

An Interview with  
MARGARET A.  
JONES

An Oral History conducted and edited by  
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah  
1990

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Margaret Jones  
1990

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## PREFACE

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

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

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

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Jodie Hanson, Alice Levine, Mike Green, Cynthia Tremblay, and Jean Stoess. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Jodie Hanson, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Shena Salzmann shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tam King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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--Robert D. McCracken  
Tonopah, Nevada  
1990

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

The great mining bosoms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands. A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

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

Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each as 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 1,000 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived. The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—R.D.M.



This is Robert McCracken talking to Margaret Jones at her home in Gabbs, Nevada, April 16, 1990.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: Margaret, to start things off why don't you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate.

MJ: Margaret Ruth Alexander.

RM: And when and where were you born?

MJ: I was born June 3, 1915, in Cutler, Illinois.

RM: Where is Cutler?

MJ: It's in southern Illinois, about 120 miles east and south of St. Louis.

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

MJ: Maude Hogue.

RM: And do you know when she was born and where?

MJ: She was born November 4, 1888, in Cutler, Illinois.

RM: And how about your father? What was his name?

MJ: My father was Thomas F. Alexander and he died in the flu epidemic in 1918 when I was 2-1/2.

RM: And when and where was he born?

MJ: He was born 2 years before my mother, 1886, in Cutler, Illinois.

RM: What was your father's occupation?

MJ: He was a farmer.

RM: Did he have his own farm?

MJ: No. He worked for his father.

RM: What kind of a farm was it?

MJ: Well, they had some dairy cattle; I don't know what they grew in Illinois. We left there when I was about 2.

RM: Did you? I wanted to ask you what your mother's father's occupation was.

MJ: He was a farmer.

RM: I assume your mother and father met in Cutler?

MJ: Yes.

RM: And so then they got married and when you were 2 you left?

MJ: They came to southern Idaho. They came out in the spring and my father died in December.

RM: Is that right? What brought them to Idaho?

MJ: Well, my mother's parents and her family had all moved to Idaho. My grandfather homesteaded in southern Idaho - Jerome County.

RM: Were you the only child she had then?

MJ: I was the only child.

RM: And what did she do when her husband died?

MJ: Well, she worked for people and she remarried when I was 6.

RM: What was the name of the man she married then?

MJ: Joe Metcalf.

RM: Was he from Idaho?

MJ: No. He was formerly from Wisconsin but he had moved to Idaho and he had a daughter whose mother had died when she was born. Lorraine was 4. And then they had a son, so I have a step-sister and a half-brother.

RM: And where did you grow up then?

MJ: I grew up in southern Idaho.

PM: What was Metcalf's occupation?

MJ: He was a rural letter carrier.

RM: And where did you go to school?

MJ: In Eden, Idaho. I went all through the eighth grade and then through high school and then I went 2 years to Pocatello when it was the southern branch of the state university. It was a junior college at that time.

RM: What did you study?

MJ: Business administration.

RM: What did you do when you graduated from there?

MJ: Well, I was married the fall after I graduated

.

RM: And who did you marry?

MJ: I married Delmar M. Jones from Durango, Colorado.

RM: How did you happen to meet him?

MJ: I had met him when they were in Idaho visiting. His parents were born in or around Cutler, the same place where all my family came from. And then we moved to Durango, Colorado.

RM: How long did you live in Durango?

MJ: Well, not very long. My husband had a job in Silverton, which is north of Durango.

RM: Yes; I know that country. I used to live in Ouray.

MJ: We were married in October and he went up to Silverton in February of 1935 and we lived there for 7 years.

RM: Was he a miner?

MJ: Yes. He was a metallurgist at the Old Hundred.

RM: Was that a big mine there?

MJ: Yes.

RM: My dad used to work at the Treasury Tunnel. I don't know if you know that one.

MJ: Yes, I do.

RM: Describe a little bit about life in Silverton.

NJ: Well, the winters were pretty rough. I didn't seem to mind that too much when I was there, but I wouldn't want to go back. It used to be 50 below zero and we would have 15 feet of snow on the level and had winter 9 months out of the year. My birthday's in June and it snowed every year but one that we were there on my birthday. But July and August were pretty nice there.

RM: [chuckles]

MJ: Then it [always] started snowing again in September and we were snowed in a lot.

RM: You got more snow there than Idaho, didn't you?

MJ: Yes, by far.

RM: Did you like it there?

MJ: Well, I didn't mind it, and my husband liked his job. My 2 older children were born in Durango. Then we came to Nevada - and my husband had always talked about Nevada. He had been out here. His father was a mortician and he had lived out here for several years when he was a child and he loved Nevada. So we always talked about Nevada and we came out in 1941 just at the beginning of the war. We were over in Copper Canyon, which is south of Battle Mountain. Then when they started developing this project, as soon as they were ready for him my husband came over. They were still building the mill. The housing wasn't finished or anything when we came.

RM: What were you doing at Copper Canyon?

MJ: We were working for Anaconda. He was in the lab at Copper Canyon.

RM: Did Anaconda have a big mine there?

MJ: Yes.

RM: How did Basic Magnesium find out about him?

MJ: Oh, he came over. Our daughter was ready to start to school and she would have to ride the bus. [The kids where we lived] were the first ones picked up in the morning and they were the last ones dropped off at night. She would leave at 6:30 and not get home till 5:30 or 6:00

and we thought that was too much for a little girl. And the other reason was that we were expecting another child and we didn't have very much room.

RM: So you were looking around for some place to go and you heard about this operation [Basic Magnesium] here?

MJ: Yes. So my husband and his brother came over and they both got on.

RM: Did your husband get on as a metallurgist?

MJ: No. He was in the mill at that time.

RM: What did his brother get on as?

MJ: I think he was a mechanic.

RM: What was his name?

MJ: Howard Jones.

RM: What did you think when you moved from Copper Canyon?

MJ: Well, I thought Copper Canyon was about as bad as you could get but I decided Gabbs was worse.

RM: [chuckles]

MJ: And here I am, still here.

RM: Why was Gabbs so bad?

MJ: Well, I was 6 months pregnant and it was hot as it could be that day. The road wasn't paved and it was washboardy and when we got here there wasn't a tree or a bit of grass or a bird or anything. And people were living in shacks, in tents, whatever. And the water wasn't piped into the house. We got a government trailer but it didn't have any bathroom in it. We had to go a block down the street to the washhouse and take a shower and go to the bathroom and all those things.

RM: A block away?

MJ: A block away. And I was getting up quite a bit in the night in those days.

RM: So you had to go clear down there, or did you get a chamber pot?

MJ: No, I didn't. It was bad. I just thought, oh, I had come to the end of existence. But the people were really nice. Everybody was in the same fix. We got here in May and these houses were finished - the houses here and down below - that fall of 1943.

RM: This is in lower Gabbs.

MJ: Lower Gabbs, yes. The government built this part of Gabbs. The other part - the upper part - was just built by other people. That's North Gabbs and this is South Gabbs.

RM: So you started off in a trailer. Where was the trailer located?

MJ: Way down below upper Gabbs. Way down toward the golf course. They just scooped off some sagebrush and plopped the trailers down.

RM: Were they nice? I mean, aside from the fact that they didn't have plumbing?

MJ: No. And my husband was on shift work when we first came. We had 2 children, 6 and 5, and it was awful. It was hot and there was no air conditioning and no shade and the water was hot.

RM: It came out of the ground hot, didn't it?

MJ: They didn't have any cooling towers built as yet.

RM: What went through your mind under these circumstances?

MJ: Well, I thought, "I hope I don't have to stay here very long." But after we got moved into one of the houses and settled, things were better.

RM: How long were you in the trailer?

MJ: Oh, we weren't in there too long. We were there from May until about the end of July 1943, and then the housing was ready.

RM: And then you moved into a house?

MJ: Well, it was an apartment. We moved in down below in one of the apartments. They had 212 units . . . part of them went to Tonopah when they shut down and part of them went to Fallon and part of them to Reno. They were 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments.

RM: Could you describe the unit that you lived in?

MJ: We had a 3-bedroom apartment and they were furnished - not elegantly, but adequately. And they had showers - no bathtub but showers - and kerosene stoves.

RM: Did you have to pump them like a camp stove?

MJ: No. They were like a regular range except they were kerosene.

RM: Did they smell?

MJ: Yes. And you had to go out and get the kerosene out of the barrel out in front and it in them and the water heater (the stoves and the water heaters were kerosene). And then we had fuel oil heaters and we had to also get that and fill them.

RM: Could you describe the furnishings in your unit?

MJ: There was a table and chairs and beds and a couch and 2 chairs in the living room and a lamp. And that was just about it. And an electric refrigerator.

RM: And where did you do your laundry?

MJ: I had a washing machine. There was no place for it in the trailer, but I had it so we installed it [in the apartment].

RM: What did you think when you moved into the apartment?

MJ: Well, I was a little happier but it was still not very good because the floors were covered with battleship linoleum and it was a dark red and every footprint showed. I was always with a dust mop in my hand. With 2 children you would.

RM: What is battleship linoleum?

MJ: It's just a plain flat color - shining - and it was dark, kind of a maroon. But it was decent and clean and new and better than having nothing on the floor.

RM: Were they one-story buildings?

MJ: Yes.

RM: And how many children did you have by then?

MJ: I had 2 and then my youngest son was born the 11th of August, 1943, after we came.

RM: Was your baby the first one born in Gabbs?

MJ: He was the first one that the doctor was really pleased about. The first one was stillborn. The captain of the guards and his wife had a stillborn baby. Then we had friends who had come

over from Copper Canyon, and she was expecting in September. Well, neither of us had been to a doctor and we didn't even have a doctor here when we came, but in July a Dr. John Bibb came and told us that he would deliver our babies. So we were supposed to go up and see him and give him our history, etc., in a couple of weeks. Well, she went into labor and went in a month early, before I did. I was expecting in August and she in September. And she had twins. They were 8 months and one of them didn't make it and the other weighed 4 pounds and he was still in the hospital when I went in to have mine. And my soul weighed 9 pounds 10 ounces. The doctor came in the next morning with tears - literally tears - running down his face. He said, "Mrs. Jones, you've restored my faith. I wasn't going to deliver any more babies. I've had such bum luck. But," he said, "you've restored my faith."

RM: Babies then were bigger, weren't they?

MJ: My other 2 only weighed 6 pounds. I don't know what happened to him. He's still big.

RM: You didn't really have any prenatal care, did you?

MJ: No.

RM: Was that typical for women in rural Nevada in those days?

MJ: Yes. That was the only way it could be. There wasn't a doctor they didn't have one here or out at Copper Canyon.

RM: How many people were living in Copper Canyon?

MJ: Oh, a lot of them rode the bus out from Battle Mountain, but I would say there were probably 50 or more who lived out in camp - about 12 families.

RM: What were your circumstances there? Did you have a house?

MJ: We had a little apartment and it was little. The bed came down out of the wall in the living room and the children slept on a cot in the kitchen and things like that. That's one reason we left there. We liked the job and the people but the circumstances were bad. Then when we got here I thought we'd stepped out of the frying pan into the fire.

RM: And then what happened?

MJ: Well, then my brother had gone into the service so my mother and stepfather decided they'd come down here and spend the winter because it's so much nicer than the winters they have in Idaho. And the company needed help so badly here; anybody could get on. If they could breathe, they could work.

So they came down to spend the winter and the people at the housing authority where we were living (it was federal public housing, but it was under the supervision of Nye County)



had just been heckling me to go to work. I said, "I can't. I have a tiny baby and 2 other children and I just can't do it."

When my mother came down she said, "Well, go ahead and go to work. I'll take care of the kids." So she did and I went to work for the Nye County Housing Authority. And I had charge of all the apartments down there.

RM: All 212 of them?

MJ:: Yes.

RM: Did your mother and father . . .

MJ:: They lived in a one-bedroom apartment next door to us.

RM: That made it real convenient, didn't it?

MJ: Real convenient. Then when my mother was leaving I told them, "I'm just going to have to quit because I can't work." So they cut a door through to the apartment where my mother had been living and put the office in there so I could still work. That's how badly they needed help. So I worked for them until they closed the apartments and then they moved those to Tonopah. Then I went down there and I was in charge of Butler Terrace in Tonopah.

RM: When did they move those apartments out?

MJ: They moved them out in '45. I was in Tonopah when the war ended.

RM: So they moved them out before the war was over?

MJ: Oh, yes.

RM: They shut down Basic before the war was over, didn't they?

MJ: Yes. They did. So I was down there [when the war ended] and that was a wild town that night, I'll tell you.

RM: What about your husband? Where was he?

MJ: He worked out on the base at Tonopah after they closed everything down here. So I went on down and still had charge of the apartments down there.

RM: How many units did they move to Tonopah?

MJ: They moved 40, I think, to Tonopah.

RM: Where did they move them?

MJ: It's where the football field is now. You know where Mizpah Terrace is. It's up on the hill across the highway; they moved some over there. I think there were 24 units over there. Then they moved about 40 units to where the football field is now.

RM: Did they tear them down later?

MJ: Yes. And the 24 over across the street at Butler Terrace are still there as far as I know.

RM: And you were in charge of all 64 units?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Did you live in one of the apartments?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Describe life in Gabbs during the war when you were living there in the apartment.

MJ: Well, we all enjoyed it; everybody was friendly. At one time there were about 5000 people here during construction and all that. Of course they had a whole crew of guards and a whole crew of firemen around the clock, as well as the people who worked up there. So during construction and right after the mill opened, there were about 5000 people here.

RM: When did the mill open, do you recall?

MJ: I was trying to think today and I just can't remember for sure. Marge [Crabill] came in the fall of '42 and I came in the spring of '43. The mill started very shortly after that - I would say it started in the fall of '43.

RM: I see. And then once it started the population dropped off a little?

MJ: Yes, a little.

RM: Was there a newspaper in Gabbs at that time?

MJ: Basic has put out a newspaper at various times and then there was a local group here called the Booster Club that put out the Booster News for a great many years. Then there was a fellow here for a while who had a printing press and put out a paper, the Gabbs Valley News, but that didn't last too long.

RM: Could you tell me some more about life here during the war?

MJ: Well, of course it was during the war and nobody had tires or, gasoline. We all had A-cards - that's all we had.

RM: Now what was an A-card?

MJ: That was the very least gasoline you could get. And you couldn't buy tires. So, if anybody went to town it was just a dire emergency, you know. And the men, even to go to work, had to pool their rides. It's 2 miles up to the plant.

RM: And the company didn't give them a ride?

MJ: No. And you had to make your own good times, which they did. We put on plays, we had dances all the time and the marine band from Hawthorne would come over and play. We'd have them over at the old gym. They'd blow us out of there almost with their music. But it was fun, you know. And we had card parties, we had minstrel shows, we had potluck dinners - we just had a really good time.

RM: It sounds like a good life.

MJ: It was. One of the men who had been here for a long time, when he was leaving a few years ago, said, "Gabbs isn't like it used to be." And I said, "No, it really isn't." He said, "You know how everybody used to go to the store and they'd go to the bar to visit and everything on Saturday night. We'd do our shopping and leave our groceries in the car. Never ever think of locking. We never ever locked a house or anything." And he said, "Last Saturday night, I bought a bag of groceries and I put it in my pickup and I went into the bar and visited a little while. Come out and my groceries were gone." We would go to Reno for the weekend and never ever think of locking the house.

RM: Why has it changed so, do you think?

MJ: I really don't know. It's so different. We had a transient population then, too, but things have changed.

RM: But they didn't steal, did they?

MJ: No. They didn't. Take these cabins out in the hills, for instance. If you were hungry or broke down or something you could get food out of there and all they'd expect you to do was replace it. Now they just strip them. There aren't even boards or windows or anything else left. To me, it's really too bad.

And the school kids used to all stick together and keep track of each other. (My son was out here this weekend - he spent the weekend with me. He just loves Gabbs, and comes back every chance he gets.) But the kids now don't do that.

RM: So the children who grew up here in the old days keep track of each other.

MJ: Are we still have reunions and get together.

RM: And now they don't?

MJ: No.

RM: Wow. And as you say, they were as transient then as now.

MJ: Right. But they had a feeling that they would really stick up for each other and really remember each other.

## CHAPTER TWO

RM: Tell me some more about life in Gabbs during the war.

MJ: Well, the only club in town in those days was the Gabbs Women's Club. And that started in 1942 when some women had a Christmas party. They started a club and they called it the Women's Relief Club, I think. They rolled bandages and knit and did things for the war effort. But they very soon changed their name to the Gabbs Women's Club and that club is still in existence. And we started the library in 1943.

RM: Why don't you tell me about the starting of the library. I understand you know a lot about it.

MJ: Yes, I helped start it. It was started in 1943 with about 150 books which were given to us by the USO Club in Reno. We've had many, many homes but the company finally gave us the building where we are right now.

RM: Could you tell me where the building is?

MJ: It's right across from the school at 602 3rd Street.

RM: It's across the street from the school?

MJ: Yes, from the new gymnasium. It used to be the townsite office. They collected the rents and the water and lights and everything there. They gave us that building and we were really outgrowing it, so when Mrs. Gates - Barbara Gates, who was the chairman of the library board - passed away (she was the wife of the manager here), we received a lot of memorial donations. And rather than buy books we thought, "Well, we'll see if we can build a room on it." So we started a room. We had volunteer help. Basic Incorporated helped us and everybody pitched in and we built this room and we thought, "Well, now that's going to do us for a long, long time."

But it didn't for very long - we soon got it filled up, too. And all this time all the help at the library was volunteer and we served dinners to raise money to buy books and heat the place and etc. So then in '81 or '82, Mr. Joaquin Johnson - he was the principal and [eventually became] the superintendent of Nye County schools - called me one day and said, "Margaret, could I come up and talk to the Women's Club?" He said, "I have a proposition for you. I'm not even going to tell you what it is 'cause you might not let me come."

And I said, "Sure." I told him when our meeting was and he came up. Well, he asked if we would provide library services for the school. We would enter into a contract with the school district and they would give us so much per student at a certain date. So we've been doing that since. We were the first library in the county to do that.

RM: That was a smart thing to do.

MJ: Yes, it was. We've had a very good relationship and it's been very helpful.

RM: It strengthens the library, doesn't it?

MJ: And the school got accredited - they were not able to before. They had very few books, really, and they were not able to get accredited because of that. So they it what books they had with ours and it went on like that. I've been chairman of the Library Board since Mrs. Gates left.

RM: When was that now?

MJ: Seventy-one.

RM: So you've been chairman almost 20 years?

MJ: Yes. And as I say, then we were outgrowing [our space]. So in 1980, when the Fleischmann Foundation grants were given away, the man from the State Library said to me, "Why don't you apply for a Fleischmann Grant?" Well, it was at Christmastime. I was up to my neck in stuff and I didn't know how to apply for a grant - I'd never done it. So I got with the fire department because they were applying for a grant for the fire department here. I finally got this grant written up and sent it in. And I didn't hear and didn't hear so I thought, "Well, that's down the drain."

So, I think it was in July one day, I was at work and this man called me. I can't remember his name, but he was in charge of the Fleischmann's money. He said, "We're very interested in your application. But," he said, "you are a private library and we cannot give it to you. Is there any way that you could get the city or the county or somebody to take you under their wing?"

I said, "I'll have to see." I said, "I don't know. These Women's Club members are pretty proud of their library and I don't know."

I talked first to the mayor and he said, "Well, we'll do whatever we can for you, Margaret." He said, "However you want it."

Then I talked to the Women's Club members and I said, "We cannot get any state grants. We can't get this Fleischmann Grant. We just are not able to get a grant as long as we're a private library. So," I said, "if the city would take us under their wing, they've told me that we could still have a library board. We could still run the library. We could still raise money. We could still buy books for the library. All these things. And the books and everything would still belong to us but we'd be under the city." So they voted to do it. I called the man and told him and we got the money.

RM: Is that right? How much did you get?

MJ: We applied for \$89,000 and we got \$76,000.

RM: Wow.

MJ: And we doubled the size of our library. When you come down the street, it's a white building just below the fire station.

RM: So you used the money for a building?

MJ: A building. We've got books. You can't believe the books we have. We've had a lot of memorial books given and we've just worked hard to get what we have.

RM: That's wonderful. How many volumes do you have?

MJ: We have about 17,000. We have a much better library than Tonopah has, or anyplace in Nye County. We had a lady from Sacramento who came in and made a survey of all the libraries in Nevada a few years ago. She wrote up a report and said that Gabbs has the finest library for its size of any town in Nevada.

RM: That's a real tribute to you, isn't it, because you've been chairman all these years.

MJ: We've really worked. I couldn't have done it, you know, without the help of everybody. But it's really dear to my heart. And all these years (of course we were moving around until 1961 when we moved down there) I've wanted a flagpole at the library. And we finally got a flagpole just very recently. We fly both the Nevada flag and the United States flag and we're real happy about that.

RM: That's great. Do you run it every day?

MJ: Yes. We have 2 librarians who run it. They aren't trained librarians, but they're 2 ladies who work and we pay them with the money we get from the school district.

RM: I see. So you still have that relationship with the school district? Are you happy with it?

MJ: Very happy. And they're happy; it's been a very good thing.

RM: So when the kids want to use the library they just come across the street and there it is.

MJ: That's right. The classes have certain times each week that they come over. And the teacher usually comes with them. The whole class comes and they check out books and we've got a program now where they read stories to the younger grades and act out things like that.

RM: I don't understand why Tonopah didn't apply for some of that Fleischmann money and I don't understand why they didn't enter into a relationship with the school like . . .

MJ: . . . Pahrump and Beatty and Amargosa and Round Mountain have that relationship.

RM: Yes. Tonopah's the only one that doesn't. I don't know why they don't.

MJ: And of course the school district has so much money to spend every year for books, so those all come to the library. They're stamped Nye County School District and ours are stamped Gabbs Community Library. But it's really worked out well and we've just been very happy with it.

RM: What other kinds of activities has the Women's Club been involved in over the years?

MJ: Well, the library's been the main thing. But in the early days that was the only organization. We would have the Easter egg hunt, we'd have the Christmas party for the kids, we'd have the Fourth of July celebration - we'd have everything that there was. And the teacher's reception every fall; we still do that. The PTA said, "No, you've done it for so many years and you do such a good job." Over the years we've collected the things - we have a silver tea service and china cups and saucers and silver plates and things to serve on. So the PTA said, "You just go ahead and do it," so we have the teacher's reception.

RM: That's a way of meeting the teachers?

MJ: Yes. It's for the whole community.

RM That's a good idea.

MJ: So we still have that. But other than that we got out of all the other things. the PTA has the Christmas party now for the kids and the VFW has the Easter egg hunt. But we still have a disaster fund if somebody has a fire or needs monetary assistance.

RM: How many members did you have back in the early days?

MI: In the early days we used to have, I'd say, 75. Now we have probably 25 or 30 at the most.

RM: Who were the members in the old days? Did they tend to be younger women?

MJ: Yes, they did. And we can't get the younger ones interested now. RM: Why aren't the younger ones interested, do you think?

MI: I think there's just too many other things [to do]. With TV and the videos and all those things they just don't want to take time.

RM: Do you think the videos and the TV and everything are undermining social life?

MJ: I think they have here. There isn't too much here and you have to sort of make your entertainment. And they just get so wound up in their navies - they can rent them at the store.



RM: What other things can you say about life in the beginnings of Gabbs? MJ: In the beginning, we had a movie theater here. It was only open on the weekends as I remember. We had a cleaning establishment.

RM: Where was the movie theater located?

MJ: It was uptown between where the city hall and the cafe are now. That building was moved to Hawthorne. I worked for many years for Gordon and Lindsay Smith, who owned most of the buildings and the store and all that uptown.

RM: They built all of that when Gabbs started, didn't they?

MJ: They moved it over here from Silver Peak.

RM: Who were the Smith brothers?

MJ: They were from Canada. Northern Trucking was one of their business. They had a store and some housing in Silver Peak and then they moved it up here. Right after I went to work for them they bought the El Capitan in Hawthorne and had that for many years.

RM: When did you go to work for them?

MJ: I went to work for them in 1956.

RM So it was after you'd done the housing management work.

MJ: Yes.

RM: OK. When they moved the housing to Tonopah you moved with it. Would you discuss what Tonopah was like during this period?

MJ: It was booming. People were living in anything - even just sheds in the backyard. People were cleaning them out and other people were renting them and living there. It was just really booming.

RM: Was it wild?

MJ: Pretty wild.

RM: How wad you describe it?

MJ: Well, the army air corps guys were always around. The night that the war was over, oh they got wild. In the middle of the night I heard this knocking on my door and my husband wasn't home that night for some reason. I got up to go to the door and before I could get there (there

was a glass in it) the glass got smashed. And I said, "Who is that? Who is that?" It was the young fellow who had the apartment down below me and he had been out celebrating and he thought his wife wasn't going to let him in and he got mad and broke the door. He was there first thing the next morning to pay me for the window in the door. And he felt terrible. But it scared me to death.

RM: He thought his wife was in your apartment?

MJ: Well, he thought that was his apartment.

RM: Oh, I see. He was confused.

MJ: He was confused. They lived just one row below me.

RM How long did you stay there in Tonopah?

MJ: I stayed there until the spring of '47.

PM: Managing the apartments?

MJ: And we closed than down. Just the personnel at the base lived in the apartments after the war.

One night in the middle of the night I had a knock on my door and I went to the door. I didn't unlock the door or open it, I just said, "Who is it?"

He said, "Can you tell me if a Colonel Dixon lives here?"

And I said, "He did, but he's moved out to the base."

And he said, "Well, I was hoping to see him. I'm Colonel Lawton and I just wanted to see him. He's an old buddy of mine."

I didn't think any more about it and I went back to bed. Next morning I saw Colonel Dixon in the bank and he said, "Do you know who knocked on your door last night?"

I said, "Well, I think he said his name was Colonel Lawton."

He said, "He was the man that flew the plane in 'Sixty Seconds over Tokyo.'" And I want to thank you," he said, "for telling him where I was, 'cause otherwise I'd have missed him."

And I said, "Gee, I didn't even open the door."

RM: That's interesting. Did you have any other interesting encounters or experiences?

MJ: No, not really. It was just kind of run of the mill. One thing I noticed - most of the military people down in Tonopah were from the east and they couldn't say enough bad things about Tonopah. They thought it was terrible. And I kept saying to them, "Just don't knock it. You'll wish you were back here when you get home." And I have seen several of them that have come back.

RM: That's right. Once you get used to these wide open spaces it's hard to take the east, isn't it?

MJ: Right.

RM: What did you do after you left the housing unit in '47?

MJ: Then we went up to Idaho. We were up there for a while. And my husband didn't like it at all because he had to work away from home. He worked in Montana for a year and he worked in Wyoming and there just wasn't any mining. He even had a lease part of that time up near Ketchum, Idaho, but he wasn't very happy up there. He had a chance to go to work out of Reno for this company and it was through a mutual friend. At that time I was working at the county courthouse in Twin Falls - I was deputy auditor there. He came down and said, "Now, you're just going to have quit your job and sell the house and we'll live in Reno." Well, he hadn't been gone but a few days and he called me one night and said,

"You'll never guess where I am."

I said, "Well, I suppose you're in Reno."

And he said, "No." He said, "I'm in Gabbs. I went to work today." And I said, "What . . . 1" I just about had a fit.

He said, "Well, when I got down here, this was a promotion thing and I just didn't like the looks of it." (The job out of Reno.) So," he said, "I just told then, 'Thanks a lot, but no thanks.' So I came by on my way to Ely and I stopped in Gabbs to say hi to Pat," and a few of the other guys that he had known . . . (Pat Willard was the manager here for a long time.) And he said, "He just insisted that I go to work." Then he went on up to see the manager up at Sierra Magnesite - Bob Jones - and he wanted him to come to work up there. And Delmar said, "Well, I've already promised Pat that I'd go to work at Basic." [chuckles]

So he came up and moved us down. I still had my job in the courthouse - couldn't get rid of it. But he wanted our son to start school when it started in September so he came up and moved him down. When Ronald went over to enroll, the principal said to him, "Where were you born?"

He said, "In Gabbs, Nevada."

And he said, "No, I don't think you understand." He said, "Where were you born?"

And he said, "I was born in Gabbs."

And the principal got angry and he said, "Just don't get smart with me." He said, "I want to know where you were born."

He said, "I was born in Gabbs. Call my mother, she'll tell you."

RM: [chuckles] That was cute.

MJ: And when he was a senior the Gabbs football team took state that year.

RM: Is that right? What division were they playing in?

MJ: They were in B - 6-man football. They beat Owyhee for state, and he was the quarterback.

RM: Is that right? That's a really special thing for the town, isn't it, when that happens?

MJ: Yes.

RM: When your husband first come to Gabbs what was a day's pay for a miner or an operator or whatever?

MJ: Oh gee. I think around \$2.75 maybe or \$2 an hour. When I went to work at Basic as paymaster - that was 25 years ago - the laborers were getting \$2.25 an hour. So I don't know what it was. Maybe it was \$1.

RM What were you making with the Housing Authority?

MJ: I started out, I think, at \$325 and I got up to \$450 a month. And that was good wages.

RM: That was a lot of money then. And was your housing furnished?

MJ: Yes, it was.

RM: So your husband came back to Gabbs and got a job . . .

MJ: He started out as the mill clerk, and then he was in charge of the SRP, which is the special products refractories, and he was there until he retired.

RM: What does a mill clerk do?

MJ: He keeps track of the tonnages and the production and makes all the reports.

RM: Oh, I see. And then what was the refractory's special products?

MJ: That was the special things they made. For instance, they use the product from up here in the soles of Hush Puppies, they use it in cattle feed and they use it in sugar refining . . .

RM: Now what year was it that he came back?

MJ: Fifty-seven. We were gone about 12 years.

RM: How had Gabbs changed when you got back?

MJ: Well, a lot. But there were still quite a few people here. When I first went to work on the payroll, I had about 350 people.

RM: And what would you estimate was the payroll during the war?

MJ: I would say it was several thousand.

RM: Tell me about some of the changes that happened in the 12 years that you were gone.

MJ: Well, Gabbs had incorporated as a city.

RM: Originally it was owned by the government, wasn't it?

MJ: Yes, but they sold it to Basic Incorporated.

RM: And then what did Basic do?

MJ: Basic kept it. We just bought our houses about 20 years ago. We had to sign a paper that if we left or wanted to sell, we would give Basic first chance.

RM: So you were living in company housing all those years.

MJ: Yes. Uh-oh [A SIREN CAN BE HEARD].

RM: What is it?

MJ: Two is the ambulance.

RM: That's how they let them know if there's an ambulance.

MJ: Three. That's a water break. One's the fire, 2's the ambulance, 3's a water break and 4's a fire meeting.

RM: What does a water break mean?

MJ: There's a pipeline break someplace.

RM: So what does that do?

MJ: That means you won't have any water if you live in the wrong place. [chuckles]

RM: What are some more changes that you saw when you came back?

MJ: Well, course they had the new gymnasium. And that's the main gymnasium now - the old one is now the junior high. And there were more mobile homes. Otherwise it was pretty much the same. The people were still donating their time. When they sodded the football field all the fathers of the football players went out down there and did that. And downstairs under the gym they had a lot of space but it wasn't finished -the restrooms and showers and things were all that was finished. So the fathers poured the floor and fixed it all up so that now the whole thing is finished.

### CHAPTER THREE

RM: Margaret, you were going to tell me something about some planes that were saved.

MJ: Two planes were saved on our little air strip out here during the war. One was from the Tonopah air base and the other one was from Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho. I guess the plane from Gowen was actually lost. They didn't know where they were and they saw the lights and they started circling. So somebody turned on the lights and they [made a safe landing].

But the one from Tonopah . . . the lady who was the postmaster had the keys [for the lights] and nobody could find her and this plane kept circling and circling and circling and there was a dance going on over here. So the deputy sheriff came and asked us if we would all drive out to the airport, park around the strip and turn on our lights. We did that, and it was one of those huge B-24s. It ran off the runway and they had to dismantle it to take it out. But anyway that saved 4 or 5 boys' lives.

RM: Plus the plane.

MJ: Yes.

RM: That's an amazing story.

MJ: The one from Gowen field was not as big a plane and it landed on the air strip all right.

RM: And you didn't have to use your lights then.

MJ: No. But the lady who had the keys was at the movies and nobody could find her and of course she couldn't hear the plane, being in the movies. So the deputy just said, "Everybody get in your car and drive out to the airport and turn on your lights." It gives me goosebumps now when I think about that big old plane coming in and rumbling down the runway. And you knew he was going to run off because he was going too fast [and the plane was so huge].

RM: Was it concrete or was it just a dirt strip?

MJ: It was just a dirt strip.

RM: Did many planes land there?

MJ: Well, after that they kept the lights on. The county commissioners decided they'd better keep the lights on at night and they got somebody living out there.

RM: Where is the air field?

MJ: It's right out here in the flats to the north.

RM: So when the plane was flying over they saw lights from the town?

MJ: And from the plant, too. Apparently from their map or something they knew there was an air strip here.

RM: How did the townspeople know they wanted to land?

MJ: Well, because they kept circling.

RM: That's a dramatic story.

MJ: About every year one of the teachers asks Marge or me or both of us to come over to the school and tell the kids, because they can't fathom how it used to be here. This one kid just couldn't get over that story about the planes. Every time I'd see him he'd have another question to ask me about it. And he said, "You know, I think I'm going to write a story about that some day."

And I said, "I wish you would." I said, "I don't know the names of any of the boys. I don't even know for sure what kind of a plane [it was], but you could find out through Tonopah."

RM: Are there any other stories that you tell a lot?

MJ: Well, somebody found a little fawn one time up in the hills here and its mother had abandoned it. It was almost dead. It couldn't even walk, it was sob, weak. They brought it home and fed it and it was a pet for everybody in town. It just went everywhere. It'd just walk into the theater sometimes. And then one day somebody found its little hide in a garbage can. Everybody was so mad. They blamed a family that lived way down here at the edge of town . . . but everybody was so, mad. Oh, the kids loved it. It would just romp around and play.

And then I heard a story the other night about this veterinarian who found the little bear. Have you heard that on TV?

RM: No, I haven't heard that.

MJ: They're going to make him take it out and let it out in the wild. And the town is getting behind him; they want to keep it.

RM: Well, you heard the story of Hobby Revert and his wildcat, didn't you?

MJ: No.

RM: He found a little baby wildcat and made a pet out of it. And the BLM or somebody said, "Well, you can't have a wildcat as a pet because you can't make a pet out of them." And they confiscated it and took it to Las Vegas. So he took them to court and Bobby said, "I can prove that that cat is a pet."

And the judge said, "OK, prove it." So they put Hobby on one side of the courtroom and they put the guy with the cat on the other side of the roan and Bobby clapped his hands like that and the cat came and jumped in his arms. And the judge says, "That's it. Give him back his cat."

MJ: My son had one of those little desert foxes, and it was as tame as it could be. He would put it on a leash and lead it around and he'd go by a tree and it'd hike his leg just like a dog.

RM: Was it grown or was it still a pup?

MJ: He got it as a pup. But everybody was afraid of it. We had a hedge out in front and it could get through the hedge so he finally had to end up penning it and it would just walk around and around. He just couldn't take that so he finally took it out and let it go. But it was cute. It was a nice little pet.

RM: Did you want to explain a few things about the background of Gabbs?

MJ: The first post office for the community was called Toiyabe and was in operation from December 18, 1942, to June 1, 1943. Before that time the mail came "Toiyabe via Luning" and was distributed from the store. The name of the post office was changed to Gabbs in 1943, a name based upon the name of the valley in which the town is located, named for William Morse Gabb. He was a paleontologist to the topographical, geological and natural history survey of California from 1862 to 1865, and he classified the Cretaceous and Tertiary fossils found during that survey.

We are located 23 miles from Ichthyosaur State Park, a unique fossil area with a nice camping area - a great place to spend a quiet weekend.

Until the late '40s there were only 2 telephones in town, one at Basic Incorporated and one at the store. Messages for individuals were taken on the store phone and written on a large bulletin board for all to see. Needless to say, everyone went to the store each day to see if they had any messages or telephone numbers to call. When we were finally able to have telephones installed in air homes in the '50s, we had to dial the operator for a long distance number, and this continued until late 1960. We were the last town in the state to get direct dialing.

RM: Are there any other stories of town history that you might remember?

MJ: Oh, there've been a lot of crazy things happen. Do you remember Wild Horse Annie?

RM: Yes.

MJ: Well, she lived in North Gabbs. And she had long hair at that time - she could almost sit on it. And she had to go out of her house - she lived in a little shack uptown - and go down to the end of the block and stand there under the faucet to wash that long hair. She finally got it cut.

RM: She didn't have water in her house?



MJ: No.

RM: Was this when you first came to Gabbs?

MJ: Yes. She was here for a long time. In fact, she belonged to the Women's Club.

RM: Did you know her at all?

MJ: Yes, after she left she sent a Christmas card every year to the Women's Club and we would see her one in a while in Reno.

RM Do you remember her name?

MJ: Velma Johnston. She had had polio as a child and I think the left side of her neck was stiff and kind of [bent] over. She was a really nice lady.

RM When you came back to Gabbs in '57, did you still find it the same honest, friendly kind of community that you had left?

MJ: Yes, I did. And most all my friends . . . Marge was still here and the Smiths were all here and a lot of people were here then that I had known.

RM Were you glad to get back?

MJ: Oh, yes - after a few days I was. And my son just took to it like a duck to water. He hadn't been here 2 days till you couldn't have pulled him away. He just loved it.

RM: And where did you live when you came here?

MJ: Right here.

RM: So you moved into this house. It was a company house that was vacant?

MJ: Yes. And then the company let us buy it about 20 years ago.

RM: So you've been living in this house since '57?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Did you go to work when you came back?

MJ: I went to work for the Smith Brothers. I kept 7 sets of books for them. They had the Toiyabe Supply, which was a store, and they had the Gabbs Valley Inn, which was the hotel. It's where the cafe is now. They had the Toiyabe Bar, they had the Gabbs Valley Enterprises, which was

the housing. They had the El Capitan Mining Company out at the edge of Lodi Valley and the L&G Mining Company up near Grantsville.

RM: And those were their mines?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Were they big operations?

MJ: They made a lot on the tungsten mine - the El Capitan. They have a mill down here at the edge of town . . . we had 2 mills right in Gabbs running and the one out at Kaiser Mine.

RM: Which mills were in town at that time?

MJ: The El Capitan Mining Company and then Dougans.

RM: Dougans was tungsten too?

MJ: Yes.

RM: So there were 2 tungsten mills in town.

MJ: Yes.

RM: And what kind of mine was the one at Lodi?

MJ: I think that was gold and silver. They're going to start that up again, I understand.

RM: Oh, they are? Were there any other operations? For instance, was anything happening at Paradise Peak at that time?

MJ: No.

RM: What was Paradise Peak? Was it just prospect or was there anything there?

MJ: It was nothing.

RM: Was it an old camp or what?

MJ: This man here in town, Earl Wilson, had claims there. He was doing the assessment work and he thought it was something else. He didn't know there was gold and silver there. He kept it up for years but he had had polio as a child and he got very crippled and he just wasn't able to do the assessment work. So he gave that property to his brother-in-law, his wife's brother, and another young man who is a good friend of air son's that he went to school with. And you know

younger people, they just let things slide sometimes. Things got busy and they didn't keep up the assessment work or keep up the claims and . . .

RM: Somebody else filed on them?

MJ: Evidently. And that's where they're mining today.

RM: Think what those claims would be worth. What other mines were there operating in here?

MJ: Well, there was Standard Slag. They had the plant up above the Basic mill. They left in '61.

RM: Was there anything happening over at lone?

MJ: No, there wasn't anything much. The Smiths - Lindsay and Gordon - had some claims up there and they did mine some tungsten up above there at one time but it wasn't too profitable.

RM: Was there anybody living in lone?

MJ: A few people.

RM: Did you know any of them?

MJ: I did but they're all gone. In fact, last Thursday they buried one of the oldest fellows who lived up there.

RM: In the '40s, when you first came here, what was happening in lone? Do you have any recollections of that?

MJ: Not very much. There were just a few people living there. Most of them worked down here.

RM: Do you remember any specific old-timers or anything from lone in the '40s?

MJ: Well, there were the Smiths. They lived there for a long time. And I can't remember the other man's name - his first name was Madesto. He and his wife lived up there. And there were the O'Tooles.

RM: Were there any active mines in the lone area back in the '40s?

MJ: Not to my knowledge.

RM: So you were working at the Smith Brothers then as their bookkeeper. Was that a full-time job?

MJ: More than full-time.

RM: So you're a bookkeeper by trade')

MJ: Well, that's what I've done.

RM: Were you essentially a bookkeeper when you were managing the apartments?

MJ: Yes. And you know the government. You have to make 10 copies of all the reports and they want a report for everything.

RM: Plus they didn't have xerox machines in those days, did they?

MJ: No.

RM: And so then you went to work for Smiths. How long did you work there?

MJ: Well, until they sold their store in '67. Then I went to work up at Basic.

RM: And meanwhile your husband continued to work at Basic and he worked there until he retired?

MJ: He was on the managerial staff.

RM: When did he retire?

MJ: He retired in about '73 and then he died in '83.

RM: Could you tell me about the churches in Gabbs. Were there any churches when you first got here?

MJ: The Community Church.

RM: Was it already here when you came?

MJ: No. It was started about the time I came. Well no, it was started before because they held it in a tent. And then we had it over in the old gym.

RM: And you were a member of that church?

MJ: I've been a member of it. My mother-in-law was the superintendent of the Sunday school in those days. We had a lot of kids. It was the only church in town. Marge's father was instrumental in building the Community Church. We built it in '60.

RM: Did you go to the church services when they were held in a tent?

MJ: No, I didn't. That's when my husband was working shift and I was pregnant and I just didn't go. But as soon as we got moved I started going.

RM: And by then it was being held in the gym?

MJ: Yes.

RM How many people were in the congregation at that time?

MJ: Oh, everybody in town that went to church went there.

RM: Was that very many?

MJ: Quite a few. I had a picture - I think I still do - of the kids in Sunday school. There must have been 75.

RM: Is that right? And what was the denomination of the church?

MJ: It was just the Community Church - just general Protestant.

RM: When did they move into the old gym?

MJ: Oh, in '43. It was finished in time for school in '43.

RM: And how long were the services held there?

MJ: Well, until we built the church in about 1960.

RM: How did you get the money to build that church?

MJ: The company gave us the Sunday school building and then donations and volunteer labor built it.

RM: Has there ever been another church in Gabbs?

MJ: Oh yes. The Catholics have a church up in North Gabbs.

RM When was that built?

MJ: I don't remember. And the Assembly of God has a church up there. And the IDS church is right down the road here. They built it about 3 or 4 years ago. They were meeting in the recreation hall till then.

RM: Would you describe Gabbs as a church-going community?

MJ: It used to be, but it certainly isn't now. They're all just struggling. On Easter Sunday we had probably 15, 18 people at the Community Church. And they had about the same amount in the other churches.

RM: Were they mainly older people?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Tell me about the old hotel.

MJ: It was up where the VFW Hall is now. That's just the lobby. It was 2-story and I don't remember how many rooms it had in it - I'd say 25 or 30.

RM: Did they have baths in them?

MJ: Yes. It was a nice, modern hotel. And the lobby was beautiful. In fact, after they closed the hotel they made kind of studio apartments.

And they let the library move into the lobby where the VFW is now. We had a beautiful library there. It wasn't very big but it was pretty. Someone gave us some beautiful drapes and the floors were hardwood and we kept them polished and it was pretty. Then the company decided that they just didn't want to fool with those apartments anymore - they were almost too small. So they sold the building and the VFW bought it and they tore all the building down except for the lobby part. They salvaged the wood. RM: When was the hotel built, do you know?

MJ: It was built in '43.

RM: And when was it torn down?

MJ: Oh, I'd say in the '60s or early '70s. And the school district has the apartment house now and the teachers live there. That's up above where the hotel was. That apartment house must have had 15 or 18 apartments in it.

RM: And they're all still there?

MJ: Yes.

RM: And the teachers live there? You have that many teachers?

MJ: Well, they've made some of them bigger to accommodate teachers with a family. I think there are about 5 teachers living up there.

RM: Do you have any trouble getting teachers?

MJ: They don't seem to. They pay pretty well in Nye County. For young teachers it's kind of isolated and sometimes the unmarried girls get kind of discouraged and don't want to stay. But some of them will come and stay for a long time.

RM: Do they ever marry into the community?

MJ: Oh yes. They've done that. But it's changed a lot. We used to have all the apartments there - the 212 down here and up here.

RM: Now, you went to work for the Smith Brothers and you worked there until '67. Then what did you do?

MJ: Then I went up to Basic.

RM: What did you do at Basic?

MJ: I was the paymaster for 25 years. I just retired last June. I retired twice before that and they called me back. I finally told them, "That's it. I've earned my retirement and I don't want to work anymore. I don't mind coming up and helping out now and then for a day or two, but no."

RM: How many employees did they have when you went to work there?

MJ: About 350.

RM: So they were going along pretty good in '67.

MJ: Oh, they were going strong. And when I quit they had about 100.

RM: Are they still as productive or are they doing more with less people, or is it . . .

MJ: That's right. They're not running everything all the time now. They did have 2 kilns running and 3 Herreshoffs and the flotation plant and the HMS plant but now they shut one section down. [They activate them] just as they need the product.

RM: But they're still turning out the same tonnage?

MJ: About. They told me in January that they had shipped more product for a month than they ever had.

RM: Even during the war?

MJ: Yes.

RM: So it's still a very productive place.

MJ: Oh yes. But they're getting along. When they first started they were having to lay people off. If they shut one section down they would lay the people off and it was making it real bad. Well, now they have them trained so they can work in 2 or 3 places.

RM: Where are the rest of the people of Gabbs employed?

MJ: Most of it is FMC.

RM: How many people from Gabbs are out there?

MJ: Mr. Wayland, who's the manager out there, told me that when they first opened up about 25 percent at the most of their people lived in Gabbs. He said now about 50 percent of them do. The rest are from Hawthorne and Fallon.

RM: It's a long commute, isn't it?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Would you talk a little bit about your job as paymaster up there and what you saw in terms of the operations and everything?

MJ: Well, you know you get to know everybody when you live in a small town like this, and I knew everyone. The time sheets and excuse sheets show you an awful lot about what everybody's doing. For instance, they have to go to the doctor or their wife had a baby or their grandmother was sick or their father died or . . . you just knew everything that was going on.

And some funny things happened. One fellow I remember - and I didn't think he was particularly noticing things, you know - came in at the end of the year and said to me, "You owe me 12 cents."

And I said, "How do you figure?"

He said, "Because you shorted me 12 cents."

I said, "How and when?"

He said, "10721, I kept track. I figured out my checks all year, every one. You just haven't paid me for the fraction of a cent and you owe me 12 cents."

I said, "I don't owe you anything." I said, "If it's less than 1/2 cent the posting machine drops it. If it's more than 1/2 cent it adds it. Over the years," I said, "it'll balance itself out. I am not going through your whole year's time and figure it all out again." And I said, "I don't owe you anything. I don't suppose you've stopped and talked 12 cents' worth and not done your job." And he didn't say any more. He left. Because he was yacking all the time. He was always yacking.



RM: That's funny. [laughs]

## CHAPTER FOUR

MJ: This one fellow, an Indian who had moved over here from Schurz, was off so many times for this thing and that thing. And they got funeral pay for the deaths of their immediate family and their grandparents. He came in one day and asked the mill superintendent if he could have the day off - his grandmother was very sick and wasn't expected to live. And the superintendent said to him, "If you bury your grandmother one more time, I'm going to fire you."

RM: [laughs]

MJ: I thought that was just hilarious. And the guy didn't have a comeback. He just used that excuse so often.

RM: That's good. What other kinds of things did you see down there?

MJ: Oh, they're always ready to tell you if you've shortchanged them but they never axe tell you if you've overpaid them. Every once in a while there'd be something that maybe had been paid at the wrong rate . . . of course, that was really a very big operation because there were 3 shifts around the clock and the rates are different for all 3 shifts. They got 20 cents more on swing and 26 cents more on graveyard.

RM: What was the basic pay out there when you quit?

MJ: When I quit it was \$12.28 for a laborer.

RM: Are they still working shifts?

MJ: Not as much as they did. They'll have maybe 2 men on graveyard shift where they did have a whole crew. And they don't have a graveyard shift in maintenance anymore - just on swing and days. But it was interesting, I'll tell you. There was always something caning up.

RM: Could you talk about the school here and how it grew and developed?

MJ: Well, some people think that we don't have a very good school. They aren't able to offer too many courses or classes but I think they get all the necessary ones. My 3 children have done all right. Both my boys went to the university. My daughter went to Idaho State but she quit to get married, not because she wasn't doing well. The 2 boys both graduated from the University of Nevada and both have good jobs. My son who lives in Reno - the one who was born here - works for IBM, and has since he got out of school. And my older son lives in Seattle and works for the federal government in the manpower division. He's in charge of the Seattle office. So they've done well.

RM: When you first came to Gabbs was there a school?

MJ: Oh yes. They had it in a tent. We came in the spring, just about the time school was out, and they had the school ready [by the next fall]. My daughter started first grade over here in '43.

RM: I wonder how many children there were in the school then.

MJ: Oh, there were more than there are now.

RM: Was it clear through high school?

MJ: Yes. They didn't have very many high school students because most of the boys were gone. If they were old enough to join the service they were gone. I think the high school had about 3 or 4 girls in it at first and no boys. And then it started growing. Some of them had been staying with their grandmother or their aunt or someone in a town somewhere else because they didn't have a high school until they got the school built. RM: When they started with the school across the street how many rooms did it have?

MJ: Well, this is the high school here and then behind it is the grade school, and it has 6 rooms.

RM: Did they start with what is now the grade school?

MJ: No, they had both schools - the government built them.

RM: So this is the same school that you've had since '43, except you've built a new gymnasium.

MJ: We built a new gymnasium, we built a new shop building, we built a new hot lunch building and a building with 4 rooms for home economics and commercial classes.

RM: Plus you've got your library.

MJ: Yes.

RM: Does Gabbs get students from any other areas?

MJ: They bus in the Indian children from Reese River. The bus runs every day.

RM: Are there quite a few Indians who come down?

MJ: Yes. What did they tell me - 30-something. They closed those schools up there. They had a grade school there and they closed it.

RM: Why did they close it?

MJ: I guess that a lot of the people were sending their children someplace else. They weren't going to school and it was hard to get a teacher. They seem to like it here and the kids get along fine.

RM: There's no problem with ethnicity?

MJ: No. And of course when Lone was running there were a few kids who came down from there, but I don't think there are any coming down from Lone now.

RM: Do they come from anyplace else, or have they historically?

MI: We used to have a boy come from out at the Kaiser mine - his dad was the watchman out there.

RM: What is the Kaiser mine?

MJ: Well, it was running during the war. Kaiser Steel had it.

RM: And what did they mine? It wasn't magnesium, was it?

MJ: No. It might have been fluorspar.

RM: Where is the Kaiser mine?

MJ: Do you know where Broken Hills is - about 7 miles out?

RM: Yes.

MJ: It's over in the hills south of there.

RM: Was it a big mine?

MJ: Yes, it's pretty good sized. There were quite a few people out there.

RM: And it was going during World War II?

MJ: Yes.

RM: When did it close down?

MJ: Well, it was going after that - a long time ago - about when the El Cap[itan] Mine and Dougans closed.

Then the Brown kids all came in from their ranch on the other side of Carroll Summit. Of course they have a house here and they live here in the wintertime. And the Johnson kids come in from out by Alpine. They usually stay with somebody.

RM: Are they ranchers?

MJ: Yes. And then the kids from out at Finger Rock come in here, too.

RM: Where's Finger Rock?

MJ: Oh, it's where that wash is - up over the hill down towards Luning. There's a house there; they have a ranch on further back. They run cattle.

RM: It's in Nye County?

MJ: Yes.

RM: Have the ranchers traditionally been a part of the community here?

MJ: Pretty much. There aren't very many of them. Then there are some kids who did come in from out here at the Gabbs Valley Ranch out by Rawhide. Rawhide's running now, too.

RM: Is it a gold operation?

MJ: Yes.

RM: All these old gold mines are . . . it's amazing, isn't it?

MJ: Yes. They're going to open one out at Bell Flats, too. That's beyond Broken Hills - you turn off toward the left. There's a sign there that says "Bell Flat." It's over where the earthquake faults are.

RM: There are earthquake faults over there?

MJ: Oh, yes. Haven't you ever been over there?

RM: No, I never have.

MJ: Well, you know where the sign is on Highway 50, "Earthquake Faults?"

RM: No. I missed that, I guess.

MJ: Do you know where Middlegate is?

RM: Yes.

MJ: Well, it's down the road in that flat there after you leave Middlegate going west. You get almost to the top of that hill and there's a sign that says, "Earthquake Fault 7 miles." It's still pretty visible.

RM: Is it from a recent earthquake?

MJ: Yes, that big one in '56 or something.

RM: Yes, I remember that earthquake.

MJ: I haven't been out there for several years, but the ground had slipped. You could see it along the road but it's kind of faint now. But you can see where the earth's actually moved.

RM: When did you start seeing a big change in Gabbs in terms of the kinds of things we were talking about?

MJ: I would say probably in the last 10, 15 years.

RM: Is that right? So before 1975 it was pretty much like it had been during the war in terms of honesty and friendliness and everything?

MJ: Yes. Or maybe '70 even - I don't know. It's kind of a gradual thing, I guess, but all of a sudden you realize . . .

RM: "Hey wait a minute, I've got to lock my door."

MJ: It isn't like it used to be.

RM: How do you look on your life in Gabbs?

MJ: Well, I've enjoyed it. It's like I told them at my retirement dinner, "I don't regret having lived in Gabbs." I said, "I thought I'd come to the end of the world when I arrived here in 1943." And I don't think I've lost anything. I've enjoyed my years here. My husband kept saying to me, "Now, you don't want to move, do you?" Because he retired before I did and . .

RM: Did he kind of want to move?

MJ: Heavens no. He was an old desert rat. He loved it here. He said to me one day when we were going to Reno, "You know, there's one thing wrong with Nevada."

And I said, "Well tell me what it is. I didn't ever expect to hear you say there was anything wrong with it."

He said, "There's getting to be too darned many people."

RM: Isn't that great.

MJ: We used to go out in the hills on the weekends and maybe we'd never see another soul all weekend.

RM: Did you take the kids with you when you went out in the hills?

MJ: We did before they were in college and all that. We always loved to go, and my son still does.

RM: What did you do out in the hills when you went out?

MJ: Oh, my husband would prospect. He always had his prospecting pick in the trunk of the car and we would just pick up rocks and things.

RM: You always went to a different place?

MJ: Yes.

RM: So you got to know these hills pretty well, didn't you?

MJ: Yes. We've been all over the eastern part of the state - up to Ely and out of Ely and out of Tonopah and down to Death Valley and out of Beatty and . . .

RM: How did you decide where to go?

MJ: We'd just start out and take a road that looked like it might be interesting. We had one of these little fold-down trailers and a Blazer with 4-wheel drive. We'd just hook that thing on and anyplace the Blazer would go that trailer'd go. We've been clear up on the top of Mount Tenabo and everything.

One weekend we went over to Buckhorn (that's about halfway between Eureka and Carlin). My husband had lived there as a child. His father was the warehouseman there and after the mine closed they stayed and he sold off all the equipment and the inventory and everything. My husband and his brother didn't have to go to school for 2 years because there was no teacher and they were out there miles from anybody. Their nether taught than when she could catch them. And he remembered those as the most wonderful years of his life. They each had an old horse. I don't think it was much good - I don't think it was any racehorse or pony or anything. But anyway, they each had a horse and then they built a cabin up in the hills and they would go up there and spend the night sometimes. Oh, he just remembered those days and thought they were so wonderful. And that's all I could hear was Nevada, Nevada. Of course, having been raised in southern Idaho it was a lot like that to me. They do irrigate up there, but it's a little better climate down here, really.

RM: It's a little warmer, isn't it?

MJ: We don't get the snow that they do up there.

RM: And the summers aren't that hot here, really.

MJ: No. Our son's lived in Reno since he got out of school and my husband's sister lived there. (They've now moved to California). But we've always gone in. If there's a show we want to see we think, "Well, we've earned it. We've stayed out in Gabbs and haven't been anyplace or done anything." And we always go out to dinner and things like that.

RM: When did they build the motel here?

MJ: That was built, I would say, in the late '60s . . . it was after we came back.

RM: Water has always been cheap here, hasn't it?

MJ: We never paid a dime for water until last year when we got the new well in.

RM: Is it expensive now?

MJ: It's \$30 for 50,000 gallons, I think.

RM: I notice in comparison to Tonopah a lot of people have nice lawns and gardens and everything.

MJ: Yes. We didn't pay for water at all. The company furnished it for all these years.

RM: Has electricity always been reasonable?

MJ: I don't think it's bad at all. And we pay garbage and now we're paying sewer since they built the new sewer plant. But the company always had the sewer and kept it up. We didn't pay anything for sewer or water.

RM: Was the rent just a nominal fee?

MJ: Oh heavens yes. When we were renting this house we paid \$40 a month, I think.

RM: Even in the '70s?

MJ: Yes.

RM: That's incredible.



MJ: And when they sold it, we paid \$4000 for it.

RM: What a buy.

MJ: Yes. And that's why I'm staying in Gabbs - because this is home. I've got my home.

RM: That's right.

MJ: I'm comfortable, I'm happy, I'm busy - I'm too busy most of the time.

RM: Merge Crabill was telling me that you travel a lot.

MJ: We do.

RM: Why don't you say a little bit about that.

MJ: Well, we've had some nice trips. The first trip we took was to Alaska, and we both fell in love with it. We'd like to go back. And then we went to Scotland and stopped in Ireland and we enjoyed that. We went with a group that time. And then 2 years ago this fall in October, Marge and I went to China with my daughter and 3 of her friends. We were in Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore.

RM: Wow. That's wonderful. Did you like it?

MJ: Oh, the stopping was just great. I'd like to have been over there a few weeks ago when the dollar was so high and the yen was so low. And then we just returned from Florida 3 weeks ago.

RM: Did you like Florida?

MJ: It's a beautiful state but I sure wouldn't want to live there. It's so humid.

RM: The old desert rats don't like that humidity, do we?

MJ: It's a beautiful state but there are too many people again. And then I've gone back every year since my husband passed away to see my daughter, who lives in Wisconsin. I braved it at Christmas time 2 years ago, because they have such rough winters. But it was beautiful. We thought we weren't going to have a white Christmas until Christmas Eve, when it snowed about an inch. Otherwise it was just gorgeous. But coming home was terrible. I sat in the Minneapolis airport for 8-1/2 hours. The planes were grounded everywhere in the east and it was bad.

And I go up to Seattle once a year to see my son. But it's like I told them at the retirement dinner. I said, "I think Gabbs and Basic has been good to me and my family. We've had a good living and now I'm retired and if I keep retired, I hope that . . ."

RM: They try to get you back?

MJ: Yes.

RM: How do you see the future of Gabbs?

MJ: Well, I don't know. It's hard to tell. If they open up these mines . . . if some enterprising person would come in and build a nice trailer court or apartments or something they might do all right.

RM: Do you think there'll always be a Gabbs?

MJ: That's hard to say. Basic, I guess, still has quite a bit of ore blocked out, but they don't get much of the really high-grade [material] anymore.

RM: Originally were they working in high-grade, back during World War II?

MJ: Yes. You used to see beautiful samples; it's so blue and so pretty. RM: But they don't have the high-grade like they used to?

MJ: No, not like they used to. But there's a lot of it up there. They've been running for 50 years now.

RM: Isn't that something? And they still have a lot blocked out.

MJ: Yes, I said to my husband that day when he called me and told me he had gone to work here, "Oh, I wish we'd get out of mining. It's so uncertain."

He said, "They have enough ore blocked out for 50 more years. Is that long enough for you?" So I guess he was right. The first time my mother came down here she thought that this was the end of existence. She said, "Margaret, how do you live here?"

I said, "Oh, you get used to it, I guess." But every time she came down she liked it better.

She said, "It does grow on you."

And I said, "The desert does."

RM: Yes, it does.

MJ: It really does. Marge and I drive along and we'll say, "Oh, look over there. Isn't that pretty?" I said, "We sound like the Chamber of Commerce." But to me the hills are pretty and the colors are pretty and the sunsets and everything . . . I told Joaquin [Johnson] when they built this building across the street here . . . We used to sit out on our front porch every night and watch the sunset and then they built that building and shut off our view. I told him, "You just should have checked with me before you built that building."

He said "Why?"

I said, "Because you shut off my view."

And he said, "Well, I'm sorry about that."

RM: Nevada is a special place, isn't it?

MJ: It really is.

RM: And the people, too, are not like they are in other places.

MJ: Yes, they're so different.

RM: And just because there isn't a lot of greenery . . . how many people are out in the country every day anyway? You live in a social world with your friends and your . . .

MJ: And in 15 minutes we can be up where it's green and there are trees and water and . . . of course I don't know about the water. They said on the news just a while ago that they thought they'd have to start rationing the first of May.

RM: In Reno? Terrible, isn't it.

MJ: It sure is.

RM: Well, people need to learn to quit wasting water anyway.

MJ: People used to say they felt sorry for us living out here. But, I don't know. People stay. The other night we had a style show . . . people seem to keep up with the times. We go to town often enough that, we see what the rest of the world is doing.

RM: Well Margaret, is there anything else that you might want to touch on?

MJ: It was a really rip-roaring town in the early days, I'll tell you. Did Marge tell you about the guards?

RM: She told me there were guards, but she didn't go into detail.

MJ: There were guards that patrolled the townsite every hour, and then they were all around the plant. They had little houses.

RM: Were they army?

MJ: No, they were government, but I don't know which branch. They just wore regular guard uniforms. And there was a guard station at the top of the hill. In order to get in to the plant you had to have a pass with your picture and your fingerprints and I had to get those to go up to have my son.

RM: wow. They had a clinic up there?

MJ: They had the doctor's office which is right down on the next corner down below the fire hall. It was up there at that time. And they had one room fixed up as an emergency room.

RM: Oh. And that's where you delivered?

MJ: Yes.

RM: What was the doctor's name?

MJ: Dr. John Bibb

RM: Who was the minister of the church when it first began?

MJ: Reverend Mani Schriver from Carson City used to come out. He helped us get it started. I've forgotten which church he was in Carson, but it was nondenominational.

RM: But he'd come down every Sunday?

MJ: Yes.

RM: And then when did you get your own minister?

MJ: Oh, we've not had a minister more than we've had one. Or we've had lay people. That's what we have right now - a lay person. He works on the hill and we have the apartment there and they live there. We furnish the utilities and a place to live but we aren't able to pay him a salary.

RM: Well, have we pretty well covered it, do you think?

MJ: I think so. I wish I had a nickel for every dinner, every bake sale, every candy sale that I've helped with. But people are always good. You just say, "This is for the library," and they say, "Fine, I'll help."

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Nye County,  
Nye County Commissioners,  
Nye County Housing Authority,  
Old Hundred Mine,  
O'Toole family,  
Ouray, CO,  
Pahrump, NV,  
Paradise Peak, NV,  
Pocatello, ID  
prospecting,  
Rawhide Mine,  
Reese River Indian Reservation,  
Reno, NV,  
Revert, Robert,  
Round Mountain, NV,  
Schriver, Reverend Adam,  
Seattle, WA  
sewer system  
Sierra Magnesite,  
Silver Peak, NV  
Silverton, CO,  
"Sixty Seconds Over Tokyo  
Smith brothers (Gordon & Lindsay),  
Smith brothers' store,  
special products refractories,

sports,  
Standard Slag Co.,  
Sunday school,  
teachers,  
telephones,  
(Mount) Tenabo,