

An Interview with
BILL
KIRBY

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Esmeralda County History Project
Esmeralda County, Nevada
Goldfield
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PREFACE

The Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) 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 recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions.

The Esmeralda County Board of Commissioners initiated the ECHP in 1993 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Esmeralda County communities that may be impacted by the construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository located at Yucca Mountain, adjoining the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Though the repository has yet to be built, the ten oral histories in this group of interviews were paid for by county monies received in connection with the Yucca Mountain effort, which is now in hiatus.

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 ECHP'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 ECHP 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 ECHP 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 Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from participating individuals. I was welcomed into many homes and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. I thank the residents throughout Esmeralda County and Nevada too numerous to mention by name who provided assistance and information. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to the Esmeralda County Commissioners who initiated the project in 1993: Chairman Wade Barton, Virginia Ridgway, and Joyce Hartman. Appreciation also goes to current Chairman Nancy J. Boland, William C. Kirby, and Dominick Pappalardo, who initiated the current project in 2012, and to Ralph M. Keyes, who became a commissioner in 2013. Ed Mueller, Director, Esmeralda County Repository Oversight Program, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy for this effort. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Mueller's office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Boland, Kirby, Pappalardo, Keyes, and Mr. Mueller for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board as we worked out methodological problems. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Esmeralda County commissioners and Mr. Mueller.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Jean Charney and Robert B. Clark transcribed a number of interviews, as did the staff of Pioneer Transcription Services in Penn Valley, California. Julie Lancaster and Suzy McCoy provided project coordination. Editing was

done by Jean Charney and Darlene Morse. Proofreading and indexing were provided at various times by Darlene Morse and Marilyn Anderson. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as accurately 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 and Suzy McCoy served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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ô Robert D. McCracken
2013

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.

Yet, even in the 2010s, the spirit of the American frontier can still be found in Esmeralda County, Nevada, in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents.

Esmeralda County was established by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Nevada on November 23, 1861. The first boom camp in the county, Aurora, named after the goddess of dawn of Roman mythology, mushroomed into existence in the early 1860s with a population of at least 5000. The name Esmeralda, Spanish for "emerald," was provided by a member of the party that made the initial discovery of gold at Aurora; the individual probably had some beauty in mind—the term was then a common name for girls with green eyes. Another version is that the name referred to the Gypsy dancer Esmeralda in Victor Hugo's novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Discoveries at Aurora were followed by others at Columbus (1864), Red Mountain/Silver Peak (1864), Gold Mountain (1866), Palmetto (1866), Montezuma (1867), Oneota (1870), Sylvania (1870), and Lida Valley (1871). Goldfield, which sprang to life in 1902, was the last great mining camp of the American West, and one of the greatest gold camps in the history of the world. Along with Tonopah (1900) and Rhyolite (1904), its two sister boomtowns, and several score of smaller, shorter-lived daughter camps located on the central Nevada desert, Goldfield was the last magnificent flowering of the American frontier.

Between 1903 and 1942, Goldfield produced approximately 7.7 million tons of ore containing more than 4.1 million ounces of gold and over 1.4 million ounces of silver, worth \$90 million, mostly when gold was priced at \$20 per ounce. Goldfield's glory days were from about 1904 until World War I. After approximately 1918, mine production declined to a fraction of what it had been, yet the town lived on. It survived a terrible flash flood in 1913 and a catastrophic fire in 1923 that wiped out a substantial proportion of the town— at least 33 square blocks, by some old-timers' estimates. Another fire in 1924 nearly applied the coup de grâce to the grand lady, but still she persevered.

Much has been written concerning Goldfield's prosperous years, but relatively less material is available on the town and its people from the decades following the end of World War I. Much of the history of Esmeralda County is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Esmeralda County's close ties to the land and our nation's frontier past, and the scarcity of written sources on local history after 1920, the Esmeralda County commissioners initiated the Esmeralda County History Project (ECHP) in 1993. The ECHP is an effort to systematically collect and preserve the history of Esmeralda County. The centerpiece of the ECHP is a 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 Esmeralda County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews conducted between 1993 and 1994 vary in length and detail, but together they form an unprecedented composite of life in Esmeralda County after 1920.

These interviews 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 view of county history that reveals the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada's past that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

A second set of interviews was initiated in 2011. The goal here was the same as for the interviews collected 20 years earlier—provide a view of Esmeralda County history unavailable elsewhere through interviews with county residents. However, in this series interviews were also conducted with a second goal in mind. Over 97 percent of the land in Esmeralda County is controlled and managed by the federal government—more than any other county in Nevada; indeed, in any state outside Alaska—and of the private land approximately 50 percent consists of patented mining claims, leaving little opportunity for community expansion on private land. A large percentage of Esmeralda County residents consequently believe the county is in large measure governed by the federal government as opposed to elected state of Nevada, county, and local officials. Many feel the strong presence of the federal government has the effect of constricting economic opportunity and personal freedom for local residents in many areas of life and would like to see changes made in that arrangement with the transfer of more control to local and state government. Those issues formed part of the focus of these oral histories.

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This is Robert McCracken talking to Esmeralda County Commissioner William Billö Kirby at his home in Dyer, Fish Lake Valley, Nevada, January 16, 2012.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Bill, could you give me your name as it reads on your birth certificate, and when and where you were born?

BK: William Cedric Kirby. I was born in East Los Angeles at Santa Marta Hospital, March 29, 1937.

RM: Did you grow up in L.A.?

BK: I grew up in east L.A., graduated from Montebello High School.

RM: It was a different place then, wasn't it?

BK: It certainly was, yes.

RM: When did you first come to Nevada?

BK: I moved to Nevada in April of 1986.

RM: What brought you to Fish Lake Valley?

BK: I have always been an outdoors person. When I came back from Asia in 1957, I was stationed for two winters at the Marine Corps Cold Weather Training Center 25 miles from Bridgeport on Sonoka Pass. I became familiar with this entire area then and loved it! However, upon my honorable discharge from the Corps in 1958, I moved to Southern California and raised my three children as a single parent through their teenage years. When I got through with that, I wanted to move to a better location and selected Fish Lake Valley.

RM: How did you earn a living in Southern California?

BK: I'm an enrolled agent. I had an income tax and bookkeeping service.

RM: How did you plan to earn a living when you came to Fish Lake?

BK: When I came to Fish Lake Valley, I commuted back and forth to Southern California; with electronic communications and so on. I specialize in doing machine tool companies. I was actually the chief financial officer of two multi-million dollar entities between 1965, when I started my business, until I moved here in 1986. My clientele moved all over. I had some move to Northern California, and my engagements were substantial, making it worth my while to travel to do the work at their site.

RM: So you worked as an accountant once you moved to Fish Lake.

BK: I have three units of college accounting and I have one year of college. I am not a CPA. I did not go through the CPA training. I am a self-taught accountant, and I've had to compensate in doing the same work that they do at a level where I would not be in conflict with the law.

RM: Are you still engaged in that type of work? So you're not involved in ranching or anything like that.

BK: No, I am not. I am a tax accountant and a bookkeeper.

RM: Okay. Describe what the valley was like when you got here.

BK: When I got here the valley was similar to what it is today, but the outlying rural roads were a little rougher. After I'd been here for a while, I felt there was considerable drug activity.

RM: Really? Was there a lot of production here?

BK: There was a lot of recreational use, manufacturing and distribution. And in my opinion, some public officials were involved in some of the activity. Not long after I got here, some events took place that were not caused by me. Consequently, conjecture on the part of the drug people resulted in threats to me and my family so I went to the FBI and brought them in. There were two people that were under investigation. One was

under investigation by the FBI for money laundering, I believe they never would tell me all of it. As you know, when you take money across the state line, that is an FBI issue. It doesn't make any difference whether it's from drugs or any other kind of illegal activity. The Nevada Department of Justice had an investigation going on concerning one of the public officials here at that time. It all started when I brought my nephew up here, along with my children.

RM: Were your children out of school by then?

BK: No, my son, Billy, and one of my daughters, Yvonne, were still in high school. I owned a home in Southern California and I was back and forth when I first came up here. I brought my nephew up here to try to break him of a dependency situation because he was having some trouble, and he was doing quite well. And all of a sudden, I discovered he'd stolen \$1,200 from me and he was using it to buy drugs. As a by-product of that I found out who was selling him the drugs and I deported my nephew to his mother in Modesto.

Two weeks after I deported him, the person that was selling drugs was caught selling drugs in Beatty, Nevada. That it was on a Sunday, so they brought the person up here and had him sign a waiver to get a search warrant. Next, they went into his house and found that he had drugs and drug paraphernalia that warranted an excise tax of \$180,000. That was ten percent of some figure, which would be \$1.8 million. He was an employee of a utility company; we'll leave it at that. He did a lot of liaison and I'm not sure what the liaison was out here because back in those days, they used to do some air stuff.

Anyway, apparently they sent a lady around with a letter of reference directed to the court because he had a young wife and two small children. The lady asked me to sign

it. I said, "I have no intention of signing it." The lady was real popular in the valley and didn't know precisely what the drug dealer was doing.

We had a conversation, and finally she said, "You have no compassion."

I said, "No, I don't. If everybody that used drugs and sold them in the valley died tomorrow, I wouldn't shed one tear."

She went back over to the place the druggies hung out, one of the local bars, and mentioned how uncooperative I was. As a consequence, I had a confrontation with this fellow later on.

RM: A physical confrontation?

BK: He was 6'4", 28 years old, and I was 54 years old. It was interesting. I couldn't help myself because I was insulted in front of a bunch of people in front of the bar when he gave me the sign of my IQ when I went by. He thought I wouldn't stop because of the size differential, but I stopped and went up and confronted him, and basically he said, "I'm not going to hit you here in front of all these people!"

I got him so mad he was shaking with rage, and I said, "Well, that's good. Why don't you meet me at the cemetery tomorrow morning at 6:00 a.m.?"

In front of everybody he said, "I'll be there!"

I said, "Bring your favorite handgun and your personal representative, and we'll solve your problem forever."

If you can believe that story, you can believe a lot of tall tales! The net result was that, now that the playing field was equal. I consider myself a pretty damn good shot with a pistol, and he's a big target. I think he reconsidered the situation and decided he didn't want to meet me at the cemetery at 6:00 in the morning to solve his problems forever.

When I confronted him he was trying to come up with an answer, and he wasn't too swift on words. I said, "You know, I can't stand around here all day while you're trying to make up your mind. I'll tell you what, when you get your poop together, you bring your friends over to my house and we'll make arrangements for tomorrow morning." Well, my passions were up because I had a bad experience in East Los Angeles with drugs.

RM: Oh, really?

BK: Let's put it this way: The situation that developed was with one of my kids. I found out who was peddling the dealer and I went and tracked him down. He was under surveillance when I was waiting for him and the cops got me before I did something that I would have gone to the penitentiary for.

RM: Just as well they got you.

BK: Yes, it was, and it was a wonderful event. The other thing that triggered this . . . you know the *Manchurian Candidate* movie, when they showed the guy the Queen of Hearts and he went bananas and executed people?

RM: Yes.

BK: Well, I learned of an incident that happened to a DEA agent, a former Marine and Silver Star winner in Viet Nam. He had a wife and two children and he was brutally murdered by drug people. He was tortured for two days and the dealers videotaped the horrors and gave it to our authorities.

Being a former Marine, I took exception to that. I have absolutely no use for people that use them or deal them. Period!

RM: Did you serve in Viet Nam?

BK: No. My obligation was from 1955 until 1961. As I told you, that's when I learned

of this area. I got over here in December of 1957 and I was here that winter and the next winter. But back to the drugs in this valleyô I could write a book about it. The situation deteriorated and my wife's tires were slashed on her car three times when I was gone.

RM: Good Lord.

BK: I tell you that because you wanted to get an idea of what the valley was like when I first got here. That trade was essentially carried on by white Anglo-Saxons. They were the dominant force in that kind of activity here at that time.

The trial that took place for the guy that I had the confrontation with was kind of a mockery because he got off easy. Supposedly, they didn't get a federal judge to get the search warrant and all the other contingencies; he ended up getting 2,000 hours of community service and five years' probation. And the community service was served under two people who, from my point of view, were his bosses. Also, at the trial they watched him very carefully every day. One worked for the county and one of them was an elected official, and I'd leave that alone. That's just my personal opinion.

RM: What a way to begin your life in the area.

BK: I've always been pretty conservative. When I was in the city, I used to take my kids and camp out in the mountains at every opportunity to get them out of the city environment. Both my daughters, Wendy and Yvonne, still have mile records in high school. One record was for varsity and the other was the sophomore-freshman mile track record at El Rancho High School. And my son had seven varsity letters; he started running cross-country when he was a freshman. He would have got eight varsity letters in cross-country and track, but he cut his foot real bad and couldn't run part of his junior year.

RM: It sounds like endurance runs in the family.

BK: I ran cross-country and track in high school and I represented the Marine Corps in Asia. I was the second-man half-miler. There was only one guy in the whole Third Marine Division that could beat me in the half mile. He was a six-foot guy named Art Delenbrown. I was always trying to catch him— never could. And I was captain of the college cross-country team, East L.A. Junior College, the one year I went to college.

RM: How did you begin to get an awareness of the kinds of issues in this area that later became more important to you?

BK: I've always been involved in community service. I was twice the president of the Montebello Kiwanis over the years. The last 25 years, I've been the starter of the track meets up here, and concurrent with my business in East L.A., I was track and cross-country coach at Salesian High School. I took two cross-country teams to the California Interscholastic Federation finals, and one year we won all three divisions of the Santa Fe League: varsity, junior varsity and sophomore-freshman. I've always been a promoter of athletics for youth.

I started the Silver Peak or Bust hike, a 34-mile one-day hike here, 11 years ago. We raise money every year to supplement the extracurricular activities for all our student kids.

RM: It's a 34-mile hike? Is it on a set course?

BK: No, it goes through the wilderness. There are no services. You start out down here on Highway 264 and the first 10.7 miles, you climb 3,000 feet. Then you only have 24 miles to go. You go over the Silver Peak Range to Silver Peak. We had 25 participants this year, and some real stunning results. I came in second, but John Scates, the Silver Peak teacher, stayed with his five students who participated. Two finished and Brian Sanderson stayed with my daughter, Wendy Kirby, who finished. (They are engaged.)

Both of the guys could have finished before me. Incidentally, Wendy is the business manager for our school district.

I remember the first time I did it I was by myself. I walked into the Silver Peak Saloon after I finished the 34 miles, late in the afternoon. That first year I did it in July and it was over 100 degrees in Clayton Valley, but I had gone over the day before and put out some water drops. I went in the bar, and I always take my .45 with me because, as I always tell people, mountain lions don't go to Sunday school. (I always tell the environmentalists that; I love to tickle them a little bit.) I slapped my .45 on the bar and said, "I want a cold beer." It was really good, too.

RM: That's amazing. So it's 34 miles one way to Silver Peak?

BK: Yes. If you don't make other arrangements, you have to walk back. [Chuckles]

RM: That's amazing.

BK: We raised about \$8,000 or \$9,000, maybe \$10,000 this year. I raised \$6,000 myself in sponsorships. I go to the mining companies and things like that and I tell them what we do with the money. The custodian of the funds is the Esmeralda County School District. Last week, I think we paid room and board for one kid that didn't have the money to participate in athletics in high school, and we paid over \$3,000 for SAT and ACT tests for students here.

RM: That's really great.

BK: Yes, we do a whole lot of good stuff. My basic philosophy is we're here to help each other and make the world a better place to live, and community service is a top priority.

RM: That's very impressive.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Now, what was your first inkling of the land issues here vis-à-vis the federal government and the state and so on?

BK: I've always subscribed to the multiple use concept because I know back east, public lands are pretty much nonexistent, and we're blessed and privileged to have public lands available for the access and diversified use of all Americans. I've never had any kind of confrontational issues with the Bureau of Land Management, although I know there are conflicts—no human institution is perfect, because of the humans that run it.

RM: That's right.

BK: My attitude is to try to get along and try to work with the federal agencies in the best interest of the rural community I live in based on what the rural people want. I wrote a resolution with regard to what this community wanted and it was adopted by the county: that we want to maintain our lifestyle here. We want to maintain our rural atmosphere; we're not interested in development. We can tolerate a little growth, and we want the farming, ranching, and mining to continue in our county.

We're adamantly against the two federal wilderness study areas they have in the Silver Peaks. We're against them for the simple reason that they don't meet the criteria to be wilderness. But when you're dealing with the Congressional delegation we have in Nevada, it seems very little ever gets done for the rurals. When you see all the stuff that I've done in conjunction with other people to try to get representation out here, you can see that we're too few votes to count. We're expendable out here, and that's exactly the way we're treated.

RM: Would it be possible to get a copy of that resolution?

BK: Yes, I've got it on the computer. I'll print it up for you.

RM: Thanks. And let's talk about nuclear testing; I forget when it ended altogether.

BK: I don't know when it ended, but I know at the end of the Second World War people were exposed to the radiation.

RM: Yes. First of all they had open-air testing, and then underground, and then they eliminated it altogether. What's your take on that?

BK: My take on that is it's like anything else that man does. When he first gets into it he doesn't fully understand it; oftentimes he gets his pinky in a ringer. Man's smart enough, after he's been burned a couple of times, to figure out how to use something and not get hurt with it, and that's exactly what we've got here. The fears from the past are not justified in the present.

RM: That's a great point. Any other thoughts on either open-air or underground testing, and the land that the government basically cordoned off for that purpose?

BK: My attitude about testing and experimentation with nuclear weaponry in Nevada: I'm against it.

RM: Would you have been opposed to it in 1950?

BK: Well, no. I would say this: I didn't have enough knowledge to understand the byproduct of nuclear testing with regard to the health of the citizenry so I probably wouldn't have thought one way or the other about it, other than the fact that they were probably taking adequate precautions, not knowing that they didn't completely know what they were doing at that time.

RM: Right. Some people are really anti-nuclear weapons and some aren't, and I always wonder how people form their attitudes.

BK: It kind of reminds me of the horse people I deal with here. I've got two types of people: I've got the ones who want to put reflectors on all the wild horses, want to fence

off the highways and slow the speed limit down to 35 miles an hour. On the other end, I've got my buddies that want to have wild horse barbecues on Saturday. Everything we deal with in this life, you've got one side and the other.

However, in talking about nuclear power, I have a real complaint against people who don't understand the benefits of nuclear power because the biggest problem we have here today is they're going to all this renewable energy with all the corruption on Capitol Hill, okay? And the renewable energy is costing us anywhere from 15 to 35 to 40 cents a kilowatt hour and nuclear energy runs about six cents a kilowatt hour. So this great nation is trying to survive in an economic crisis and they're going to push the cost of energy up and put our businesses out of competition and put the people out of work because of the high cost of utility bills. We've got cheap energy lying all around us, and the Chinese are building 1,000-megawatt continuous production pebble reactors. We're sitting back here fiddling while Rome's burning. I get real passionate about this, forgive me.

RM: No, I want your opinion on that, but I wanted to talk about the Nevada Test Site right now. It's cordoned off, and will be cordoned off for many lifetimes.

BK: I don't know what's going on out at the Test Site; I haven't had any issues with the Test Site with my constituents.

RM: And what about Nellis Air Force Base and all of the land that got cordoned off for that use?

BK: I think that's fine; that's a done deal. I don't have a problem with that and I don't care about low-flying aircraft; I kind of like to watch them. It bothers some people but it doesn't bother me. As long as they're not drones trying to take me out because I get too outspoken about things (I'm just kidding around).

RM: [Laughs] Okay, I think the next major issue to discuss is Yucca Mountain. Plans

for using it as a nuclear waste repository started in early 1983, so it was just barely getting going when you got here in 1986. What's your overall take on the Yucca Mountain effort?

BK: I think that it's one of the biggest boondoggles in the United States. It makes the Teapot Dome scandal look like a Sunday school picnic. They spent billions of dollars getting the best place in the United States to store that stuff, to take it away from the 155 sites in 38 states, where it's lying on the ground waiting for an event, and put it in one safe place where the only thing that could cause any kind of disaster would be a direct hit by a meteorite or a volcano eruption.

The stuff's encapsulated in ceramics and it's taken care of, and the way man's moving along, they aren't going to have to wait 10,000 years to put that stuff to good use or get rid of it. And it would do a number of things for Nevada's economy. I was in it in the stage when they were thinking about running trucks to haul it, and I suggested using convoys early in the morning. I knew how many trucks it would be - I think it was 360 trucks a month, maybe. It's been a long time.

Most of my constituents think that Nevada's economy should be diversified, and it should be diversified because we've got the highest unemployment in the nation. I get into that with the issue of Yucca Mountain and developing the 500-mile Highway 95 corridor, with a shared-use railroad offering wondrous opportunities because transportation corridors are the precursors of economic development.

RM: That's right.

BK: A two-lane highway doesn't cut it. I've talked to mining companies that won't do anything because they aren't going to truck stuff 400 miles on a two-lane highway.

About the same time they were talking about trucking the nuclear waste they focused on the idea that a railroad would be far superior, and that would have brought

between \$1 and \$2 billion dollars to the state of Nevada to develop the only railroad that made any sense at all. That's the Mina route - it runs north and south and interfaces with Southern California and Northern California and the national grid. It would be a shared-use railway, which would benefit casinos because they could even bring tourists in on the damn thing.

RM: So you were for the Mina route as opposed to the other one.

BK: The Caliente route? I would do this: I would do the Mina route, get that done. Then if they still want the Caliente route, fine and dandy. I've dealt with the people in Caliente. I know them all and they know me and they know that my interests aren't the same as theirs with regard to how that stuff should be routed.

RM: Because they want it to come through their route for their economic benefit.

BK: Sure, and I don't blame them. I like all those people. The mayor in particular, I like him a lot - he's a nice man. And so are the Lincoln County Commissioners, and they're doing exactly what I would do. They're looking out for their area's interest and I'm looking out for mine.

RM: Of course. Now, you watched the whole Yucca Mountain thing evolve from when you got here. Can you talk about that?

BK: I became intimately involved in it in 2003 when I became a commissioner, and ever since then I've been either in the AULG (affected units of local government), I've been on the public lands committees and so on and so forth, and I've done everything that I could possibly could do for it. I've gone to consortiums of nuclear physicists to talk about the high-level nuclear waste and the tremendous potential nuclear power has for desalinating vast quantities of water off the Pacific Coast and shipping the water here far cheaper than taking it out of White Pine County.

RM: I agree 100 percent. In your opinion, how did the Yucca Mountain effort go wrong? Why did it fail?

BK: I talked to several of our congressional delegation people, and one of them won't even return my e-mails anymore. His name is Harry. [Laughter] I got into some lovely debates with the hired guns from the state when I went to these scoping meetings, where they were trying to put a squash on this thing, with Bob Loux and all of the good old boys, their henchmen. I call them hired guns.

I used to kid them. I'd say, "They pay you good money for this, don't they?" We'd get into it real good, and I'd throw my stuff at them and that'd get them really upset before they'd leave the meeting.

RM: I can just imagine. So why do you think we don't have a Yucca Mountain program today?

BK: I really can't put my finger on it. I would say this: If the media was fair and got ahold of it, the snow would hit the fan, okay? But I'm going to get back to reality in this little predicament, I've been told by several members of congressional delegation, who oversimplify it, that to work on Yucca Mountain is political suicide.

RM: But was it in the beginning?

BK: I don't know that because I wasn't here in the beginning. From what I sense, there is an elite group of people, primarily the casino owners, that dictate the politics of Nevada. They always have and they don't have any intention whatsoever of relinquishing that control over the state. And some of these people could give a damn about the middle class. They could give a damn about all the people that are out of work down in Pahrump. They could give a damn about the idea that President Obama said he'd replace those jobs when he was around here politicking for president, and they've never been replaced yet.

And so on and so forth. Their issue is not what happens to middle class people in Nevada because they know the state of Nevada depends on them, and that's the top priority. What they want comes first, and anything that's inimical to their interest - for them to lose a nickel out of their slot machines because they have Yucca Mountain sitting over there - isn't going to cut any ice with them.

RM: Obama promised to replace the Yucca Mountain jobs?

BK: He certainly did; I remember that. In fact, this is kind of interesting. I went to Mr. Sandoval, and I really like Governor Sandoval, but he's a political realist like anybody that's in that office (and if you aren't, God help you). I went to the economic summit he had just before he took office up in Carson City; 17 counties were there. Mostly county managers went up there, but we don't have a county manager so they sent old rotten Bill Kirby up there. I enjoyed that. In the meeting all these people are wringing their hands and crying about the fact they've got no money and this is going to hell and that's going to hell and everything else. I'm sitting in there listening to all this, and being an accountant - I was a cost analyst and former corporate CEO - I've done a lot of budgets. I did the budgets for the East Los Angeles Senior Citizens Nutrition and Transportation Program; I've been around.

I'm listening to all this crying and carrying on about not having any money. So finally it came my turn, and I raised my hand and I said, "You know, you people are talking about money. The solution to your problems is revenue lines. The state legislature gave the farm away when they gave these renewable energy companies a 72 percent discount on their property taxes and sales taxes for 20 years. They didn't need to do that. They didn't need any inducement to bring those people here because we've got no personal income tax, we've got no corporate income tax. We've got low property taxes;

we've got low sales taxes. We're in close proximity to the people that need energy and we've got low-priced land. I said, "They have the best lobbyists in the world, don't they?" And nobody said a word. Everybody's sitting there in stunned silence.

I said, "The other thing they did to destroy the opportunities we had to have a revenue line is," I said, "you people stopped Yucca Mountain. We could've had a shared-use railway that would have brought billions of dollars in railroad construction to this state. It would've given the casinos more business. It would have created a 400-mile corridor for mining and mineral interests that would have put people to work," and so on and so forth. And I said, "The congressional delegation rejected that. Every time some opportunity comes along there's some vested interest in this state that must have an awful lot of say about it that doesn't want it to happen, and it's not helping you and me and all your concerns about where your money is." There was stunned silence because it's very unpopular upstate to talk about Yucca Mountain.

Well, I don't know whether it was stunned silence because I don't count, and I'm just a little guy from Esmeralda County, or whether it was stunned silence because they were shocked that anybody had the audacity to say that. I was waiting for a rebuttal because I was ready. I got no rebuttal. Nobody said a frigging word.

And it's funny I don't know whether anybody believes me or if it was just an accident, but when the meeting was over everybody was going up to shake Sandoval's hand. I didn't get up to shake his hand. I didn't have anything against him, but I didn't see any use in trying to ingratiate myself by shaking his hand. He was sitting about ten or 15 feet from me while people were going up to him, and he apparently kind of glanced at me. I got up to walk out the door and he walked over to me and shook my hand.

RM: He can't come out in support of Yucca Mountain at this point.

BK: He can't. How could he go back and tell the whole legislature that they're a bunch of jerks, you know? He can't do that. [Laughs]

RM: What you said is, "Hey, the king has no clothes."

BK: That's exactly what I said. And they were just thinking, "Shut up, kid. The king's got clothes on." [Laughs]

RM: Approximately when was that meeting?

BK: That meeting was in December of 2010, just before he took office in 2011. The best explanation I could get out of our congressional delegation was in a town hall meeting with Dean Heller. I'd use his name because he said this. I asked about Yucca Mountain and he said, "Well Mr. Kirby, it would be bad for tourism, and besides, the whole congressional delegation is against it." Now, how is that an answer!?

RM: I agree.

RM: It's really odd; it doesn't seem to hurt tourism in France.

BK: Not at all. And it only costs six cents a kilowatt-hour, and we're going to pay 36 cents a kilowatt-hour. The people in Las Vegas are in revolt over their utility bills because they're paying all high utility costs now?

RM: It's pitiful. Well, maybe it will turn around.

BK: Well, maybe the elite people in the country can get rid of us yokels and then they won't have to worry about it anymore. We'd all go bankrupt paying utilities.

RM: Assessing Yucca Mountain and looking forward, what could be done to make Yucca Mountain a reality and bring that economic development to Esmeralda County and central Nevada?

BK: I'm going to tell you one thing: our Repository Oversight Director, Edwin Mueller, has turned the thing he set up in an old vacant gas station into a wonderful place

to educate people who come down Highway 95 on Yucca Mountain. He does everything first class. That place was a nightmare when he took it over, and by his own hands and effort, he converted it into an excellent place to promote the safety and the benefits and everything else of Yucca Mountain.

RM: Can you think of more ways we can reverse this attitude of no Yucca Mountain and no high-level waste storage in Nevada? How can we get that turned around?

BK: It's real simple. We take our country back and get statesmen to run our country instead of politicians.

RM: But how do we do that?

BK: That question, I can't answer. I believe in the ballot box. It's funny, when people compromise the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and justify it because they have fine legal minds, they remind me of King George III. He had a fine legal mind, too.

RM: Do you see a Yucca Mountain in the future?

BK: I'm going to be realistic now. I think that with the politics in the country as they stand today, trying to get Yucca Mountain going is like untying the Gordian Knot. If there are some big changes in the presidential election, I think there's a glimmer of hope but that's as far as I can see it right now. All the facts are on the table. Everything's there that any man who would open his eyes could see - if they move ahead with nuclear energy. I'm not saying that we should abandon the renewables, but if they move ahead with nuclear, they're going to have the cheapest energy. We have a place to store this stuff. They need legislation to let us reprocess it like France does, and so on and so forth. Because they only use, what, six or seven percent of each rod, and you can revitalize them and use them again and again and again, but we're not allowed to do that.

I think that my first statement was the most accurate, that we need statesmen, not

politicians— people that have principles and are looking out for the best interests of the American people, as opposed to looking out for a power base that will keep them in office.

RM: I agree 100 percent, but how do you get them in there? And we have deep underlying energy problems that are coming down the road.

BK: There are a lot of other factors involved, too. We have multi-national corporations here. One of the things I said when I spoke at the Tea Party is that we need to get a fair balance of trade and tariffs back in our political system. We need to tax multinational corporations on their gross, not on the net profit they never have here. We need to penalize them for all the jobs they've shipped outside the country and we need to give tax credits to the domestic corporations to hire American people and give them good benefits. Like the ones I do books for: Cut their corporate taxes down from 35 percent to maybe 10 percent, and then they can hire more people. And there's the accumulated earnings tax— let's say we cut their taxes down, they accumulate earnings. Well, if you don't spend those accumulated earnings in a C-corporation to expand the operation, they'll tax you again and again and again and again on them. They already have teeth in our tax laws to keep people from overcompensating themselves if they're an owner of a corporation.

That would enable them to build up the working capital that they need to put people back to work, and to get state-of-the-art equipment in their companies to compete in the world marketplace. But these idiots up there let the multinational corporations run our media— I think GE owns half the media. They made billions last year and paid very little or no taxes here. Then they have guys as advisors for Obama that are putting jobs outside the country. There's more than one way to skin a cat if you have a sharp knife,

but we don't have a sharp knife on Capitol Hill.

RM: What would be your take on a nuclear reactor or reactors in Esmeralda County?

BK: I don't see a problem with it. You're talking about a pebble reactor? They're self-contained and generate power for 25 years, pumping out 1,000 megawatts of electricity and exporting it and putting people to work.

RM: And creating good jobs.

BK: Creating jobs in low-cost energy. Lovely. We would be site-conscious about it, naturally, and the people should be educated on the pros and cons on it to make sure that they're comfortable with the idea there's no jeopardy in having it here.

RM: Do you think there's a chance that that could happen?

BK: I think if people are educated it could happen. Because the NRC, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, has the most stringent requirements in the world to do work on nuclear energy production, we have the safest system in the world, and we're so far away from Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, you can't even compare the two to the safety measures we employ today.

RM: It's interesting how Harry Reid has subverted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, with the chairman that he appointed who was his anti-Yucca Mountain aide.

BK: I've seen the workings of Senator Reid, and I don't care to discuss them in this meeting. I would say that he is a very ethical man, and he has a code of ethics that are beyond my comprehension. You can quote me on that.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: [Laughs] Okay. How do you see the wilderness issues? Talk about their impact in Esmeralda County.

BK: Teddy Roosevelt is one of my favorite presidents. He did some great things to conserve some of the beautiful parts of our land, and I believe in conservation. I believe in some areas being designated as wilderness areas, but enough is enough. We have an economic situation here where we can compete in the world marketplace by developing our own energy sources, including oil, uranium, and everything that goes along with that, including uranium along the Grand Canyon.

What I see here is that they have standards for designating wilderness, and they designate wilderness study areas that don't meet those standards. I believe that the laws that we've created here offer us the tools to do intelligent work on this. We need to revise the Endangered Species Act and the related public land laws so that if an environmentalist group sues somebody, they have to pay all their own legal costs. Because they have funding that comes from philosophies that are beyond what American people think about their country.

I've dealt with some of the environmental groups. I went into one meeting in Bishop one day over the Furnace Creek issue, and the Friends of the Inyos and so on and so forth showed up. I sat in the meeting and I said, "I'd like to make an opening statement." Jeff Bailey from the Forest Service and all the good old boys were there and we had some representatives in there. I said, "What are these people doing in here?"

Jeff Bailey had a horrified look and he said, "They're the representatives of the Friends of the Inyos," so on and so forth.

I said, "They don't live in Fish Lake Valley. What the heck do they have to with this thing?" I went on, "The negotiations are between the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service, and the people that live in the local areas, not some outsiders that don't live here."

And of course, their first attack is, "Well we speak for all the American people." That's always their first argument.

I indicated to them, "You people are hired guns. You've already been given an agenda. You didn't come here to negotiate. You can't deviate from the agenda or you'll lose your jobs. So I don't understand what you're involved in the negotiations for. You've already decided what you're going to do, and so I see no purpose in you being here." Oh, they got madder than hell.

RM: I'd bet they did. As I understand it, they've got two wilderness study areas in Esmeralda County. Talk about those, and your take on them, and their impact on the county.

BK: Well, the impact is that you can't do anything with them. See these little squares on the map here? These are sections, and these sections represent different kinds of activity: There are so many mining claims in these sections, so many geothermal claims in these sections, and so on and so forth. This [showing a map] is a wilderness study area.

RM: What's it called?

BK: The areas are in the Silver Peak Range. We have another wilderness study area down here, and that is in the lower end of the Silver Peak Range. This is going down towards Death Valley. We're not concerned about them because they meet most of the criteria to be wilderness.

RM: Oh, I see—the ones in the very southern tip of Esmeralda County.

BK: Yes. The ðVö in the Pigeon Springs area, that's a wilderness study area. We don't think that meets the criteria to be a wilderness, and the one in the Silver Peak Range up here doesn't meet them, either.

RM: Are there any designated wilderness areas in the county?

BK: The only ones we have would be right here: This is the Boundary Peak Wilderness Area in Esmeralda County. And then down in Death Valley, we have a small piece in the Death Valley National Monument.

RM: And these others have been designated as study areas?

BK: Yes, and a study area is actually worse than a wilderness area because you can't do anything until the study's been completed, whereas in a wilderness area they have certain standards and certain regulations with regard to its use.

RM: Say something about the impact of that designation on the county and the county's ability to plan and so on.

BK: Well, most of Esmeralda County is just ripe with natural resources. It's just a matter of getting to them and extracting them.

RM: What are some of those resources?

BK: We have Grefco down at the end of the valley - they have about 20 people working there. They mine Dicalite. Dicalite is used in filters and all kinds of commercial products; they ship it to Japan and everything else. They would love to see a railroad because they're compromised by where they're at.

RM: They're trucking it to the coast? Or to a railhead somewhere?

BK: Right. And then, we have lithium. We've discovered huge deposits of lithium in the northeast end of Fish Lake Valley. That's the same thing they're mining in the Silver Peak area.

RM: So you've got lithium in two sites in Esmeralda County?

BK: Yes. We have a ton of lithium over there, and right now our biggest concern is, are you going to have to use water to process it, and if so, how much? And can our aquifers tolerate your drain without compromising the ranching and farming that are the basis of our economy here? They've got 7,000 acres of mining claims on lithium in my district, Fish Lake Valley.

That's not like geothermal. We don't have a problem with geothermal, and there's a particular type of solar that I don't have a problem with because it doesn't use much water.

RM: How have land issues affected the development of these resources?

BK: I think that we're worried now about how the sage grouse habitat designation is going to go. They're going to try to keep the sage grouse out of the Endangered Species Act, but the BLM has identified areas in Esmeralda County that are considered sage grouse habitat. We have transmission lines we're going to need to put over the hill to export electricity if we get our geothermal and solar going. We're concerned that we might not be able to get our transmission lines through areas that are designated for sage grouse.

In fact, I made a comment on the sage grouse issue. I went to the scoping meeting on it last week. My comment was very simple. I said, "I've been hiking for 26 years in the areas and environs of Fish Lake Valley where you have shaded areas for sage grouse. I've never seen one sage grouse. I've seen doves, I've seen chukar, I've seen quail and predatory birds and other birds, but I've never seen a sage grouse." I think there's a few sage grouse up by Montgomery Pass, up in that area. Really, I haven't seen them. I said, "My concern is that if you have sage grouse areas that you can't qualify as

having any significant number of sage grouse, then I don't want to see them because they're compromising human existence by damaging our economic opportunities here in the valley. Or words to that effect.

RM: How else would you frame these issues in terms of the impact on Esmeralda County in your position as a political leader?

BK: The way I feel about it right now is that we need to stop right where we're at, eliminate the wilderness study areas we have here, and not bring any more wilderness areas into this county. Let our local public lands policy dictate what the federal government does in Esmeralda County. Our public lands policy is very simple. It identifies that we, the local people, are good custodians of the land and we identify with the Code of the West. The Code of the West works on the premise that we don't suffer big city mentality any more than we absolutely have to in managing our affairs out here.

RM: Describe the big city mentality.

BK: I'll give you an example of big city mentality: You have to have zoning. Another example is that we have volunteer ambulance and fire services out here. The state has adopted national standards that if you're going to be a volunteer EMT which I was for eight years you almost have to be a doctor. It's trying to create uniform standards throughout the United States for all EMT employees. Whereas we have volunteers that run from work to do it and they only need intense practical event-type training. But since the big cities require those regulations, we have to suffer. It's extremely difficult to get volunteers that are going to go through all that ordeal because there's no profit in it. And it's vital that we have these services out here.

RM: Of course. Could you give me an overview of the economy of Fish Lake Valley?

BK: The economy of Fish Lake Valley is derived from a complete hardware store, two

bars (one is a bar and a restaurant), alfalfa farms, cattle ranching, and some public service. We have teachers and aides that work for our little school here. And we have some people that subsist electronically. They can have a business here and function outside the county because of new technology and computers and so on and so forth.

RM: What kinds of businesses?

BK: Well, I have one. I sit here and do business all over the state of California. And we have retirees who have retirement income and trade at the store here—there are a lot of retirees in Fish Lake Valley. And we have an excellent RV park.

RM: Do you know off the top of your head how many hay operations there are?

BK: I'd say there are seven hay operations here. I'd say the hay operations and cattle ranching employ one-third of the adult people that live here.

RM: Are they raising a lot of cows?

BK: You've asked me some questions I don't have an answer for. You'd have to talk to the ranchers and hay farmers.

RM: Sure. Do you know where they're shipping their hay?

BK: I think mostly California.

RM: Maybe to dairies?

BK: Right. We have high-quality hay here. The very nature of our environment leaves our hay with more nutrients and proper moisture loads, from what I've been told by the farmers here. They can compete even though they have to send their hay long distance because it is desirable and dairy farmers have found out that they get a lot better production when they have good-quality hay.

RM: Does it go out on Highway 6?

BK: Yes, and some people take it over Westgard Pass, which is kind of tricky.

RM: Oh, wow, that would be tricky. I wouldn't want to drive a truck over Westgard.

BK: It is tricky. There's been a couple of loads lost up there. And we do have some mining here. We have some people that live here that have small claims, and they are very discreet about identifying what they do. They probably can extract enough gold to eke out a minimum subsistence.

RM: Do you get a certain amount of tourism off of the White Mountains?

BK: Yes, we do. In our valley we have the highest point in the state of Nevada, Boundary Peak. We have trout fishing. I can go up nine-tenths of a mile from my house and catch trout if I want to. The biggest one we caught in that stream up there was 13 inches, but you can get some pan-sized: 9, 10, 11 inches. We have game birds and we saw a herd of 60 antelope the other day at the northern end of the valley. I frequently see deer herds moving across, right along the edge of the border. And we have a large bighorn sheep population here. I was hiking in the mountains the day before yesterday. I went for a three-hour hike back in the Silver Peaks in some real wild country. and saw all kinds of bighorn sheep.

RM: Man, you're a real hiker. I admire that.

BK: I keep a log. This is the month of January. As of yesterday, I'd been 73 miles on foot.

RM: This month? That's a record!

BK: I've done 1,665 pushups and 154 chin-ups and I just got over being real sick. I got some real bad food poisoning and I was out about a month and a half. It screwed up my intestines and everything.

RM: Do you use a pedometer to measure your miles?

BK: No, I pace off the distances or use my vehicle odometer.

RM: No doubt you've been on top of White Mountain and all that?

BK: Yes, and I have climbed Mount Whitney from both front and back, climbing the back after a 12-day hike 240 miles from Yosemite.

RM: That's amazing. I climbed White Mountain years ago.

BK: That's a neat hike. I love it up there.

RM: I really enjoyed it. Now, how do you see the future of the valley, particularly in the context of these land issues?

BK: I see that we have a lot of people that come here to rock hound, hunt, enjoy the great outdoors, four-wheel, and hike. And I see that we have a lifestyle that we want to keep here— a rural lifestyle. We don't have gangs. We don't have any significant crime here anymore.

RM: So the druggies are gone?

BK: Yes, for all practical purposes. You're always going to have some recreational users; you can't eliminate that. Besides, I think the mode of doing business anymore in the drug business doesn't identify with what they were doing when I first came here 20 years ago. It's too risky and there's no profit in it, and when you're a small rural community, everybody knows everything pretty soon. I think they felt that they had enough people that were involved in it here that they were building a drug paradise, and it dissipated for various and sundry reasons.

RM: This would have been in the '80s, when you got here?

BK: No, this was from '86 to '96, about a ten-year period; there was a lot of activity here. They had people here who were cookers— they'd take trailers around and cook methamphetamines and stuff like that. But with the new technology that the DEA has . . . and besides, the people down in Mexico are jealous of competition from the boys up

here; they would just as soon export it from Mexico. The world has changed in the drug business. I think it hasn't been any particular individual up here, but anybody that screws around with those people is going to meet an untimely end, and the business will go on as usual, I can guarantee it.

RM: Here's an off-topic question: Do you hike alone?

BK: Yes. When I was getting on the top of that mountain, the day before yesterday, I thought, "You know, you're crazy, Kirby. You're 75 years old, you're breathing like a son-of-a-buck going up the side of this hill." And I said, "It's as good a way to check out as any, I guess."

RM: Oh, definitely. And how do you pick where you're going to hike? It sounds like you hike almost every day or every other day.

BK: I try to do one hike a week where I go into some area I've never been before, if I can.

RM: So you probably know this area like the back of your hand.

BK: Yes, I know it pretty well. And right around the house I've got a half-mile loop, and I've got a chin-up bar over there.

RM: Do you run the loop or walk it?

BK: I've been walking. I can run but at my age, if I run, my knees bother me for a couple days. So I walk real fast. I walk about 14 minutes a mile when I'm on a flat surface.

RM: You're walking more than four miles an hour.

BK: And then, in a lot of my courses, to compensate for not running anymore, to get good cardio, I've got one course that goes four miles uphill and four miles downhill. I just pour it on walking uphill, and that gives me all the cardio I want. So that keeps your

stamina up. I do that because that's part of me.

Now, back to this area, that's pretty much what our economy is. We do have some mining in Fish Lake Valley. We have Grefco, as I mentioned, and we have a place called CMR - you probably saw it coming in the valley. They're kind of a ghost operation. There used to be a milling plant down there, and they have all the capability to do that. They keep a skeleton crew to keep the equipment up and everything else. The guy that is the primary stockholder there uses that to get people involved with different mining investments because he's got hundreds of claims; he has investments in Arizona and so on and so forth. That guy's name is Larry Atkinson.

RM: Is Esmeralda set to become a world-class producer in lithium and rare earths?

BK: No, I don't think so. I think most of the mining companies are looking for huge deposits. I think we have a lot of minerals here but they're scattered; they're not in huge deposits, with some exceptions. For instance, Metallic Metals is getting ready to take out the highway over by Goldfield. From what I understand, they've got some stuff under there that's at least 22 ounces a ton, which is a pretty hefty amount for a ton of ground.

CHAPTER FOUR

BK: I didn't tell you this when I introduced you to my wife, but she's a prospector's daughter. Her dad found the primary claims in Gabbs and sold them to FMC for a couple hundred thousand dollars.

RM: What's her maiden name?

BK: Deborah Donahue. Her dad and mother were both prospectors. He took the Gabbs money and used it back in the days when you had to do your assessment work, and he used it all up. He had probably 90 or 100 claims when he retired, and he was very secretive.

He had a claim called the Golden Ghost that they lived on as children up in the mountains. It was a big one-bedroom place right up in the Silver Peaks. The old cabin is still up there. He was a wonderful man, but he had no entrepreneurial spirit and he was very secretive about everything he did. But he did get that one good one, the Gabbs claim.

RM: And then when World War II broke out, molybdenum claims became worth some money, didn't they? And then they were trucking that to Vegas, I believe.

BK: I don't know when he got the claims up there, and I don't know what part of Gabbs he had the claims in, but he had claims there and they were primarily gold.

RM: Was he a prospector all his life, or was that just his one passion?

BK: He got involved in prospecting in the '50s when he lost his turkey ranch in Ramona, California, to a big fire and disease. His brother was an attorney in Bakersfield, and a guy owed him some money and gave him the claims to the Golden Ghost Mine up in the Silver Peaks. My father-in-law was out of work at the time because he had lost his

ranch and everything with it. So he decided he was going to suddenly become a prospector. However, before that, he'd always been a diviner. He had a reputation in this valley he could tell you how much and how deep the water is. And not only that, he divined ore.

RM: No kidding.

BK: Yes. I saw some old woodcuts here a while back in a book on the Spaniards in the sixteenth century in Mexico and South America and it showed Spanish prospectors divining for ore so that's an old phenomenon.

RM: Yes, my dad used to try and do it but he wasn't so good at it.

BK: My father-in-law was really good at it.

RM: About what year did he come up here?

BK: I think he moved up here about 1960, but it might have been a lot earlier. You'd have to ask my wife. She knows more about that than I because she was just five, six years old when she started going to school at Dyer School. They'd come seven miles down a jeep trail to the highway, and when they'd hit the highway they had to go ten miles to the elementary school. And in the winter it would snow in the mountains.

RM: So she grew up on that basis?

BK: She grew up there. A good part of her life was spent there when she was younger.

RM: When did her dad acquire those claims at Gabbs?

BK: He acquired them in the 60s.

RM: How did you and Debbie get together?

BK: When I came up here in 1986, I'd been a single parent and I was out to pasture. Debbie drove the high school bus 85 miles to Bishop at that time. They didn't pay layover time so she'd go to work in Bishop while waiting to bring the kids home. She

was a single mother raising three kids. Her mother was here and would take care of them when she was working. The layover work was in the Chinese restaurant in Bishop.

I didn't pay any attention because I was out to pasture and had no intention of getting married again when I came out here. Well, I was in the Kiwanis then and we'd sell Washington apples every year as one of our fundraisers; we'd sell them down in East L.A. people in East L.A. love apples. I happened to have a couple of boxes left over and I brought them up. Somebody mentioned to me that Debbie was raising a bunch of kids by herself and not making a lot of money, so I took a box of apples over and put them on her porch. Never met her or anything. Two weeks later when I came back from L.A., I had some applesauce on my front porch. And things got sweeter after that.

RM: That's a good story.

BK: Do you see that picture of the football team?

RM: Yes.

BK: The far right-hand kid is our late-in-life child, Cedric.

RM: Isn't that wonderful.

BK: He was the fourth-best running back in Nevada last year, high school-wise. The Tonopah High School game against Round Mountain, who they just barely beat earlier in the year in a practice game, was their homecoming game. He gained 289 yards on the ground and four touchdowns and two two-point conversions. And he ran three events in the state track and field finals. He graduated last year and got two bites on colleges. He's going to community college in Reno now. Truckee Meadows College.

RM: That's nice.

BK: They don't have athletics so he's just working on getting an education.

RM: My daughter, Bambi, also graduated from Tonopah High.

BK: When I first came here, before I was on the school board, the students from here were all going to Bishop. They couldn't go out for athletics, and the only people whose kids got extracurricular activities were the ones who could afford to board their kids out in Bishop.

So when I got on the school board I conspired with Harold Tokerud, who was our superintendent then. I said, "Hell, let's get these kids and move them to Tonopah High School, where they can have sports." And they wanted to go out for sports! So we got the school bus, we changed the whole situation then; that was in 1993. My oldest stepson is 6'2" and he played varsity football and basketball, and went to the state finals in both events. He might have gone there when your daughter went there.

RM: What was his name?

BK: Lucas Michaelson. He graduated in 1998.

RM: He was after my daughter; she graduated in '87.

BK: That's the year before my youngest son graduated, the last of my kids from my first marriage. Incidentally, Lucas still holds the shot put record here. Believe it or not, I used to throw the eight-pound shot put in high school. Little guys do the eight, the next guys do the ten, and the next guys do the 12. I learned Parry O'Brien style.

RM: I remember him.

BK: Randy Matson from Texas A&M broke the world record with 72 feet, and he developed a new style where you swing in a complete circle and then just let the ball go. Before that, Perry O'Brien would stand in the opposite direction, make a half-turn, and then pitch the shot. I taught the kids up here how to throw the shot put, including my stepson. He could throw it a lot farther than I could.

RM: That's great. Now, do you have any thoughts on the Sagebrush Rebellion?

BK: It's the same as the Furnace Creek thing. That road's been used for 100 years. In the '50s the ranchers graded it and kept it up, and there was a mine up at the top of the White Mountains that the Mexicans mined probably in the 1840s or 1850s. That road's been used all those years and everybody's had access to it. But you've got to understand, the environmentalist groups have money and they know how to use the law. The Center for Biological Diversity is the group that shut that down. Daniel Patterson was the lead man on that. They shut that down in March of 2003.

RM: This is into the White Mountains?

BK: Yes. There are a lot of Furnace Creeks; this is the one in the White Mountains. It's the southern end of the White Mountains. I've got a history on that whole episode. We went down to the first scoping meeting at the entrance and we had all the people there who were for keeping that road open. Even though it's in Mono and Inyo counties, it's common to our area and whatever usage there is, we do it because of the way they drew the state lines.

Anyway, we had the first scoping meeting and Daniel Patterson was there; he was an arrogant soul. He said, "I want to tell you people something right now: You're wasting your time. That road's going to stay closed. We closed it; it's good for the environment." And he said, "We've never lost a lawsuit and we don't intend to lose one now."

We fought him all the way to the hilt until the Boxer/McKeon Wilderness Act came through and shut it down for sure. We were fighting them, and are still fighting them. The Forestry Service gave us an option that we were satisfied with but the environmentalist groups still kept playing with us, and so on and so forth, because they had money. My attitude about the environmentalist groups is they're arrogant and the rural people are their worst enemies and they hate them.

I hiked all the way to the top of Furnace Creek and I took my GPS with me and I identified the precise location of each and every little riparian area and that was during the runoff period in the spring. They had one area that was just flush with flora, and that was the area they depicted as being damaged. Before four-wheel drives went in there, there was probably very little flora in there because the four-wheel drives that occasionally, once in a blue moon, went up there would plow the soil in the area where the water is, and that would enable the flora to spread in those areas. So they took that area, when some four-wheel drives would run up it, and put it on their website the whole route up the hill was like that to twist the minds of their donors in the big cities.

I eventually got Neil Kornze, in Harry Reid's office, who I like, to hike up the creek to help us get a cherry stem in the wilderness Furnace Creek route.

RM: What is a "cherry stem"?

BK: That means that that's the end of the trail, the Forestry Service one. Hector Villalobos, who is the Ridgecrest BLM guy, was still trying to do some kind of an EIS on it, and we never heard from them; they're in that area of Fish Lake Valley. Mono County never classified that road as an RS-2477 road, and they don't really have any interest in doing that. They get no beneficial use from it the way we do and there are a lot of environmental-minded people on their board up there so they were no help at all.

So we fought to open a road that's not in our county. We got the Forestry Service to agree to open it up, and the BLM to agree to open it up, and then the Boxer/McKeon Wilderness Act pretty well killed the whole deal. That happened the year before last.

There was another one before that the one where Harry Reid had trouble with all the small rural counties. It was the year before the Boxer/McKeon Act. His bill covered large areas of Nevada, and I have all the information on that what they offered

us, the carrot in front of the hare. We were going to give up 680 square miles of our 3,600 square-mile county to wilderness, and they were going to give us 36 acres in exchange for that, to help out with some of our county needs.

RM: That doesn't sound like much of a trade. Let me follow up on biological diversity. What's your take on diversity, when somebody says there is a decline in diversity?

BK: I never did know what the Center for Biological Diversity really meant; I never read their bylaws or their articles of incorporation or whatever. My attitude about diversity is that, I'm an environmentalist. I want to protect our environment.

RM: Anybody who hikes as much as you do doesn't want to hike in some desiccated, ruined place.

BK: And I know how to ride dirt bikes, and I don't do it. I have a Bronco, and I know how to use a Bronco.

RM: But what is your answer to the people who say we need to protect diversity? How do you respond to that? Not in a specific case, but generally.

BK: I think the BLM already answered that question: the multiple use concept, with concern for the environment. It allows everybody to get a little bit of it. Because we don't want four-wheel drive vehicles overwhelming our environment or our ecosystems.

RM: Okay, your take is that everything is saved for multiple use, without one guy overwhelming it?

BK: That's right. Here's a little story about Furnace Creek: I used to go hunting up Furnace Creek in the chukar run; I took some of my clients up there. The cattle used to run up there and I never saw such a mess - you can't drink the water or anything. But believe it or not, a byproduct of those cattle running up there is that it enhanced the environment to a certain extent because the cow poop brings varmints in and insects, and

things that they feed on. So cows aren't all that bad. When I go up here to Percy Aiken Creek, the cattle never run up there. The water's clean, there's plenty of flora, there's plenty of game, and I don't have to put up with the cow poop and giardia you get when you drink the water.

RM: And if somebody wants to come in with a large mine like a Round Mountain or the one maybe they're going to make outside of Goldfield, okay, but you have to do it responsibly. What would you say to that?

BK: Here's what I would say to that: I would say that the people here in Fish Lake Valley don't want a large mine in our environment, but that's not a county-wide attitude. Goldfield would love to have a large open-pit mine and Silver Peak would love to have a big mine.

RM: So you think it's all right for locals to veto a project?

BK: Yes. We live here, and I don't want some outside people coming in and dictating.

RM: So you're for local control and multiple use.

BK: Absolutely.

RM: Did you ever interface at all with Dick Carver up in Round Mountain?

BK: No. I know Mrs. Carver; I've met her. But I understand what he did, and I was familiar, a little bit, with that Sagebrush Rebellion. He was probably on good footing. The local people had been using that road, and then the government arbitrarily shut it down; it just showed the arrogance and power from the federal government. I agree with what he did, taking that tractor and blocking their access. That's when Janet Reno flew over here to see if she was going to send the boys that destroyed the Davidian compound to deal with us.

RM: She did?

BK: Yes, we saw her plane and we know she was in it.

RM: Where do you see these issues going in the future?

BK: I see that we're going to have more and more restrictions on using public lands in the rural areas of the United States. I see more restrictions, more regimentation, they're going to hire more enforcers to make sure we abide by any regulations they make, and they're going to try to usurp the power of the local police departments with regard to what goes on out here. I look for a more totalitarian arrangement than we've ever seen before. I don't see much hope out here for anything at this point in time unless there's some turnaround in the federal government on Capitol Hill.

RM: I hear that at one point the BLM wanted to bring their own people in for law enforcement?

BK: I've done so much in the last nine or ten years that I can't remember all the details. All I know is I was at a NACO (Nevada Association of Counties) meeting and the BLM brought their law enforcement people in and they were telling us how much they wanted to help us, and they were going to develop this new program to get law enforcement into all rural areas out here, and that didn't go over well at all. I spoke against it at that meeting.

RM: Bill, in terms of your dealings with the federal government, have you experienced any differences between the Forest Service and the BLM?

BK: We've had an excellent relationship with both the Forest Service and the BLM, and they've listened very patiently and with conscientiousness and concern about the issues we've had. They worked hard on getting options for us and helping us come to terms on dealing with the Furnace Creek issue. They brought back an option that the people in Fish Lake Valley liked, and the same thing with the BLM. Every time we've

had an issue, the local offices have gone over backwards to help us out with whatever resources they had available..

RM: So any problems that you've had are coming down from the top and are policy-type things?

BK: They're coming down with policy from the top and from the extreme environmental groups. The groups are pressuring them and filing lawsuits and things like that, that the US Forest Service and BLM would prefer not to have to deal with, generally.

RM: Have you been involved in any of those lawsuits over the years?

BK: The only one that I've really been involved in is the one I told you about that shut down Furnace Creek.

RM: Who in the community and Esmeralda County have been colleagues in these challenges that you've undertaken?

BK: I would say that 75 percent of this community has stood up to the test any time we've had an environmental or access issue. They not only have supported me, they've advocated procedures to deal with this that I, as their representative, have followed because I respect their views on environment and access. I would say the ranchers and the farmers have been especially supportive of maintaining access and freedom from undue impositions by the Department of the Interior on restricting the use of our public lands.

RM: Are any of the ranchers grazing on public lands? Are there any big operations?

BK: Yes, we have big operations that have grazing permits, and the ranchers here have always honored their obligations, paying the government for the right to graze on public lands. We haven't had any ranchers here that refused to pay the fees for the allotments they've been given that I know of here in Fish Lake Valley. I understand there were some

over by Goldfield. At this point in time, most of our ranchers and the people here have worked closely to abide by the rules set out by the federal government.

RM: I imagine you know Ben Colvin and about how he just pulled his cows off the range. He said screw it.

BK: I know Ben very well. I know all about it. They confiscated his cattle and tried to auction them. In fact, we had a grand jury that we had to pay for out of the county coffers as a byproduct of that because he has that right, as a citizen, to call a grand jury against the federal government. That was interesting. I consider Ben Colvin a friend. He and I have disagreed on a few things, but I like him. He's a good man. I agree with a lot of his philosophy and with regard to the federal government he and I are a lot alike. But there are certain things you have to do.

RM: Do you think you are kind of a county leader in these issues?

BK: If you would want to compare me with all the commissioners they've had here, I'd say I'm probably average.

RM: So the other commissioners are activists, too?

BK: Do you mean the current commissioners?

RM: Yes, and also in terms of other citizens who are not commissioners—are you one of the leading activists?

BK: Let's put it this way: I'm always outspoken, and I am an activist. If a problem comes up and there's going to be some confrontation or issues, I'll be right there.

RM: You don't hold back.

BK: That's right. My neuroses run along defiance.

RM: Like your challenging the big guy in the drug issues.

BK: Yes. All my heroes are good guys, you know? Robert E. Lee and all the good

bunch and Andy Jackson, my favorite president. I have the beautiful farewell address he wrote. It identifies the problems we're having with international bankers today to the letter.

RM: He had conflict with the bankers, didn't he?

BK: Biddle and the Central Bank of New York. I'm a history nut, of sorts. But to your question, I don't think I have a particular following. I think the people in this valley probably think I'm a little nuts, and that's okay. Because if you can't be your own man, why play the game? I think that if you went around and talked to them, they'd probably tell you the same thing, but they do know I get things done.

I think I exert leadership; I'll give you an example. For the gymnasium we're building here, we were going to get \$125,000 out of the geothermal funds, and there's \$1.5 million total available. Somebody else—a good person—wrote up the ordinance and the ordinance had a financial formula in it. I looked at the formula and I didn't understand it, and I asked the person who wrote the ordinance, "How does that mean the money is going to be allocated?"

They said, "I don't really know. You'll have to check with the BLM and see the components of this thing." I checked with the BLM and as a byproduct, I re-wrote the ordinance, and each of the three districts got \$500,000—that's better than \$125,000.

RM: That's great.

BK: If I've missed a meeting, it has been because there was some event that took place that prevented me from getting there; I don't miss meetings.

RM: I also note that you express yourself very well.

BK: Thank you. It's a matter of presentation when you've got to do something.

Somebody criticized me the other day. I said we only got 13 percent of the county CDBG

(community development block grant) grants. They've got several million dollars in grants for this county, and we've only got maybe \$200,000 or \$300,000. In this public meeting, this guy spoke up and said, "You only got 13 percent out of all the grants?!"

I said, "Yes. The only grants this area of the county ever got were on my watch, too." [Laughs] They've got nasty problems over in Goldfield with arsenic in their water and all that stuff. We don't have that here in the valley because we don't depend on a municipal water system. And most of those grants that were left were [earmarked for] public health and welfare, and we didn't have any public health and welfare problems over here, but I didn't go ahead and explain all that to him. He just was upset because I only got 13 percent of the \$3 million that was left to the county, or whatever the hell it was. And so you have to deal with that kind of stuff. I have some people that definitely don't like me.

RM: Sure, that happens.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: There are basically three population centers in Esmeralda County, aren't there? There's Goldfield, there's Silver Peak, and there's Fish Lake Valley.

BK: Yes, and all of us are different.

RM: Could you discuss those differences?

BK: Okay, in the area over by Goldfield, they'd like to have an airport and economic development, commercial growth along the highway, and so on and so forth. They have historically ruled the county because they've always had the majority of the voters. That's where our county seat is, that's where most of the employees of the county work. They would like to see some capital growth and expansion over there.

Then you go to Silver Peak. Silver Peak is totally dependent upon mining— their community is at the mercy of the mining. If the mining was gone, they'd be gone. Well, their population would not totally go. Silver Peak probably represent 110 voters, we represent maybe 300 voters at the most over here, and Goldfield has about 400, 450 voters. Silver Peak's interest is mining and outdoor stuff. They are very strong on protecting the public lands for the access and use by Americans. And Goldfield is interested in mining. Goldfield is for mining development and commercial development along Highway 95.

And over here, the people are content to leave their lifestyle the same, ranching and farming, without any significant development at all. And the majority of the private land is in Fish Lake Valley. Ninety-seven percent of the land in Esmeralda County is federal land, and probably 75 percent of the private land is here.

RM: That's interesting. How does the part of Fish Lake Valley that's in California fit into the community?

BK: They have a commonality with us because they're hay farmers and cattle ranchers. And they have no restrictions on the use of water down there. But by the same token, they have no more room for development because the environmentalists have shut everything down in California. The farmers on this side sometimes resent the inordinate amount of water use that goes on below the border because it hurts our aquifers. We have a declining water table here and we have concerns about that because it's all farming at that end of the Fish Lake Valley.

RM: Are they growing more down there than they are up here?

BK: No, I don't think so. I think we probably grow more up here - at least the same, if not more. We really don't make any distinction between them and us. It's almost like there wasn't a border there, except for the water. As Mark Twain said, "Whiskey's for drinking and water's for fighting."

RM: That's good. And then, what about Gold Point? Do many people live there?

BK: Gold Point is kind of like Uranus. They have about ten or 12 residents, and they want to see the township the federal government claims it possesses conveyed back to them, even though they are currently in trespass with the BLM, and they don't want any development around them. They love their pristine area and they're very defensive about it. I said that to maintain the aesthetic value of that historic mining town if we had the land back, there were conditions to be maintained; we weren't going to have a bunch of junkyards up there. When I said that, some of the residents got upset with me for a while. But they liked the effort I took to try to get it back. They're just not so sure they like the conditions that would have to be enforced if we convey the land back to them. So we're

distinctly different.

We have a good board of county commissioners now. Nancy Boland, the one who tried to slick me on the money for the geothermal stuff, is a good gal. She was doing what was in the best interests of her constituents. I don't resent her for it one bit. It's just that I read that funny thing and I didn't understand it, and I said, "How the hell did you put this formula together?"

And she said, "Oh, this and that and the other thing."

I said, "Oh really? Well who's going to get what?"

She said, "I can't tell you that right now."

I said, "Well, we're not going to vote on this until Mr. Kirby finds out what the formula says - who can get what, and so on."

She's our chair and she does a great job. She's been a credit to our county. Great gal. And Dominic Pappalardo is doing a super good job. Do you know R. J. Gillum?

RM: Yes, I do. I interviewed him.

BK: He's a big guy. R. J. Gillum and I are both former marines, and they thought we were going to get into fistfights sometimes - he and I really went at it. I love R. J., though. And you heard how he won his election - they had a tie. It was in newspapers all over the country. They had to draw cards and they both drew jacks and he had the predominant jack.

RM: I remember; that's quite a story.

BK: I know you haven't got time for all this, but the numbers for our late-in-life child - he was seven pounds, eleven ounces when he was born at Nye Regional Medical Center, for seven come eleven. He was 21 inches long, for blackjack. He was 1,111th baby born in the Nye Regional Medical Center, for four aces. [Laughter]

RM: He's a true Nevada boy, isn't he?

BK: As you know, there was a recent attempt by others to marry Esmeralda to northern Nye County. I was interviewed in the *Pahrump Valley Times* about three weeks ago and I have my comments in it after the article, if you want to get some good insight into the mentality of Esmeralda County. It was really simple. The suitor doesn't have a big enough dowry to marry us.

RM: [Laughs]

BK: Of the 17 counties, we made \$385,000 profit the year before last and lost \$18,000 last year. We've got \$9 million in the bank, and we ain't interested in marrying anybody.

RM: [Laughs] So your take is, it's not going to happen.

BK: It's not going to happen. We like our autonomy and we don't want to be ruled by Tonopah. We love Tonopah, don't get me wrong. We just want to fry our own fish and let them fry theirs.

RM: You're Esmeralda County and have been for quite a while.

BK: Judge Davis of Tonopah and I had a lovely talk on that. I love Judge Davis; he's one of my heroes. He was trying to sucker me into his line of thinking on that and he had some good points. This was about a year and a half or two before he died. And just like I told him, "We want our autonomy. We like it; we manage our own affairs."

RM: Sure; you could be submerged.

BK: We have everything a big county has with just 1,000 people, if you can believe that. And we do it right. I run a tight ship; I'm an accountant and I like to be in the black.

RM: Do people in the valley orient more toward Bishop or Tonopah?

BK: It's probably 60 percent towards Bishop and 40 percent towards Tonopah. I'm a Tonopah guy because I like the Nevada State Bank. They've been a great bank. Over the

years of being in business, I've had so many issues with the Bank of America.

RM: I noticed you said your boy was born in Tonopah, so you didn't go to Bishop for his birth.

BK: No, but you have to understand that from a medical standpoint, I go to Bishop for the doctor. I like Nye, don't get me wrong, but Bishop has a higher level of care. When I was on the ambulance service, if it was a 50-50 tossup and I had anything to say about it, if somebody was going to check out or not, take them there. I was on the ambulance service as a volunteer for eight years.

RM: That's amazing. As I've said, you certainly sound like a really community-spirited person.

BK: Well, let's put it this way: Man's been trying to figure out what he's here for ever since he's been here. And my attitude about it is very simple - we're here to take a test. If we knew the answers, why take the test? So we don't know why we're here for sure.

RM: That's right. We're being tested, and we're not sure what for.

BK: It transcends all human understanding. My best friend's an atheist. He's a community service-oriented person, too. I've been trying to get him to Bible study for the last five years. He and I are best friends and we don't take offense to what either one of us believes because that's what America's all about.

RM: I agree with that philosophy. Well, thanks a lot for talking with me and sharing your insights.

BK: You weren't sure what you were going to run into when you came down here to see me.

RM: Well, every interview is a new experience.

BK: This was a gift to me from my Maker, to be able to come here and experience

this. I liken myself to the smallest politician in the smallest county with the smallest population in the United States. Our life is built on humility; sometimes it don't seem that way, but we really are.

RM: Again, thanks for the interview.

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