and I wasn't doing anything wrong. I wasn't going to go, because I was friends with their family. Not to say friends; I was just acquaintances. I knew the family, and that was pretty much it. It wasn't like I went over for Sunday dinners or anything like that.

They say that Steve Wynn was mob. I don't know if I believe that or not. I know the Golden Nugget was a really nice little job. I loved working at the Golden Nugget.

RM: Did he own it at that time?

VB: Yes.

RM: So he was the one who rebuilt it? Oh, yes, you worked for Wynn at the Golden Nugget and Treasure Island and the Mirage. You hear different stories about Wynn. Somebody was telling me in an interview the other day, "Man, what a dynamic, nice guy." And then you hear the opposite.

VB: I think in his younger years, when he was really cocky and new to the business and all, he was, you know, a typical male. He had a lot of women around. I'm not saying he did anything, but he had a lot of things. As the years went on, his eyesight started going to hell and crap like that, but the guy is a wizard with gaming. You know, he's got a knack. He knows what

attracts them. You've got to keep a place beautiful to get the women in there. If the women are happy there, then the men are going to stay and gamble. The places are beautiful.

RM: You mean the women customers?

VB: Yes. If a woman walks in, and the place is clean and immaculate, and there's a little shopping to do, the guys are going to sit and play cards. It's all around the women. He is an absolute neat freak.

When I started at the Golden Nugget, you went in for an orientation, and they flat told you that if you were seen walking by a piece of paper on the floor, or you walked by a garbage can and there was an empty glass in there and you left it, you would be fired on the spot. And I saw it happen many times.

Steve Wynn is one of these people who, when he speaks, he's fascinating from the time he opens his mouth. He's just got that knack, you know, where you love to listen to him. I think he's an incredibly intelligent man.

RM: He knows how to build a hotel casino better than anybody.

VB: Yes, he does.

RM: The poor folks up at MGM Mirage, in my opinion, just really dropped the ball at City Center.

VB: When he sold out the Mirage to MGM, and it became MGM Mirage, it just lost its classiness.

RM: The one that didn't was Bellagio. It still has some pizzazz.

VB: Yes. But his places were always done to the best. And they were immaculate and clean. And, you know, they weren't trashy. I go into that Mirage now, and I just think, "Oh, my God, I got out of here when the going was good."

RM: Tell me some more about that concept: if you bring the women in, you'll bring the men.

VB: If a woman walks into a hotel or comes into an entryway and is greeted by a doorman, and it's nice, and you walk in and there are mirrors, and the place is beautiful when you check in, then she sees that. When you walk up to a registration desk, there are all these little gift shops, so then you have a little bit of shopping to do. They get up in the rooms, the rooms are beautiful, but they're dictated toward women. You know: big mirrors, big bathrooms.

They like the beauty of a room. You know, if their husbands are going to go down and sit and play cards all night long, they're not going to want to be sleeping in some craphole someplace. They want a beautiful place. They want a place they can go get their hair done, a massage. Take care of themselves, get pampered. But it's all got to be through a woman's eye,

and there's not a prettier woman in the world than Elaine Wynn. I mean, she's stunningly beautiful.

Shadow Creek, the golf course— there's another perfect example. The design of that golf course is just immaculate. Immaculate. I got a T-shirt from them one time.

But, you know, that's the kind of class he brings and he draws. I loved working for him. Once it turned over and it turned to MGM—you have to like and respect the people you work for. If you think you've got some idiot that you're working for who treats you like you're lower down the food chain, you tend not to have respect for them. Now, dealers are a dime a dozen, I'm here to tell you.

RM: They are?

VB: Oh, yes, especially now. A dealer now, to get hired, has to know every game, and they have got more funky fun games like three-card poker and goofy games like that. But for you to find a good dealer who can deal baccarat, roulette, and the major craps, high-limit 21, you know, is hard. It's hard to find somebody that can do that. It takes a lot of training. You have got to have some really good references. You don't have to have so much juice anymore, because 95 percent of the time they demand a drug test. If you can pass a drug test, you know—drugs are real prominent down there.

RM: Yes. Tell me about the changes in dealing from when you went in. You could hold on to high rollers at your table, because you interacted with them, but now is it taboo to interact?

VB: No, you still can. A lot of the places are getting away from having the American dealers in there, because they can speak the language, and they have more of a tendency to get—I'm not going to say "mouthy"—but, you know, they would much rather you have a high-limit game going on, no conversation. And a lot of the times you're going to get that, because the person who you're dealing to is probably going to be Oriental or from some foreign country. And they just really don't promote that. They don't want that one-on-one stuff.

RM: Does that make it harder, then, to hold the customers, the high rollers, like you held them at your table?

VB: It probably would be, but I was fearless. If I've got something I want to say, I'm not going to change my personality just because you're betting \$15,000 a hand or whatever. You're still human. You know, I can read people pretty well. If they walk up, and they want to talk, you can read it right away. If they just want to sit and play cards, then you just shut up, dummy up, and deal the game.

Also, when you get a couple of players on the game, and then somebody comes up, and they're a little different than the people you already have on the game, I always thought it was a courtesy to tell the people that are playing, "I know this player. If you don't want him to be real crazy, if you can't handle it, I'll suggest he go to another table." They respect that.

RM: You mean the crazy guy? You suggest he go?

VB: Yes. You know, "If you're coming over here to have fun and get crazy, this isn't going to be the table for you."

RM: You tell them that?

VB: Absolutely. It's a courtesy to them, and it's a courtesy to the other guy, because then they're going to get mad at each other. You know, you don't need that aggravation. It's not the only table in Vegas.

RM: What do you do if you've got a couple of people that don't want to talk? Just dummy up and deal, as you said?

VB: That's it.

RM: But then you've got a couple who like the interaction. How do you handle that?

VB: Very quiet.

RM: You just don't interact?

VB: You do to a certain extent.

RM: Oh, you reduce it? Kind of split the difference?

VB: Right. You're more considerate. Where you normally would go ahead and lip off, you don't. Wish them the best of luck, and you're just the dealer.

RM: How do you see the future of the Mizpah?

VB: I don't know what kind of condition it's in. I don't know what it would take to get that open again. But if it were to open again with live gaming, I would go down there and deal in a heartbeat. Absolutely. The money might not be as good now. I mean, it's not going to be a money-making proposition, I don't think, in this town. But it's just the fascination and the fact that I love to deal 21. I like it. I did. I really did.

I felt like I was on stage. And this was going to be your show for the night. You can either have a good show, or you can have a bad show, whatever. You had control of whatever was in front of you. However you handle it, you are the bomb.

But I would go back to work down there. I think if they had live gaming it would be good. But you can't be afraid of your wins and your losses. You can't be afraid to lose. Nobody's going to always win; it's just the balance. I think if the Mizpah does come back, I think it would be a good thing. Have you heard anything on how much work needs to be done in there?

RM: I haven't heard, no.

VB: I think that a lot of it is finding good people. It's hard to find help here.  
[Speaking of good people,] let me introduce you. This is Vince Holmsten. This is Bob McCracken. Bob's doing an article on my dad and stuff. Vince just graduated from high school here with honors. He's going to medical school; he's going to school first up in Seattle.

RM: That's wonderful. Congratulations.

VB: He works for me part time here, and he works up at the hospital. So he helps me out.

RM: Another successful Tonopah student.

VB: Yes. The ones who are willing and have the desire and the passion to do something, I'm always there to help them out.

RM: That's wonderful. That's one of the reasons we want to put you in the book. You're an amazing woman.

VB: Are you serious?

RM: Yes, I am. I talked to Joni about it, and she liked the idea.

VB: I wish—and it was my brother who brought this up to me—that I would've had a place like this, or somebody like me, here in town when I was growing up. You know, kids come in here, they can talk to me, they tell me everything, and it goes nowhere. Unless I think it's like a life-endangering thing—then maybe. But if they just need advice, what to do, it never leaves the place.

RM: No. I can see that you're a treasure in the community. I really can.

VB: I don't know if I'm a treasure or not.

RM: Well, I think you are. Looking back on your dealing career, which of the places where you dealt leaves you with the best memories and the best sense of satisfaction? Or is that a fair question?

VB: No, it is. The satisfaction part of it comes in where my goal was to get to the Mirage. Okay, so I got to the Mirage, so that was a satisfaction. I got there. Where I had the most fun and learned the most was the Nugget.

RM: When you were beginning?

VB: No, I had been in it for a while when I got in there.

RM: But you really learned there at the Nugget?



VB: Yes, I had a good rapport with the upper management, which would be the shift managers and the pit managers. I learned a lot from them. They taught me a lot. They weren't Strip people, so they didn't think they walked on water.

There was a guy down there that had worked at the Golden Nugget since it opened up, so he'd been there for 50 years. This guy could deal roulette better than any dealer in Las Vegas. At the age of—whatever the hell he was, 79—he retired. And he's still kicking. I look at those kind of people, because I like to learn. I learned a lot from them. "Okay, show me. Show me." And they were always willing to help out. Even nowadays I have a guy who is a shift boss down there that I talk to off and on, and he said, "Please come back to work for me." At the Nugget.

I said, "God, haven't you had enough, you know? Enough headaches?"

He was like, "Yeah, but you were the funnest."

RM: He still says that. Wow, what a compliment.

VB: It was. And he said, "I could leave any game with you on it and know everything was going to be okay." When you hear that from somebody who's been in the business for that long . . .

RM: What a thing. What I would like to do, as we get into the letters, and also into transcribing this, I'd like to maybe come back and talk some more, because I find it very personally satisfying to learn these things.

VB: It seems really strange, because I have never opened up to anybody like I have to you in these talks. No, you know more about me than anybody here in town.

RM: Well, again, everything you've said here is confidential, and nothing will go out to the wide world until you have approved it. I would only use anything you say in this novel—and of course I wouldn't mention your name or anything—with your permission.

VB: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I have got nothing to hide. You know, like you say—one of the amazing people—you know I've been through it all. You know, I grew up here. I grew up in the political eye. I was, like, everybody's freaking nightmare around here. Anybody said it was black, I was going to argue it was white, no matter what you said. And I pissed a lot of people off before I left. When I left town I had a lot of enemies.

When I sobered up I still stayed in Vegas. I took care of myself. And when I came back here, I knew I was going to have a large hurdle to jump. Because some people won't forget. They're going to remember the good, bad, and the ugly, and I may not remember it all, but some of it will be true, and some of it won't. But I can't change the past.

RM: Well, like I said, I wouldn't just say that to somebody, I think you are a treasure for the town. It gives me a lot of pleasure to see you with these kids here, because my daughter was one of these kids.

VB: I love these kids. I would much rather have this place packed with kids than adults. Here's another thing that amazes me: I have hated being around women all my life. I mean, my masseuse here was the bully of my life from kindergarten. When my cousin Cindy came to me and said, "I got a masseuse for us, Kathy Quas," I wanted to throw her off the deck out there.

I was like, "You're out of your mind. I hate her."

And she was like, "You know, you've got to let a lot of things go." And I have always stayed away from women, because they are very jealous. They're back-stabbing, you know? So here I go off and open up a business . . .

RM: For women.

VB: Yes, for women. Jesus Christ. Not only the clients are crazy, but so are the employees, you know? But I have a good crew that works in here now. I rent it out, and they take care of themselves. I'm not here to baby-sit them. And I'm always here for kids. I mean, I'm only just a phone call away, no matter what they've got going on.

RM: That's really cool. I admire what you do. And thank you for talking with me; this has been great.

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