

An Interview with
JOE
MASLACH

An Oral History produced by
Robert d. McCracken

Nye County town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
2011



Joe Maslach
2010

COPYRIGHT 2011
Nye County Town History Project
Nye County Commissioners
Tonopah, Nevada
89049

CONTENTS

[Preface](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Index](#)

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Valerie A. Brown, Debra Ann MacEachen, Robert B. Clark, Lynn E. Riedesel, Marcella Wilkinson and Jean Charney transcribed a number of interviews, as did Julie Lancaster, who also helped with project coordination. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Joni Eastley, Michael Haldeman, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people’s names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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

—Robert D. McCracken
2011

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) in

1987. The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the Lied Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique—some are large, others are small—yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

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

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

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

—RDM
2011

This is Robert McCracken talking to Judge Joe Maslach in his offices in Tonopah, Nevada, June 23 and July 1 and 29, 2010.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Judge, let's start by you telling me your name as it appears on your birth certificate, and when and where were you born.

JM: Joseph Matthew Maslach, and I was born in Kimberly, Nevada, in 1942 on October the 22nd.

RM: Where is Kimberly?

JM: Kimberly's no longer there. It was a little mining community just outside of Ely about seven miles. Kimberly, Ruth, and Reipetown those are all kind of tied together.

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

JM: My father's name is Andrew Maslach, and he was born in Borut, Yugoslavia, May 10, 1890.

RM: And was he raised in Yugoslavia?

JM: It's hard for us to find some records on him; he never talked much. He never did become a citizen of this country. Back then, you had to read and write English, and he could speak English quite well, but he never did bother to learn to read and write it. Outside of that, he was pretty well educated through the Slavic language. The only recollection I have through the family was that he arrived in Ely around 1935, having come to America at the age of 22. He first settled in Jackson, California I guess that would have been around 1912. He became involved with mining interests there before he came to Nevada and started working in the mines in the Ruth/Ely area. Catherine O.K. O. Lydon was a Serbian who also was a Tonopah native and dear family friend and spoke the language fluently. Well, as a tidbit, she told my wife that my dad was actually from royalty in Montenegro. I'm not so sure about that; if he was, he obviously didn't want any part of it. We never followed up with K.O. before she passed away to get more information about what she knew. With my dad not willing to talk about his past, we have yet to learn much about those years before he came to the U.S.

RM: When did your mother and dad get together?

JM: My mother, Mildred Petrovich, was married to a man named Pavlich at the time my dad arrived in Ely. Pavlich was also working in the Ely mines, but he was killed in a cave-in in Ely in 1937. At that time my mother only had my half-brother, Gregory, but she was pregnant with my other half-brother, George. Within the next couple of years my dad must have started dating my mother, as they were married in 1939 in Eureka, Nevada. I have their marriage certificate pretty interesting. I know it said John Lemich

from Ruth stood up with my dad and Annie Piscevich from Kimberly did so for my mother. My brother John and sister Sylvia and I were also born in Kimberly.

RM: Was your mother born in Yugoslavia?

JM: No. My mother and her oldest sister were actually born in Juneau, Alaska, which is just across the bridge from Douglas—evidently the hospital must have been there. My great-grandfather came to Tonopah in 1904 and lived here for about a year before he sent for his wife and son to come to America to live with him in Tonopah. He and his son were both miners. As you know, in those days most everyone came to Nevada to seek work in the booming mines of the time. Most miners, though, were lucky to make a good living for their families. They built a small house—my family home—and it's still here. It's never been moved or burned or anything. It's the last house on East Oddie Street.

They picked up about two years later—somewhere around 1910—and they went to Douglas, Alaska, where they resided in the Northern Territory until about 1918. It was there that my mom's mother, Slova (which is Sylvia) Posich, had come from Dolmatia, Yugoslavia, across the Bering Sea in a Russian boat. It was there she met and married my grandfather. His name was Jovo (which is John) Petrovich.

They traveled through Russia and then around the Bering Sea. The story goes that they never did get along because of all the fighting between the Serbs and Croatians, but they did manage to have five children.

From Alaska, my great-grandfather and great-grandmother went back to Yugoslavia, where they died. My grandmother and grandfather wound up back here in Tonopah with their family, back in the same family house my great-grandfather had built in about 1904.

They were very good friends with the grandparents of the Skanovsky families that have lived here in Tonopah since that time as well. The Skanovskys had been in Alaska during some of the time my grandparents were there, but they had come back to Tonopah earlier. My aunt Irene Jeffrey, Mom's sister, tells me that my Grandmother Slova and Baba Skanovsky had both been bridal maids at the same time in Alaska. When my grandparents moved back to Tonopah, Skanovskys were living in the family home but were kind enough to move. They moved up the hill maybe 400 or 500 yards kind of going northeast, close to Bruno and Annie Skanovsky's house. It's also still there. My parents and the five of us kids moved to Tonopah in 1945, back into the same family house.

RM: What a tradition!

JM: Yes, so that house has been occupied by the family since 1904, until the last of my family living in the house passed away. That was my mother; she died suddenly. It was pretty devastating to my family and me. I had lost two of my brothers before they were 30 years old and my dad passed away in 1962, two months after I was married. I had moved to Reno with my wife and children and my sister lived in Reno—she was a schoolteacher for 36 years up there. She didn't want the house and my brother in the air force didn't want it either, so we wound up selling it—it's too hard to keep up an old house when you're not living closer.

RM: Is it still occupied?

JM: It's occupied to this day. It's still in the same location. I guess I should tell you about the bootlegging my dad did at that house when I was a kid.

RM: The family did?

JM: Yes, the family did. The Skanovskys did, too. I mean, they were all bootleggers. I can remember my dad would make potato mash on top of the stove. The still was brought in by Dave Banovich, the highway patrolman. Baba Banovich, his mother, would instruct him to take it over to our house. Mother used to make the white lightning, and we used to stomp a lot of grapes and all that. Back in 1927, Sheriff Thomas would notify all the bootleggers that the revenue guys were coming in. I got that from a very good source. He would notify them, and I guess they'd be clean as a whistle - nothing found.

RM: Sheriff Bill Thomas is actually a hero of mine.

JM: Well, he was a wonderful man. I could tell you a story about him. I know for a fact that he was a very sensitive man. The reason I say that is that as part of his duties he had to serve civil action lawsuits. My mother and dad, neither of them had a driver's license. Hey, we never had an automobile in the family until my older brothers were of an age to drive. My brother John was two years older than I was and he had wrecked his 1955 Chevy in about 1959. There were five guys in the car, and two of those families sued my family for \$100,000.

Sheriff Thomas had to serve that civil lawsuit. When he served my mother, he came up at lunchtime and we were all home for lunch. That's when you didn't take lunch to school - you came home. We were all sitting in the kitchen and he knocked on the door. I opened the door and he asked for my mother and I said, "She's in the living room." And when he walked in, he had tears in his eyes. He had to do what he had to do, but he felt like a piece of crap, I guess.

RM: That sounds just like him. What was the outcome of the suit?

JM: They settled for about a tenth of what they wanted, but the insurance company paid it off. At that time you carried, like, five-ten-and-five, or whatever they called it.

RM: A lot of people didn't even have insurance.

JM: We're lucky we did. Probably the only reason we had it is because the vehicle was financed a little bit. But they wound up getting a little settlement to help the families.

RM: Back in the early '50s we had an old dump truck and were driving it back and forth from out at Reveille. Sheriff Thomas stopped us on Main Street. We didn't have a license and he said, "I see you boys come into town in your truck, and I see you don't have a license. I'd appreciate it if you'd keep off Main Street when you come to town."

JM: Well, that's a good warning.

RM: Yes, that was the way it was then. [Laughter] Any more stories about Thomas?

JM: I do have one more story involving the sheriff. It had to be about 1965 or '66, somewhere in there. I was a member of the Tonopah Elks Lodge; I was an officer, and we had what we called old-timers night. Once a year you'd send out invitations to all the old-timers who were Elks and they'd come there for their special night. That one night we had Peter Fabbi, Sheriff Thomas, and Jack Schwin.

RM: Who was Fabbi?

JM: Peter Fabbi was the gentleman who built the bakery here in Tonopah. And Jack Schwin, all I knew was he was retired. I met him when he was about 85, but he lived here for an awful long time. Well, all three of those old-timers were 90 years old and all life members of the Elks Hall. We had an elk like this one hanging on the wall here, and it was No. 90 in the world's record book. Dick Trueba had killed it on Mount Charleston. We had a picture of all three of them sitting underneath that elk head - we called it "Four 90s." We took a picture and we sent that in to the Elks national magazine, but it never made the magazine, so we were a little upset. And would you believe, that same night our Elks Hall burned down to the ground.

RM: Oh my gosh! The same night.

JM: Same night. It burned down to the ground, and Coleman's grocery store went with it, along with the power company office and Lyon's dress shop. The Elks Lodge was reached by climbing up a narrow stairway to the top, where the Elks Hall covered most of the top of all those other buildings. I think that was about 1966.

RM: Coleman's wasn't where it was in the '80s?

JM: I think Coleman's was rebuilt in the exact same location. It was where the Western Auto building is now, all right next to the post office.

RM: Yes, that's the way it was then. [Laughter] Any more stories about Thomas or anyone else?

JM: I had a lot of dealings with Bill Beko. Dave Banovich, Sr., was the highway patrolman. Between him and Beko, there's no doubt in my mind they kept me out of jail and on the straight and narrow. I got arrested a couple of times when I was a kid, for silly things. You know, you were thinking that you were smarter than everybody else, and alcohol was involved. I got thrown in jail one time in Tonopah here. I tried to hit a kid in the butt with a pellet gun but I hit him high in the back - good thing he was out there a ways.

They picked me up for it, and they had me in jail. Bill Beko was the district attorney at the time, and he came up. And Taskar (Tak) Eason was the chief of police. He told old Tak, "Just take him home. Andy'll take care of him." [Laughter] That was my

dad. I grabbed that cell door, and I put my foot against it, trying to hold that cell door shut— those doors open out. Well, old Bill grabbed a hold of that bar and pulled me and the door both. They loaded me up in the car and Tak took me home. I got the beating of my life.

Then one time we got thrown in jail in Hawthorne (alcohol was involved again). Hefty Sanders was the sheriff there, and he called my dad. He came down with old Bud Saunders and they picked me up and, boy, I got thumped all the way home. [Laughter] I was a slow learner. I should have learned the first time, but it took me two times.

You can't get away with it nowadays like you could then; you can't discipline anybody else's kids. Back then, it was kind of like an Indian tribe— everybody watched out for your kids and if they did something wrong . . . I remember old Felix Traynor. He kicked our butts one night. We were going to the ballgame and picked up a rock and threw it, and it hit his rig. He turned right around and came back. He didn't fool with us, he didn't call our parents. He just flat . . . it got our attention and we didn't fool with him.

Felix— now, there was a gentleman! Felix Traynor and his wife Jo— a lot of people don't realize how they were. I have a daughter, Junee. She was born in 1963 with congenital heart defects. She's had four major heart surgeries; she's doing good now, but you can imagine. This couple had no kids. And they didn't get along too good— they fought a lot. I lived right across the street from Minnie Perchetti in a little rental at \$60 a month. It was nice at the time— 1964. I'm going to say it was late afternoon and it was on the weekend and there was a knock on my door. It was Jo and Felix Traynor. I didn't have a clue what they wanted, so I opened the door and saw who it was. They said, "May we come in?"

I said, "Please do." They came in, and those folks offered me \$25,000 cash money. That was back in about 1964. We were going to be taking Junee to San Francisco for her first heart surgery. I told them, "Jesus, I really appreciate it." I didn't take a dime from them, but for them to come and offer, it just took a load off your shoulders, knowing that somebody's offering you up to \$25,000.

RM: For your child's healthcare. Oh, my God, what a story!

JM: We never did take a dime from them but that offer was always there. And if they were still alive, I bet it'd still be there. That's just the way they were.

RM: Were they pretty well off?

JM: I don't know. I know Felix dabbled and dabbled in mining. He was involved in the Summit King Mine, and I heard a rumor years ago that he'd got a \$100,000 cash settlement or something. I guess there were ways to beat the IRS— if you didn't bank it, you didn't know about it. Whether that ever happened or not, I don't know. I don't know what type of estate she had, but she outlived him by quite a little while.

We really had a lot of fun with Jo Traynor. She was one of my better customers. When I was in the service station she'd come by all the time and I'd take care of her car. And I've got to hand it to my wife. Years ago we used to have an open house. It was a tradition in the Petrovich house on Serbian Christmas, you know, that everybody that walked through the door got fed. That's the way my dad and mother were, too. We ate in

shiftsô the house was so small that you'd eat in shifts because you only had the one living room and you could sit maybe 15, 20 people in there, so you kind of rotated them out.

My wife, Nancy, is from a ranch, and it was their custom that everybody that came by, if it was dinner, lunch, breakfast, whatever, they fed them. At Thanksgiving, Nancy and I always had a ton of people over at our house. One time she told me, "I'm going to invite Jo Traynor, Maggie Ray, and Lena Darnell." They were all quite up thereô probably somewhere in their late 70s or early 80sô and they had never talked to one another for 20 years. Well, my wife has always had a special way with the elderly.

Anyway, I told Nancy, "Boy, you're a fool for punishment. They haven't got along for 20 years."

And she said, "Well, they're coming. I called them, and I let them know who was coming and who I was going to invite." They came and we had one of the nicest Thanksgiving Day dinners with them. It went so good that she invited them back the next day for leftovers.

RM: The three women had a long estrangement?

JM: Yes. I have no idea what caused it. I never asked, they never brought it up. When they sat down at that dinner table, it's like they had talked to one another yesterday.

RM: That is an interesting story.

JM: Totally amazing, how that worked. But you talk about people holding grudgesô they've done it in this community. Years back, when you went through a picket line or something like that, your name was mud. I know there's been families that, because of hard times, did go through a union picket line, and people never did forget that. But it's been a good community.

RM: There's an incredible underlying spirit here. I mean, for the Traynors to make an offer like that. That's the most generous, heartfelt offer I've ever heard of.

JM: Yes. This was 46 years ago, tooô that was a lot of money. Of course, open-heart surgeries are quite expensive. June had four of themô she had one surgery in San Francisco, then one in Houston, Texas, and one U.C. Davis, California, and the last one was in Reno, Nevada.

RM: And she's okay now?

JM: Oh, she's doing real good. It's funny how you remember certain things when it's so dramaticô you're traumatized with what's going on. We had never flown before, but that was not an issue. We loaded up and drove down to Vegas to get on an airplane and fly her directly to Houston for major heart surgery. She had just turned six. We were just kids ourselvesô Nancy and I. She was 17 and I was 19 when we got married. She often reminds me how I put the pressure on her not to go to Arizona State or UNR, but it all has paid off. We had a real nice big wedding and all, the summer after graduation. We're

celebrating 48 years. Kids give up too early nowadays on their marriages; you have to work on it all the time. Ours hasn't been a bed of roses, especially for my wife, probably.

RM: Was your surgeon in Houston DeBakey?

JM: No. DeBakey was there, but we had Dr. Cooley. I think DeBakey did the first heart transplant.

RM: But Cooley was world famous, too.

JM: Oh, yes. Man, I was so mad at that guy. He came into that room, and he's about six foot five, maybe six foot four. Big blue eyes - good-looking guy. I thought holy cow, this guy has everything. [Laughs]

RM: Yes, he won the lottery.

JM: And he played on the basketball team for the University of Texas. My daughter still has the pillow - it's a pillow shaped like a heart and it says, "Mended by Dr. Cooley." He also gave her an autographed photo.

RM: How nice.

JM: Yes, it is. They gave out those little hearts that show a little incision and stitches. There were a lot of things, and a lot of tough times.

RM: Talk about growing up here.

JM: Well, there were three brothers and myself. My dad used to order grapes and they'd come in from transportation companies - big truck or trailer loads of them. I know we stomped Bert Harges and John Valyo, and Nick Lovich's grapes. They made their own wine, too.

After you stomp the grapes - and I can't remember the process - they let them ferment for a week or so and then they squeeze them through the press and make grappa. One time I remember we got our butts whipped good. My dad loved playing cards downtown and he went down that weekend. After we squeezed the grapes through the press, he told us to clean it up. In our house we probably had a hundred chickens in the yard - all fenced in, you know. We fed the grapes to the chickens, what was left out of that press. My dad came home, went out there, and there were about a hundred drunken chickens. If you had a video of that nowadays, you could probably win the funniest video because all those chickens, they couldn't stand up.

RM: They really were staggering and everything?

JM: Oh, horrible. You'd chase them and they'd kind of run sideways. You just couldn't believe it.

RM: And you were doing that at your old family home?

JM: Oh, yes. We had the wine cellar right there in the house.

RM: And he would bottle it there and . . . ?

JM: Yes, but they were the one-gallon jugs.

RM: Was he selling it locally?

JM: Yes. He had a license to make it at home, but only for personal use. I can't remember I think it was 300 gallons that he was allowed. He would sell that, but then he made the potato mash on top of the stove. That's when old Dave Banovich used to run the still down the street in his cop car.

RM: No kidding. When was this?

JM: In the 50s. He'd cook it right on top of the wood stove in the house.

RM: Down the street from you?

JM: Yes. Baba Banovich, his mother, lived almost by the state highway across on the other side, right where they built that garage. That'd be at the corner of Magnolia Street and Main. That's where Banovich lived.

RM: What did they make out of the potato mash?

JM: White lightning.

RM: How did they do that?

JM: I don't know the formula, but I know a lot of it was the potato and the yeast and whatever. And they had the coils. I can just remember that dripping constantly, just clear white.

RM: And it really had a punch to it?

JM: Yes, it did! I know at our house for dinner, there was always the wine bottle on the table. And if you wanted to drink wine with your dinner, they never would stop us.

RM: Even as kids?

JM: Yes. I've never had an alcohol problem and it was there all the time. It was so potent we didn't like it anyways. My mother never did drink, nor my dad. Every now and then a bunch of Serbians would come from Ely, and they'd have a big party at the

house or something like that. They'd give them the booze to take home. It was always a good time.

RM: Was your dad a miner?

JM: Yes, he was. As I said, when Dad arrived in the U.S. in 1912, he first settled in Jackson, California, and that was his start in making mining his life interest. As I told you, he met my mom when working in the Ely area mines. He was always a miner until he got too ill. The miners aged pretty quickly back then.

He mined here in Tonopah and when they closed here, he worked at Round Mountain for quite a little while. They actually had living quarters out there. This had to be the early 50s, I'd say. He was working out there and they finally closed that mine. Then he just kind of kicked back - he had silicosis pretty bad. He died when he was 73.

Probably my dad was best known for being a very civic-minded man. He was especially interested in all school activities in which the five of us participated. He was a real Mucker sports fan, following the basketball and football games everywhere. He'd always be standing alongside the field of play. You'd hear him holler every once in a while.

One of the things I remember is that my family was all raised Catholic, and my dad was real sick. They gave him his last rites there in the Tonopah Hospital. Well, he didn't die. He made it through that and we all went to his wedding - my parents got remarried after that. I remember all us kids going up there, and the old father remarried them. The next time, he wasn't so lucky. That silicosis got him. He was one of the few people in the state of Nevada who was actually receiving a check for silicosis. If I remember correctly, less than 300 people in the state were receiving silicosis pay. It wasn't much, but it did help.

RM: When did he start working in the mines in Tonopah?

JM: In 45.

RM: And before that he worked in Ely. What mines did he work in up there?

JM: I really don't know. I know that he lived with the Lemiches up there; he boarded out with them. The Lemiches are the ones that are coming in this weekend to do the barbecue for Minnie Perchetti's 90th birthday. He knew my dad quite well. He's about five years older than me, but he told me he used to run down to the grocery store and buy my dad cigarettes when he was just a little kid. My dad would give him a tip, and stuff like that. They're quite the people up there.

RM: Was there a strong Yugoslavian community in the Ely area?

JM: Ely and Tonopah. There were a lot of Slavs here in Tonopah, too. They had their own organizations, back in the years. If you go down and look at my grandfather and grandmother's headstones, they have [symbols for] the club that they belonged to. One of them's a woodcraft or something like that. They were pretty well organized; there were quite a few of them. I know Bob Perchetti has a picture of my dad when he was initiated

into the Odd Fellows Hall in Tonopah. I'm going to guess there's probably 40 people in that picture. He misplaced it, and I'm about ready to wring his neck because I'd sure like to get that picture. [Laughter]

RM: You went all the way through school in Tonopah. What was grade school like?

JM: Our first grade teacher was Miss Curieux; the second grade teacher was Miss Salvie. Those are the same two teachers that taught my mother and my aunt Irene— she graduated from Tonopah. In fact, she's been a resident here for 86 years. Her brother was born here— my uncle, Sam Petrovich. She was born in Mason Valley and she came here when she was a year old. But we had the same teachers.

One of my fondest memories of grade school was that I had a black dog; I called him Blackie. Well, anyways, he would always follow me to school. The teachers were always good to him because he'd just wait for me, so they decided to let him come in the classroom with me. He would always sit underneath my desk and never say a word. That went on for years. When I was going to graduate from eighth grade, since it was going to be in the evening and all, my mom insisted that Blackie couldn't go to school with me. Well, what a disappointment, as Mr. Lepore, the principal, had a diploma for Blackie, too. [Laughter]

That old school that they tore down was something. When we were juniors and seniors in high school, we had absolutely no gymnasium or auditorium. It was all condemned by the state and we practiced in the firehouse and we still qualified for state in basketball.

RM: That was the old high school?

JM: Yes, the one where Barsanti Park is now. We played all our home basketball games in Gabbs, 112 miles away. We'd play a Friday night game and a Saturday game and we'd spend the night in the gym in bedrolls.

RM: Were you on the team?

JM: Yes. I played four years of basketball and four years of football. And everything went pretty good for us. We qualified for state in basketball without a gym and the only team that beat us in our league was Virginia City. Virginia City has always been tough. Then we went to state in Wells and played there and didn't do so good, but at least we got there. There were only four teams.

But all the teachers, I think, were more dedicated. We had Miss Del Papa as a third grade teacher and we had her again in seventh grade for a little while and then for freshman and senior years.

RM: I think my daughter, Bambi, had her, too, in the 1980s.

JM: She was a wonderful teacher. I don't believe that dedication is totally there with 100 percent of the teachers. Some of them are still quite dedicated, but not all of them.

RM: I've noticed that an awful lot of the kids from Tonopah do really well.

JM: Yes, they do.

RM: Why is that? From this isolated town, they go out into the big world and become doctors and lawyers and vets and are successful in business and so on. What do you think accounts for that?

JM: I think they try a little harder. I don't think school education is that much different, I just believe that they have their minds made up and they work a little harder.

RM: They have a good work ethic here.

JM: Yes. And if you look at the families that have succeeded, very few of the kids are from single-parent families. I'm not saying that the mother and dad were still married, but if they were divorced, they were still involved with the kid.

RM: You probably run into it in your court.

JM: Yes. Kids are running the household, or trying to, anyway. It's a tough deal.

RM: They come out of here with a good work ethic. And does that work ethic come from an intact family?

JM: Well, the ones that I know of pretty much do. I could go on and on about the kids that grew up and graduated college . . . and also about the many other young people that did not go to college, but because of their work ethic are successful in their jobs and successful entrepreneurs.

RM: Why is that? Here's this little town way out on the desert, turning out these quality kids.

JM: I think it's just the way they're raised, I really do. It's built into them. I'm proud that all three of my kids did so well going through the Tonopah schools. Junee graduated from Reno business college - she's always been good with figures, so that's a good thing. Then son Joe, he graduated from UNR and is a captain for law enforcement with the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The youngest, Judith, graduated from Tonopah High School in three years and went off to UNR and graduated with her bachelor's degree.

I have a nice story about my wife. She was always taking community college classes if they were offered locally, but she'd always say, "When the kids all graduate, I'm going to get my degree." I guess that is the good old Tonopah High School work ethic, because our youngest was graduating from UNR and the wife was starting college in 1996. She was 51 years old. We'd just sold the service station so she had a little money to start with. She got an Associate degree first and set up a paralegal office back in Tonopah at our home. Then a couple of years later she went back to the university and got her Bachelor degree. She always did well, but it wasn't easy for her. She commuted

for all that time, trying to keep up with me. But you can see what determination can do. The kids and I are happy for her, but, like she says, "Get those degrees when you're young."

RM: There's something about this place; youngsters turn out well. Not everyone, but more than you would expect in a town this size.

JM: Yes. You're talking at least half of a class that are all good kids and very successful.

RM: I look at the kids that my daughter and her husband, Bill Metscher, went to school with here, and it's amazing how well they do.

JM: I remember your daughter quite well—and Bill. Take the class with Billy Metscher and my son and John Friel. Billy and my son wrestled together.

RM: Bill's son Billy now is wrestling. He's on the wrestling team in his school in Long Beach.

JM: Isn't that something! And he's a tall kid, too.

RM: He is. He's taller than me now, more than 6 feet 3 inches. He pinned the coach the other day, wrestling. [Laughter]

JM: He's tall and lanky. He could have had a good career in basketball, too, probably.

RM: Yes, he could have.

JM: Those sports run the same season, so you have to flip a coin. I'm sure he took a look at, "Well, Dad, you wrestled, and I'm going to, too." If Bill would have played basketball, I think he would have.

RM: Yes, I agree.

JM: It was good to see that family at Jim Butler Days.

RM: Yes, they had a wonderful time.

JM: That's another tradition here. It's nice to see it keep going. Some of the people are getting burned out, but the younger ones are coming in a little bit to take over. Joey Westerlund did a nice job in the arm wrestling, and Otteson did a nice job putting everything together. A guy like Bob Perchetti, doing 40 years of this—that's a lot of time.

RM: He's done a wonderful job.

JM: You've got to give him credit, 100 percent.

RM: Bill and Bambi's two boys, Billy and Robby, really liked the arm wrestling. They want to join arm wrestling groups now. [Laughter]

JM: It's not all brute strength. There's a lot of technique to it. You saw that guy that came in from Yerington. He wasn't that big, he's just quick and hard and he put down some big guys. He won his division and took second in the super heavyweights and he was under 177 pounds.

I don't know if you saw my granddaughter, Jordan, at the arm wrestling or not. She was 18, just finished one year of college. She knew her dad, Joe, used to arm wrestle so she wanted him to. He told her he was too old, but persuaded her to try it. She'd never arm-wrestled but with a quick training from her dad, by golly, she was undefeated in the women's group. She really liked winning that money. [Laughter]

RM: I'm sorry I missed that. Do you have any other recollections about high school and kids you went to school with, or people in the community?

JM: We've lost a lot of good friends already.

I had the opportunity to leave Tonopah in 1967. My wife's father, Leonard Stephens, picked up his family and they moved to Darwin, Australia. He had the Lida Livestock-JV Ranch out here. He wanted Nancy and me to go in the worst way and we really wanted to go, but when you have a daughter that needs medical attention, you didn't dare pick up. And we don't regret it one bit. I mean, we did what we wanted to do. But they went over there, and that was an opportunity of a lifetime. My brother-in-law was two years younger than me. Johnny Roberts he graduated with my wife, Nancy's same class. He wound up getting killed over there on the ranch. He wrecked a vehicle and got killed. He had a wife and four kids.

RM: Did they stay in Darwin?

JM: They stayed there for about 14 or 15 years, and then they came home. They saw Darwin grow from just a spot in the road to tens of thousands of people.

RM: What is your wife's name?

JM: Her maiden name was Nancy Stephens. As I said, her dad owned the Lida Livestock-JV ranch, and some of my fondest memories are going lion hunting with him when I was a young man. I tell this story, and it's the truth. The very first time I went lion hunting with my father-in-law, we went out to Cherry Creek Ranch just above Nyala, out at the Sharps' place. They were having trouble with mountain lions.

He told me, "Whatever you do, you do what I tell you, so nobody gets hurt."

I said, "Not a problem," [laughter] but I was sure he was trying to get rid of me! I can remember, I was just out of school. I was 18 years old and I felt pretty good. I did have a little extra weight, but I was pretty solid. We treed this lion, and he was about eight, ten feet off the ground, but his tail kind of hung down; he was out on a limb with

that tail hanging down. That tail had to be hanging down 14, 15 inches. He told me, "Jump up and grab him by the tail, and don't let go."

I said, "Okay." I jumped up I grabbed that lion by the tail, and I just hung on there. My toes were barely touching the ground, just kind of dragging.

And he said, "Don't turn loose." Well, it's like trying to pull a housecat out of a tree. That big lion, he just sunk his claws into that tree. You couldn't pull him out.

He went over to the horse and opened up the saddlebags and took out a syringe and a needle and a bottle of serum and fixed a shot. He climbed into that tree, and that lion was all hooked in there. He couldn't claw him because he was dug in. He gave him a shot and then he climbed out of the tree and said, "You can turn loose of that lion now." I turned loose and he just fell out of the tree - he gave him a drug shot and put him to sleep. We put a set of handcuffs on him and put a bit in his mouth, wired him up, threw him on the horse, and led him out. They used to catch them alive, you know.

RM: Talk about having a lion by the tail! [Laughter]

CHAPTER TWO

RM: What did you do when you got out of school?

JM: I graduated in 1960, and I went to work for California Edison Power Company. I worked for them for about three years. I didn't get along too good with my supervisor he wouldn't give me overtime because I was single, but I was trying to get married. I wanted to get married. A guy by the name of Byron Foster died out at the Test Site he was working out there. I applied for his job, and I got it.

I went to work out there in about 1962, '63, and I worked out there for four years. Then I quit and went to work for the phone company for about 10 years. After that I went into my private business at the service station.

RM: Where in the Test Site were you working?

JM: I worked in Mercury and I worked in Tonopah at the Test Site. I worked on two of the dirtiest shots they've ever had out there.

RM: In underground shots?

JM: No, open air. One shot was kind of located between Cactus Peak and Stonewall, in that valley.

RM: They were shooting open air there?

JM: Yes, they blew up 25 pounds of pure plutonium. They had six or eight jackasses staked out and maybe half a dozen beagles dogs. I don't know how long they left them out there after the shot a couple or three, four, or five hours. Then they killed the animals and removed the organs and things like that. I don't know the outcome, but Bernie Merlino and I worked on that shot and we wound up burning and burying most everything out there. They just cleaned that shot up about six to eight years ago.

RM: It was on the other side of Stonewall? I had no idea they were doing open shots there.

JM: Yes, they called it Two-Track Roller Coaster.

RM: And they were both dirty?

JM: They were both dirty.

RM: So that's probably how some of that radiation came west.

JM: And I worked down in Mercury in Area 9 when one shot vented blew out of the ground.

RM: Really! What was at Area 9? Where's that from Area 12?

JM: It's only a few miles down the road. Area 12 basically was the man camp and Area 9 is where they did all the underground drilling and testing. Area 9 is the big flat and they drilled those holes. The one I worked on is over a mile deep.

RM: No kidding! They had those big core drills, or big augers?

JM: Yes. Howard Hughes owned them, I guess.

RM: And they drilled one hole a mile deep and put a bomb down there?

JM: Yes. They cased that hole, too. They'd load them up, then back-fill them. I don't know how far, but they used shotgun BBs and black sand. That had so much weight, you know.

RM: That it can't blow it out of there?

JM: Well, that's what they thought, but that one time . . .

RM: One of them did blow, didn't it?

JM: Well, it vented. They had cameras, and you can watch that video in real slow motion. It shows the ground coming up like a mushroom. It just kind of sits there for a few minutes, then it comes down, and it created that crater. They waited a couple of hours, then they sent us in to fence that crater. And we're in there fencing the crater. And what happened, it surged . . . it kind of fell some more, and it emitted radiation through the cracks. Rad Safe come down and ran us off there.

That was in 1966. I went to work at the phone company up in Reno in about 1969. (We had to move due to our June's heart condition at the time.) I wanted to climb microwave towers and one of the questions was, "Have you ever been exposed to radiation?" I checked "Yes" and I listed the two places I was out at Roller Coaster, and I was 86ed out of Area 9 for one year. I had to work in the gravel plant because they wouldn't let me work radiation anymore. They called me into the office at 2800 Vassar Street at Ma Bell in Reno and they said, "You know, what you put down here as radiation?"

I said, "Yes."

They said, "Well, we checked on it. They have no record of it." Well, it didn't surprise me.

RM: Oh, so they were erasing people's records.

JM: Yes, no wonder they don't have a record. They knew what they were doing. But they wouldn't let me climb microwave towers.

RM: Because I guess there's radiation there.

JM: Yes.

RM: When it was sinking back down again and venting, was it scary?

JM: No, you didn't even know it. You see it on the film - they let us watch the film. It comes out, then it comes down. I worked on the Mighty Oak shot for a little while, too. I don't know a lot about it because I just was out there for a while. But that one, you can drive right into the crater to this day. The sign there said, "Mighty Oak Shot," and how many megatons it was and all that. You can see that cracked all the way around. But you have no idea that it might have slipped a little bit, or vented. And that's what happened there. We didn't notice. We were still pounding stakes fencing it. And the guys came . . .

RM: But it was doing this right under your feet?

JM: Yes! Naturally, we're standing on the solid side. And the crack might be, maybe from here to that elk, and we're fencing out here on the solid ground. We had no idea that that crater went down a little bit more. But, boy, I guess it set the instruments off, and we had the pins in our pocket. There was no record of it.

RM: My dad, Robert G. McCracken, worked down there for a long time.

JM: I remember your dad quite well. He was a big man.

RM: Yes, he was a pretty good size.

JM: He had big hands. I remember when I shook his hand a couple of times at the service station - I sold him a lot of propane - my goodness, he had big hands.

RM: Yes, and he was very strong. He told me a couple of stories about the Test Site. He was working where they were drilling the big holes straight down and he said they filled it and they miscalculated, and the filling came out of there like a shotgun. Is my memory correct?

JM: That's correct; there's some that actually blew. Not in my time. But this is true - they blew the doors off that tunnel shot. They blew them clear across the valley! I don't know if they ever did recover them, to tell you the truth, but they blew them completely off.

RM: So that happened. It was like a gigantic shotgun.

JM: Sure. And they sit there, and they still lie to you to this day. Nye County proved that the water that's migrating off that Test Site has got radiation in it. Nye County was the first one to say that; the Test Site wouldn't say it. They had to have known it because they were testing before Nye County.

RM: That's interesting. Another story I remember the old man telling, he said they were drilling a hole in the ground four feet wide and they cut a streak of rich gold. He said those old miners were just drooling and they cased it over and went right on down. Have you ever heard that?

JM: No, but I wouldn't doubt it. Ed Slavin told me . . . I loved that man dearly. He took me on more excursions than you can shake a stick at.

RM: Did he? I want to hear about those.

JM: Yes, down in that Quinn Canyon area, over by Sharp's and all that. He had pieces of rock in his house that you could actually see the gold vein in that came from over at Gold Reed, at Georges Water, off the Test Site, Mellon Mountain, all that. And they really didn't do any underground work there. Eddie Tomany owns a piece of property that sits out in Reveille Valley where the mill is.

RM: Really? We used to live there!

JM: Yes, he has that claim. He has about 300 feet of overburden. And they drilled that, and you got one-ounce gold there.

RM: At Reveille Mill site?

JM: Pretty close. He's had that staked for a long time. He had it leased out a couple of times and people took options. They finally kicked the option back not too long ago because of the overburden. It's one-ounce gold. Well, at \$1,250 an ounce, there might be a day that they might strip that and mine it. Ed Slavin told me, "There's good gold down there." They quit mining it when gold got to \$22 an ounce or whatever it was - it wasn't worth it, to hard-rock it. But he said that's virgin country in there. And he had a couple of beautiful pieces.

RM: And they had come from down around Gold Reed?

JM: Around Tunnel Springs.

RM: Where's that?

JM: You know where Cedar Pipeline is?

RM: Yes, kind of.

JM: It's this side, on the Test Site side, going towards the Reveille Mountains.

RM: On the west side or east side of the road?

JM: It would be the Tonopah side, going up by Silver Bow. Tunnel Springs is just below Silver Bow. And then Mellon Mountain sits down by Cedar Pipeline. I remember Ed telling me about Mellon Mountain.

RM: What did he say?

JM: He said there's definitely got to be good gold there.

RM: There's gold all over down there, isn't there?

JM: Yes. Well, you figure, since 1950 they've had that property for about 50, 60 years.

RM: It's been totally shut off.

JM: Yes. People don't have a clue what's there, really. But by the time you get your permitting, nothing's going to happen.

RM: No. And it costs so much to open a mine now. Don't even think about it for less than several million.

JM: Yes. It's very interesting. Central Nevada is really nice. I go to these judges' meetings all the time, and I try to entice them to come up here. I tell them, "You haven't lived till you've come to central Nevada." I mean, Vegas and Reno— my goodness sakes, that's not life. I offer places for them to go in 4-tracks. I had one judge in Lake Tahoe take advantage of it; he came down with his daughter and brought his horses and he rode all the way up above Moores Station and looked at the petroglyphs up there. He said he just had a blast. And there's just so much of it, like the Ichthyosaurus Park this side of Gabbs. That's beautiful. I know where a guy could pick up fossils, you know, just lying on the ground. Beautiful fossils. I packed home a bunch of them and people said, "Well, where'd you get that fossil?"

I said, "At 10,000 feet." You tell me that this world wasn't covered with water, now. [Laughter] You have a big seashell at 10,000 feet. We were up there deer hunting, and we ran into a bunch of them up there.

RM: Have you done a lot of hunting?

JM: I have, yes. I enjoy getting out. My son is a game warden. When he graduated from high school, he went to the university and got his degree in wildlife management. He told me he wanted to be a game warden, and I said, "Oh, my God, son, that's the worst profession in the world. People don't respect you and you're out there by yourself and everybody that you stop has a gun." I said, "I don't like it."

He said, "Well, look at it this way, Dad," and that's when I was in business for myself. "Every time you go out of town they either rob you or steal you blind. When I'm out there, I'm getting paid for it. You go and take a week off, you won't make any money." [Laughter]

I said, "Well, you've got a point there."
But we've gone on some hunts. I've got quite a few pictures in my office. My wife loves to hunt, too. I have never got a desert bighorn and she's killed two of them.

RM: Where did she get them?

JM: She got one ram off of Lone Mountain and the other one off of Stonewall. My son also got one ram off Lone Mountain and the other off Stonewall.

RM: So there are quite a few sheep up there?

JM: A reasonable amount. For Lone Mountain they issue about three, four tags a year. And Stonewall, I think they go up to five or six tags.

RM: Every time I drive past Stonewall, I admire that mountain so much.

JM: Have you ever seen the waterfall up there? You can drive right to it.

RM: I've got to do that.

JM: Yes. It's a beautiful waterfall.

RM: And it runs year-round?

JM: I've never seen it dry. It might get down to a trickle, but in all my years, I've never seen it dry.

RM: And are there quite a few sheep on Stonewall?

JM: Well, it's a big area. You're talking tons of acres and the herd probably averages around 200 head. It's a big area. Don't kid yourself. You spread them out over a couple hundred thousand acres; you have to look for them.

RM: There never was much mining on Stonewall, was there?

JM: More bootlegging than mining. Same way with Lone Mountain. In fact, one canyon's called Bootlegger Canyon. You can see that pipe. They were piping that water down for the stills. And you could see what's left of the places where they had the stills. You can still go out there to Clifford's place and pick up five-gallon cans that were hit with an axe. I think there's a couple of stills around out there. Wally Boundy was the last one to bring some in that I saw. It wasn't that long ago. Probably 10, 12 years. You can see where they hit it with an axe.

RM: Where is your favorite place to hunt?

JM: We have lots. For sheep, probably Stonewall; down around Beatty, too, and Lone Mountain. Now for deer, I kind of like Reese River and over in Monitor Valley and Lida - there's not many deer there. If you look at Lida on the map, it's totally surrounded by desert so the migration is not much.

RM: Is there much game on Mount Magruder?

JM: Probably the better mountain in the whole area would be Magruder; there are a few deer. And they're starting to sneak a few antelope in there now. I've been picking up a few antelope around the county - seeing them - and they're just bleeding over from the other areas. A few birds - a few chukar and a few quail. And actually a few lions.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: When did you go into business for yourself?

JM: I went into business in 1976. The wife and I and our three kids were still living in Reno. Our oldest, June, was doing well up there. But when I got the call about a chance to move back to Tonopah and go into business for myself, we really had to talk it over. There was a lot to consider both ways. It was a family decision. June was attending a private Christian school and doing well and she was involved with the Penny Singers and the Nevada Rangerettes. They performed in the Nevada Day parades and the Pioneer Theater Auditorium in Reno and such, so she wasn't too excited about moving back to Tonopah; she was 13. Of course, our son Joe was all for it. He really enjoyed riding dirt motor bikes, and he and I liked to fish and hunt. He was in fifth grade. The wife had just had our youngest, Judith, the year before, so she was just a little over one year old. We decided to sell our house and move back to Tonopah and give it our best shot.

RM: And you bought a service station.

JM: Yes. I was there for about 20 years.

RM: How did you like that?

JM: It was a good business. I loved the people. It was just great at Christmastime, you got your rewards. Ed Slavin used to bring me down a nice bottle or two of Jack Daniels or Jim Beam. When he was a little low on money, it was Jim Beam; when it was a good year, I got Jack Daniels. [Laughter] A lot of the little old ladies brought me cookies. I always had cookies. You do miss the people; they were a fine clientele.

I did get robbed. I was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I had this kid by the name of Darren Nixon working for me. My phone rang about 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, and Arlen Jameson called me. He said, "Hey, Joe," he said, "I'm down at your station. Darren Nixon just got hit over the head and got robbed."

I said, "I'll be right down." So I jumped in my clothes and drove down there.

And a cop was there. I can't remember the cop's name, and I really don't want to. He was a total jackass. But he called me over and he said, "It's an inside job."

I said, "Oh? I've known this kid for an awful long time." I went over there; I took one look at it and he had a knot on his head about that big, and his eyes. Pupils were just BBs. I said, "Hey, this kid's got a concussion. You're telling me it's an inside job? What makes you think this is an inside job?" And the whole cash register was gone. He took the drawer and everything.

The cop said, "Well, he told me what it was. He said it was a black car that had red flames on it."

I said, "Did you call it in?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Well, where are they going to go?"

So he called ahead, and they caught that car. It was a black car and it had big red flames on it^o painted on^o going into Fallon. They still had my cash register in the vehicle. [Laughs]

RM: They didn^t even have sense enough to get rid of it!

JM: No. And boy, that kid had a heck of a knot on his head, I^m telling you. That^s when I said, ^oThat^s enough. No more graveyard shift.^o Then it was daylight to dark. I didn^t want anybody getting killed over a lousy few dollars.

RM: Was it tough to make a go of the station?

JM: Oh, yes. I worked long and hard hours and I had minimum help. I only had two or three part-time workers. It was a tough go. You had to do a little bit of everything; you couldn^t make it on gas alone. We sold a few tires, fixed a lot. Service work^o that^s where I came in, doing lube, oil, and filter^o things like that. And selling propane. A little bit of everything, you know, just to make a buck or two. It did work.

It was tough hours for both the wife and me. I hardly got any time off and she did the bookkeeping, and with the little one and running the two older ones around, she was very busy. She eventually took an outside job full time with the school district so that she could pick up our health insurance^o it^s so expensive when you^{re} in business for yourself. So between the bookkeeping and the second job and kids, we were a very busy family. Our son would help me in the summer when it was the busiest; you make it in the summer to get you through the winters. We were all involved.

RM: Was it tough working with tourists?

JM: No, people traveling, they wanted in and out. They just wanted a fair price. I never was self-serve; I was all full-service. I was always a few cents higher than everybody else but hey, if you wanted your window washed, tires checked, your oil^o it^s worth something. If they wanted it, they^d come in; and if they didn^t want it, they went somewhere else. And I fixed a lot of tires and that. It was good money.

RM: I wanted to talk a little bit more about some of the challenges you had in running the gas station. What was it like operating a business like that?

JM: It was hard to keep good help. I had one kid that stayed with me for about six, seven years, which was good. I always had good customers. But one of the things I ran into later on in life^o my son was in high school and he qualified for the wrestling championship, just like Billy Metscher did. We all went to Reno, and we had reservations at a motel there. I just got there, pulled up, went to check in, and they said, ^oYou^{ve} got a message to call Nye County sheriff^s office.^o

I said, ^oOkay,^o so I called the sheriff^s office, and they arrested the guy I had working for me for child molesting or something. So there you go. I was 240 miles from the business. But I had friends at the firehouse, Arlen Jameson and Dan Sweeney^o they locked the service station up for me. (The sheriff^s department didn^t know how to lock it

up.) But those are some of the things you run into. And getting robbed in the middle of the night and almost got a kid killedô I didn't like that at all. It was good business, but it was a hard business, and very tough on the body.

RM: Did you experience the gas crisis in '73? Was it tough to get fuel?

JM: Yes, it was. But what happened, the gas companies would guarantee you so many gallons. When you had that guarantee, and you didn't get your fuel, they basically had to pay you for it. But they never left me short.

The bad thing about it is that . . . say I went in business in the mid-'70s, and when that shortage got going, it was about six years after you're in business. So if you increased your business, you were only allowed whatever you had to start with. A lot of people increased their business threefold selling fuel. I increased mine quite a little bit, so I did have problems. I just called up different companies and because I was a private owner, they brought me fuel. I still sold it under the label of Unocal and they didn't care. I let them know what I was doing. I stayed in business, but it was tough.

RM: Did you ever get oil or gas supplies out of the refinery in Railroad Valley?

JM: No. I did get some fuel from the airport at one time when they had their refinery there. But they had contracts to fulfill, too. If they had some extra fuel, I did get it from them, and it was cash-and-carryô that was no problem with me. They were pretty good, but like I said, they had contracts.

RM: From what you know, how would you compare doing a business like that then to say now?

JM: I'd hate to be in business right now because the majority of them, if you notice, are associated with some type of fast food or something else. I was a full-service service stationô I wasn't going to change. I didn't want to be self-service because I had too many older customers, and they wanted you to check the tires and all that. I see now that our state legislature wants to create a law to make you check tires. Give me a break. [Laughter] I hope they've got something better to do. They're going to regulate everything. I laughed when I read that.

RM: Another thingô tell me more about those deep holes that they drilled on the Test Site. What were you doing with them?

JM: They were underground tests. The drilling would be totally done when I'd go outô I was just laboring out there. They would have the hole drilled, and they had these big cranes. Bob, if you've never seen them, it's hard for me to explain but I'd bet the tracks on those cranes are half as wide as that post thereô and one on each side.

RM: So we're talking ten feet; eight feet, at least. Oh, my goodness!

JM: At least. Yes, they're huge. And right on the end of the huge boom they have a scale by the tons so they know what they're hanging on there. And they case that hole.

RM: Do they line it with these big steel things?

JM: Just like a culvert, but it's iron.

RM: Did they start from the top or start from the bottom?

JM: They'd start at the top. They put the first section in. I'm guessing the sections were 30, 40 feet. They'd have a collar on it, and you catch it and they disconnect, then they hook another one, and they put one on top of that one. When they get them bolted together and this is the thing I couldn't understand they needed a plumber, for crying out loud, from the plumber and pipe fitters union.

RM: That's union stuff?

JM: Oh, I'm telling you. [Laughs] We did all the work because we were laborers. After they'd bolt two together, they'd pick it up and move the collar out, then drop it down and put the collar there, and that scale just kept picking up the weight so you knew what was on there. They just kept extending that and they cased those suckers.

RM: How wide was the hole?

JM: The one I worked on, I'm going to say had to be a ten-foot circle.

RM: How far across?

JM: About six or seven feet.

RM: Was it a big auger? I wonder how they did it.

JM: I never did see them drill, but I saw the drill bits. I think Howard Hughes had the market on all that. You can still see the pipe there in the Mighty Oak shot up there in Moore Station.

RM: I think I saw that one. There's two holes up there, right? One they shot and one they didn't?

JM: One they shot and one they didn't. The one they shot, you could see the pipe there, and that's exactly what we put in the ground. Exactly like that. I remember we put a lot of black sand in there and shotgun BBs for the weight, to keep everything packed in.

And we had a couple of nasty shots that blew out; the one vented. Every time they were getting ready to shoot another shot, they wouldn't let us go to work. They'd load us on the bus, and we sat there playing cards. If the shot was supposed to be at 3:00, we'd sit there and sit there and wait, and then when it finally went, and it didn't blow out or

anything, then they'd let us go back into Area 12. But if it blew out, man, they hauled you out of there. I don't ever remember getting hauled out, but I know that one shot I told you about vented on me down in Area 9. And they have that Sedan Crater that was one of the first shots. I didn't work on that one but the hole was out there, and we knew what it was.

RM: Were you living at the camp at Area 12, or were you commuting?

JM: I stayed there Monday night through Thursday and then came home.

RM: What was it like, living there?

JM: It wasn't too bad. They had real clean little units, two people to a unit. It was always clean they had maid service. Half the time, you didn't really know the guy that was bunked up with you; he worked in another area. They had breakfast, lunch, and dinner there, and they had a theater. So you didn't go without, and you had a nice rec hall.

RM: What was at the rec hall?

JM: They had a bar in there, mainly beer. I don't remember them selling hard liquor, but they might have. I know they had beer there and a few treats and a few pool tables and stuff like that. I think that they were privately owned; I think the government just allowed the facility.

RM: Did you access it through Mercury, or was there a better way?

JM: I went in through what they called LRL Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. That road used to take off before you got to Mercury, and go up there.

RM: In Amargosa Valley?

JM: No, it was just before you got to Mercury. Sometimes we went into Mercury and then up to Area 12. If they had that gate open and you could come out, it would save you a 45, 50-minute drive because you didn't have to go back through Mercury.

RM: So you would get out into Amargosa Valley as you went past Mercury?

JM: Yes.

RM: You would hit that road there because there's some mountains there.

JM: Somewhere pretty close to Lathrop Wells. And you hang up there, somewhere up where Yucca Mountain's at Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. They had a big headquarters there at that time.

RM: Were there a lot of men living there when you stayed there?

JM: Yes, quite a few that place was packed. If you didn't get there early for dinner, lunch, and breakfast . . . it was busy. They were going 24 hours a day, three shifts.

RM: Were they trailers, or had they built units by then?

JM: Ours were modular trailers. We didn't have the fancy units like they had down at Tonopah. But they were good they were warm and maintained.

RM: So you didn't have any complaints about living out there. Did you find it personally okay? I mean, you weren't at home.

JM: No, it got old in a hurry, the traveling and all that. It must be the Bohunk in me I'm kind of hardheaded, you know. They transferred us down there just around Christmas time I should have been thankful we didn't get laid off. A couple of the guys quit because they didn't want to travel, but I said, "No, I'm not going to quit until I get home. They can transfer me back, then I'm going to quit." I got transferred back, and after I got transferred back, I gave them two weeks notice and quit.

RM: When you were working out of Tonopah, were you working out on the flats at the Cactus Peak area?

JM: Yes.

RM: What were you doing out there?

JM: Laboring, mostly. It was all above-ground testing. They tested a lot of the Rebel rockets that we had to recover; they dropped them in the dry lakes. And those suckers went anywhere from ten feet to 110 feet down.

RM: A rocket went 100 feet in the ground?

JM: Yes. We never did recover one of them. We got so deep, we had to call for the miners to come up from Mercury, and they never did get it. I think it got so deep into the water table and all that, and that was it.

RM: My dad and I were working out there on the flats Thanksgiving of '69. They were pouring a gigantic slab of cement it was a foot thick. Was that out there when you were?

JM: Yes. That was the hard target at Area 9. Later on, that's what they used for the target when they dropped those units we had to recover. One day we filled up a ton of sandbags and we sandbagged one of the buildings that sat right in the middle of that hard target. They actually dropped 500-pound bombs out there, and they blew the hell out of that hard target but never did hit that building.

RM: They blew holes in the big slab?

JM: Oh, yes. We refilled them.

RM: With cement? Were they just working one shift when you were doing that?

JM: Yes, it was all daytime. And they did a lot of filming on it. We poured concrete walls, probably two foot thick, maybe even more, and let them cure for over 30 days. They'd shoot those Rebel missiles, or projectiles, that they developed, out of howitzers, and the projectiles were only about four inches around. But the howitzer barrel is real big, and they had the chamber like an accelerator covered with plastic so it'd go out that barrel without wobbling down the barrel. It was coated with a heavy plastic. The projectiles would go right through that wall.

RM: Go through a two-foot wall?

JM: Easy. And they wouldn't even get hurt. The Rebels that they dropped in that lake, we were kind of wondering what they're testing them for. The only thing that would happen - they would rip the fins off but they would be unhurt.

RM: They'd go into the concrete?

JM: Yes, wouldn't even be scratched.

RM: How far in would they go?

JM: We had to jackhammer them out of that concrete - you'd see the fins lying on top of the concrete. But if they went in the dry lake, half the time the fins never even came off. They were these bunker busters. Later on in life, when they dropped them, they'd penetrate the ground. They have a fuse on them or a timer, and they detonate after they got into the ground.

RM: Were the walls that they were shooting them through reinforced concrete?

JM: No, I never saw anything reinforced. Then we picked up a metal - it was called Tube-Alloy. I know it's bad stuff. Bernie Merlino and John Quas - they're both still alive - and Del Bailey and I, we picked all that stuff up off that lake. They would blow them up or however they detonated them. And when you picked that metal up, if you got two pieces, it's just like hitting flint - a spark would come off there. I know now that it wasn't good. And half the time we didn't wear gloves, or they didn't tell us to, and just regular old work clothes. And you'd go home with that crap on you.

RM: Was it in that dry lake that's below Cactus Peak - Mud Lake?

JM: No, that was called Antelope Lake.

RM: Did you like working up there?

JM: Yes, it was a good job.

RM: What were you guys making by then, do you remember?

JM: It seems to me like we were taking home about \$140 a week. That was pretty good money, then.

One of the things I remember the most is we were sitting in the truck out there when we heard that President Kennedy was killed.

RM: Really, you were working out there that day? What did you think?

JM: It was kind of scary. There was no boob tube out there, and to hear your president was shot to death, it just sent chills up your back when you heard it. It was a shame.

RM: When my dad and I were working out there, we were living up at Bellehellen. They were working from sunrise to sunset, seven days. I lasted about ten days, and I had to take a day off. That's when I realized that I would never be the man my dad was. [Laughter] He went to work that day.

JM: Oh, I can remember—he was a big man, big strong man.

RM: Plus, he did all the driving, and I would sleep a part of the way. I considered that a hard job, pouring concrete in November and December. It would come out of the trucks, and it would frost up sometimes as it was being poured. [Laughter]

JM: That hard target actually turned out pretty good, though.

RM: It seemed like a huge thing when we were doing it.

JM: Yes, it was; it was deep. We had to break it all out of there after they blew them up, kind of cut the edges and clean them up.

RM: Then you would re-pour there? I suppose it's still there?

JM: Oh, it's got to be.

RM: I think that was '59 that we did that.

JM: I didn't go out there until '62.

RM: I made enough money that fall working there to go back for another semester of college. [Laughter] So the Test Site put me through school.

JM: That's good. Now they do that, you know.

RM: And my dad would send a little money to help out. He finished out his career there - he lived 18 years at the camp at Area 12. How far would the slab be from the camp at Area 12, by way of the crowd?

JM: I'm going to say probably 70 miles.

RM: Did you ever go down that way?

JM: We never went past Mellon Mountain. Cedar Pipeline, where Fallini's ranch is, is as far down as we could go. But we went back over the hill at Cactus, halfway to Goldfield, going towards Stonewall.

RM: And that's where you said they had that big shot?

JM: Yes, they had it in the flat there.

RM: How do you look back on testing in Nevada? What's your perspective on all that?

JM: They flat weren't truthful with you, and they know it - that's why they're paying these bucks out. They know they mistreated you, and hid everything. And I think they're just as sneaky now as they were back then. I mean, give me a break. They don't level with the people - I'm sorry.

RM: Any other recollections?

JM: The FBI came in here when I was first elected Justice of the Peace, and they wanted to pick my brain. Bernie Merlino was the assessor, and I said, "Follow me." We went down to Bernie's office. They were trying to find out about that Roller Coaster shot. And we had the same conclusion, Bernie and I did - "Hey, we don't remember; we just know we buried it, burned it. Go talk to Bozo Boscovich - he'll tell you right where it's at." See, they never had coordinates on it or anything, and they wanted to reclaim it. Well, we just know that we buried it out there somewhere [laughs], but where?

Phillip Metscher kept a diary, and he gave me a copy of it. He worked on that shot, too. And what happened - one of the bulldozers quit, and it was in that shot area. They went out there and they steam-cleaned that whole thing for him. And he had to change the transmission. When you've got a 20- or 30-ton dozer, how did they steam-clean underneath that?

RM: Yes, how did they?

JM: They didn't. And when he came down with that growth . . . it was cancerous.

RM: And it may have been from that?

JM: I think so. He had everything documented; he gave me a copy of everything. I haven't pursued it yet, but I came down with that cancer in my neck, and I think I do qualify for compensation, but I haven't got around to applying. My wife got the settlement for her dad; she filled out the paperwork for him because he was a downwinder

RM: Her dad certainly sounds like someone who qualifies for what you would call a hero, and we need heroes who are people who did something and had a can-do attitude and made the country.

JM: One time Nancy and I went down to Kingman, Arizona, visiting. At that time, he'd gone to work for BLM. He was laughing like all get out. I said, "What's the matter?"

They gave him a \$500 bonus, and he said, "You know what this is for?"

I said, "No, what for?"

He said, "They didn't know how to catch mustangs. [Laughter] That's what I've done all my life." He built a water trap. Once they get in there, that gate will close, and there's your mustangs.

RM: Talk about how he used to catch mustangs.

JM: He caught a ton of them, and he used to sell them because it wasn't against the law then. That law didn't go into effect until the early '80s. If they were on your property, they were your horses. They didn't need to be branded. You had the right to round them up. He'd load up a bunch and take them up there to Fallon and sell them for dog food, chicken feed, or whatever. And he learned how to catch them.

RM: So you don't have to go out and herd them in? How does that trap work?

JM: If you've got isolated water, you just build a fence around it and leave one or two gates open; usually he put two gates on it so they didn't feel quite as restricted. They start walking in and getting a drink, and pretty soon it becomes habit to go in there. Then you close the gate off, and they start using the one gate.

The gate is spring loaded and controlled electrically. After you know they've been going in there for a while, you can either set it to shut off after so many have gone in or set it off with a remote control. You could actually sit there and watch them go in. You could be 100 yards up on the hill, and you push the button and it'll lock automatically, and they're there. Then you just back up the truck and load them on there.

RM: What kind of fence did he have around it?

JM: It's these regular pipe fences that you see, the panels.

RM: And they couldn't tear it down or jump over it or anything.

JM: No. And the panels are all chained togetherô you have to have two dead men, basically, just for the gate. It worked good.

RM: And then he would load them up in a truck?

JM: He had a small cattle truck, I think a 2-1/2-, 3-ton truck; you could probably haul six or seven head of horses on it pretty easy.

RM: And then he would drive them to Fallon. Do you know what he was getting for them?

JM: Whatever price chicken feed was; it wasn't much. I remember back then, an old bull would go for about ten cents a pound. So you take a 500-, 600-pound horse, probably 50, 60 bucks.

RM: But it helped make ends meet.

JM: Yes, and that's when gas was only 30 cents a gallon. [Laughter]

RM: Where was his fencing, or did he move it around?

JM: He put it wherever the mustangs were causing the most problem. He used to shoot a few of them, too, and feed them to the lions. He didn't buy dog food or anything like that; he kept the dogs eating the horses. He kept the horses thinned so they were never a problem. Look at the mess you have nowô you've got a minimum of 50,000 horses in this state and they're eating you out of house and home. I went up deer hunting last year at the top of Morey Peaksô horses all the way up there and all the way up on top.

RM: I've always admired that mountain. What's it like on top of there?

JM: It's beautiful. You could drive right to the top of that mountain. You come off of Highway 6 like you're going down to where the Mighty Oak shot was, and that road takes you right to the top. It's beautiful up there. We saw some mountain sheep up on top and lots of horsesô I couldn't believe the horses.

RM: They've taken over up there?

JM: Yes, they've got stud piles as high as these rails. I don't know how they could crap that high, but they do.

RM: Back in '55, we shot two at Reville for food for the dogs and cats. I've still got the hides. [Laughter]

JM: That's what they did. It wasn't inhumaneô it's inhumane what they're doing now! You go out there and see themô they're a bag of bones. When their water holes dry up, they'll sit there and paw the mud. People think somebody shot themô well, the water

hole dried up; they filled their gut with mud. It's sad. These people see one or two horses, and they look like beautiful mustangs. There are some beautiful mustangs, don't get me wrong. But if you take a look at the majority of them, they're not. They got big old jug heads on them, and they're all interbred. It's sad.

RM: It's funny how people can get all wrapped up in something like that, isn't it? They get so emotional about it.

JM: And this government, too. I mean, you're spending a million dollars a month, for crying out loud, feeding them hay. The vet bill . . . Nancy adopted a burro from BLM in Kingman, and they actually had it tattooed on its lip and the vet went in and floated its teeth and shaved its feet and they fed it for about six months. She paid \$75 for that burro. It didn't even cover the feed bill [laughs], let alone the vet and trapping it. So that's what they go through.

RM: What do they do to float its teeth?

JM: They kind of file them down and get them even.

RM: So they're not even in the wild.

JM: No, they get a little on the rough side, but they'll clean them down. They do all that and don't charge you a dime.

RM: Do you still have the burro?

JM: No. We gave it to my father-in-law, as he had several he had adopted and he wanted her. The novelty finally wore off and we took it back down there and gave it to him. Nancy loved her. She was a real pretty and gentle jenny. But the family got too busy to feed her and all, so you know who ended up doing it. [Chuckles] He bred her.

RM: Did he get a good colt from it?

JM: Yes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Next time we meet, we need to talk about your service on the school board and as a Nye County Commissioner and as a judge. I don't want to touch on anything confidential, but just review some of your recollections on that aspect of your life.

JM: That's one thing about being a commissioner— everything is public record. In the court, unless it's a pending case, there's nothing confidential. It's disgusting. Just to show you how low these politicians are— I'm not just saying Democrats or Republicans— politicians. We had one in here trying to know about somebody that's running for the U.S. Senate. There were some actions filed, but the actions were filed by that party— it wasn't against that party. And they're in here digging.

RM: Just looking for dirt?

JM: Looking for dirt. I'll tell you, that's what this country is coming to— pitiful. Things that happened 25 years ago shouldn't even be considered; people change.

RM: It's a different world now. That's the reason I like focusing on people like the folks I've interviewed in Nye County.

JM: There are some remarkable people here.

RM: Now, when did you sell your gas station?

JM: I sold that about 1997. I leased it out for two years after I went out of business. I went out of business January 1, 1995.

RM: When did you start getting interested in public service? And what was your thinking?

JM: I got started on the school board. I had two two-year terms there.

RM: What made you want to run for the school board?

JM: I had three kids in school, June, Joey, and Judith, and I thought I'd be involved and try to help out a little bit that way. It was an experience. Just in the short time that I was on the school board, we built a brand new school in Pahrump and one in Beatty and one in Tonopah. And Round Mountain Gold built one at Round Mountain and threw us the keys after they built it. It didn't cost the taxpayers a dime for that school out there.

RM: What were the challenges in getting the new schools established in Tonopah, Beatty, and Pahrump?

JM: It was a pretty even trade. We really needed new schools in all three places. Pahrump just started growing like the dickens. It didn't take them long to even outgrow the one that we had down there.

But Tonopah that was about the time Anaconda moved in here, and we had a big influx of people. The little school couldn't house them properly so we built a new school. We built it for about 600 students, and it was designed so that you could remove the outer walls and add on to it with no big problem. But instead of growing more, like was anticipated, Anaconda only hung around for about 18 months and we were stuck with a building that really was an overkill. But there might be a time when things bounce back. I'm not saying it ever will, or not.

RM: I think it might.

JM: I hope so.

RM: I think energy is going to be the future.

JM: Energy and mining. I see that they had a little problem with the molybdenum property in Eureka so they might go back to the moly property here. It was my understanding that the court shut them down for the water application in Eureka. And without water, there's no way in the world you're going to get that mine to work. I hear a rumor that they're interested back in Tonopah now. But they made that property their No. 1 choice, in Eureka. So it's possible that they could get Tonopah on line before they get Eureka.

RM: When was your first term on the school board?

JM: I'd say about the mid-80s.

RM: What was it like, being on the board?

JM: Joaquin Johnson was superintendent. It was a seven-person board - three from Tonopah and one from Amargosa Valley and two from Pahrump. It was a pretty good board. We got a lot of things accomplished. I was amazed that we got some of the work done that we did.

RM: What kind of work amazed you?

JM: Well, there's a lot involved; I didn't realize how involved a school board was. The purchasing of buses and things like that, the bidding processes. You're bidding on school buses, you're buying tons of equipment and accepting bids, and you really have to have a lot of faith and trust in your superintendent. Joaquin Johnson did an adequate job. But things changed and a lot of things happened. It was hard to adjust to; it was a very hard learning process for me.

The bad thing about it is you've got a lot of things you try to get accomplished with very little money. I still have the understanding in my mind that if you have a good

athletic program, you're going to have a clean school and a well-respected school. And the athletic budgets are shoestrings and they've always been a shoestring, and they always will be because your curriculum definitely comes first. There's very little money left over for sports. You'll probably see a day when sports are unheard of in high school.

RM: Really? It's that bad?

JM: It's getting that bad. The cost of transportation on the buses, and the cost of fuel and the coaches and the referees; it does add up. Or the parents are going to have to subsidize the budget, somehow or another, which is a possibility, or some type of fundraisers or donations or something.

It's a hard business, it really is. I didn't realize it. And they could be a little heavy on the administration end. We didn't really look into it hard but we pretty much justified all their jobs. Whether it's still that way or not, I don't know. I imagine it probably is.

RM: Were there special rewards of being on the board in the school system?

JM: Oh, yes. The schools that we built, you walk in them right now and there's a plaque on the wall with your name on it because you were on the school board and you had the school built. I didn't really realize it until I walked into the high school up there. I noticed the plaque and I said, "Gee, that's pretty decent of them; it's nice."

RM: So then you ran for a second term?

JM: I did. I was appointed for the first term, then I ran for the second term.

RM: Who appointed you?

JM: The school board.

RM: And you applied?

JM: I had to apply, yes. I think we had two or three applications and I was one of them. There were two years of an unexpired term, and I can't remember who I replaced. State law said that you have to run in the first available election, and that was two years down the line. Then I ran for a two-year term, and finished that off, and basically, that was enough for me.

RM: Did you do much campaigning?

JM: I did, but I didn't really have to. On my election, I was unopposed; nobody wanted to run for it. But three people applied when I was appointed, and you went to oral interviews with the school board. They selected me, and I was kind of honored that they did.

RM: Did your school board term overlap with your commissioner term?

JM: No.

RM: And when did that end?

JM: It ended about 88.

RM: Was there a hiatus between your school board work and thinking about becoming a county commissioner?

JM: I really got involved in the high school when I was a board member. I was high school football coach and baseball coach assistant. They couldn't pay me because I was on the school board and it would have been a conflict of interest. I told them I wasn't interested in the pay, anyway. I just wanted to help the kids. And I was pretty well involved in the wrestling program, where Billy Metscher was a wrestler, too.

RM: So your son, Joe, and Bill Metscher, my son-in-law, were wrestlers when you were working with that program.

JM: Yes. I made all the trips with them. I didn't drive my personal car. I rode on the school bus, which was pretty nice. I tried helping the programs. I understood the budget and I understood how strapped they were for money. It was very difficult, but we seem to have managed. It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it.

RM: And the football team went to the state finals. I followed every game of that. It was one of the most fun things I've ever done. I can still see that pass.

JM: Yes, so can I!

RM: Tonopah had it, and then all of a sudden out of the blue, here's this pass.

JM: Hail Mary pass.

RM: Yes. So you were involved in that? Baxter was the coach and Craig Barr was the star, wasn't he?

JM: They had a lot of outstanding athletes. That was Danny Eason's class, and Barr, they were basically the seniors, and Johnny Klapper. That was the last year that I was really involved with it. Craig Barr was really an outstanding athlete. In fact, I followed Craig's career after he finished high school. He tried to get a scholarship from Reno, and they didn't want any part of it so he went to Idaho State. And he made, I think, 23 unassisted tackles in the University of Nevada game, against Idaho State.

RM: Oh, that's how he got to Idaho State? I remember after football season, I called the coach up at Reno, Ault, and I said, "Why don't you take a look at this guy? Give a local guy a chance, because he's damn good." And he gave me some line of crap

JM: I had no respect for Chris Ault and I still don't. I was coaching Pop Warner football up in Reno when he came to Reno. He put on a football clinic for us, and he's a total jerk, as far as I'm concerned.

RM: You mean he doesn't know what he's doing?

JM: No, it's his attitude—the way that he treats people. He's just very cocky.

RM: He was very rude to me.

JM: That's what I mean. That's just his nature. In fact, to this day, I don't care who's playing against Reno; as long as Ault's there, I root for Vegas. I'd naturally pull for Reno when they're playing another team, but interstate, I'd take Vegas just because of Ault.

RM: So you ended your school board career. What happened next?

JM: After my school board, a little time went under the bridge. I became a county commissioner in '81.

RM: And how did you decide to make that run?

JM: I just kind of missed being involved. I jumped on it; I thought I'd run for the vacant seat there. It had been a three-person board and they made it a five-person board so there were two vacant positions. I ran for the second position—they just added two commissioners.

RM: And what was your territory?

JM: At that time, it was just Tonopah.

RM: So you only had to run locally?

JM: Yes. Dick Carver was the other commissioner [from northern Nye County] and he had Gabbs and Smoky Valley. They broke it into five districts, and Tonopah was a district by itself.

RM: And who was on the board with you, at that time?

JM: We had Dick Carver, Red Copass . . .

RM: He was Amargosa?

JM: He was Amargosa. And Cameron McRae from Pahrump and Dave Hannigan from Beatty. We disagreed once in a while on the board, but we got along with everybody. I never had hard feelings towards any of the decisions. You might have been

on the wrong end of the vote on something, but, hey, you threw it behind you and went ahead.

RM: What did you see, in the process of being commissioner? And what kind of challenges did it present to you?

JM: I think our biggest challenge was being squeezed by the federal government. There's no doubt in my mind, they could really put a crimp to your style. A good example is that Nye County is so dang big. What do we have, 17,000 square miles? And for what we get paid from the federal government, we only own two percent of this county. For 98 percent of the county that they manage, you don't get much payment in lieu of taxes. I'm sure they've had a raise by now, but, oh my goodness sakes.

And some of the land deals they did, they should be held criminally responsible. A good example is the old bowling alley up on top of the hill in Tonopah. It was on the tax rolls for a little over a half million dollars. Gilbert Developing in Las Vegas was a construction company that built that and owned that property.

The Forest Service and BLM wanted to buy that building and move into it, and just have one office and only one secretary at the door. They have four or six acres that went with that property; that's why it was up over a half million dollars. So they agreed on a price and Gilbert Developing received ten acres of land in Las Vegas for that bowling alley.

Gilbert Developing turned around and sold those 10 acres for \$9 million. Then the Forest Service and BLM realized that they could not use any money to renovate the building. They owned it, so they had to put it up for sale. They put it up on sale on the Internet and sold it for a little over \$200,000. So your taxpayers, they take a look around. They sold ten acres of land for over \$9 million and we lost it off the tax rolls at a half million dollars. It's harebrained things like that. No accountability. They got away with it, you know? And they made a couple other land swaps.

RM: Do you remember them, off the top of your head?

JM: There was one in Northumberland. They had that mine up on top of the hill and the people that owned Northumberland had to buy a piece of property down in Hunt's Canyon and give that to the Forest Service. And the Forest Service deeded over the top of that mountain, on that mining claim to Northumberland, to the company. They really didn't look at dollars and cents, they just looked at what they wanted; it's things like that.

We adopted RS-24776 it said that we own all the unimproved roads in the county. To this day I really don't know where it stands; that was 02, or 03, somewhere in there. And so we got a stranglehold, I feel, on the dirt roads.

RM: So legally, the county owns all the dirt roads on Forest Service land?

JM: That's right, the Forest Service and BLM land in Nye County. And even the ones that are unimproved, that go from point A to point B.

RM: Would that include an old mining road crossing over the Reveille Range or something?

JM: It should. Unless they can really shoot it down somehow. RS-2477 was for mining; 90 percent of the roads were built for mining. Actually, after they got started, they built roads from one valley to the next valley so they didn't have to make big, long loops. Well, as far as I was concerned, we owned it all. I don't think that should be disputed, to this day.

RM: Do you recall any involvement, or anything you personally, or the board, would have had with the repository program at Yucca Mountain?

JM: I could tell you something about Yucca Mountain that not many people know. Yucca Mountain does not sit on the Test Site. A lot of people don't realize that. Buddy Perchetti is the one that went down there and staked it and the government had to buy it from him. I think it was a little over \$200,000 that they had to spend for the mountain.

When I was a commissioner, Eddie Tomany was a state mine inspector. He still is. The only thing different is that he's the No. 1 man now in state mining. Before, he was just an inspector. He came to me and he said, "They won't let me on Yucca Mountain."

I said, "Why not?"

He said, "They just won't let the state inspect it."

I said, "Well, it's not on a federal reservation. It's not on the withdrawal. I don't know why not. Do you want to go down there?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, let me make a call or two."

So I made a call or two, and they said, "Okay." He could come down as long as he was with me and a couple other people. I can't remember how many went down there then. He could write "fix it" tickets if he found something wrong, but not citations. Like if you have a burnt-out tail light, you get a citation to fix that tail light. So we went down there, and you couldn't believe the crap he found.

RM: This is when they had some kind of tunnel?

JM: Yes, they were still building the mountain and they had all the equipment. Some of those things he found, a blind man could see; it was very obvious. They had a big old swamp cooler running in this little portable house where a guard sat. On top of the swamp cooler, they had a big old five-gallon Igloo full of water. And the swamp cooler wouldn't shut off, it'd just sit there and drip. So over the period of a week or so, the dripping, and filling it up, and putting it back on top of that air conditioner, you were standing in water when you were filling your water cup and that air conditioner was running. You could've gotten ground pretty easy. So he pointed that out.

Then, they never had guards on a lot of the conveyor belts. And the funniest one was, they had this huge circus tent made out of canvas, oily canvas. They had the boring machine in there, a 22-foot circle, and they were changing out the bits on it. I was with Eddie and we went in there, and they're beating away, welding on new diamond bit teeth

and all that. Eddie looked around and he said, "Where's your fire suppression? You got any fire extinguishers? You got any fire trucks? You got any hoses or anything?"

They didn't have anything. No fire extinguisher, no fire truck. Nothing. They said, "Well, it won't burn down."

Eddie said, "Well, Christ's sake. It's oily canvas and you're sitting in here with lightning rods, for crying out loud, welding away."

They said, "Well, we've been doing it for a year and a half, two years. It will never happen."

So we left. That was like 2:00 in the afternoon, and that was about the last thing we inspected. We jumped in the trucks and came home. About 5:00, 6:00 that night, my phone rings. It was Sonny Halbrook - he used to be Sonny Meacham when I was a kid but he took his step-dad's name. He lived in Pahrump, and he called me up. He said, "You'd never guess what happened."

I said, "What happened?"

He said, "It wasn't a half hour after you left, that tent burned to the ground."

[Laughter]

I called up Eddie and I said, "You'd never believe what happened." And I told him.

And he said, "You've got to be kidding me."

"No, sir," I said, "that damn thing burned to the ground." They had absolutely nothing to put it out with. They just sat there and watched it burn. They couldn't hurt the drill bit because it's solid iron. The only reason they had that tent was because you can't weld in the wind. It seemed like the breeze always blows there just about like it does here - you're chasing your flame all over.

The thing that really kind of got to me, as a commissioner - I still remember this. We went to the drill hole. It was called LM-300. That was the site number. We popped in there at, like 8:00 in the morning. We left town about 5:00 and we caught those guys by surprise. They were sitting there drilling. And they had the 20-foot long box with a drill core, and they had it closed.

I said, "What's this?"

And he said, "That's the drill core from 1,000 foot to 1,020."

I said, "Oh, I'm interested. Open the lid."

He opened the lid. They had 18 inches of core in there. I said, "What happened?"

They said, "Well, we had a new driller and he laid on it and he never had a core. He just ground it all up, you know?"

RM: Oh, he pushed too hard?

JM: Pushed too hard, and never had a core. I said, "How do you justify that, now?"
And he said, "Well, that's all we got."

I said, "Where's your oversight?" You've got to have some type of oversight on this. What would you do if there was a problem in that 20 feet?

He just kind of shrugged it off, like "Oh, well." I don't know if there were any more cores like that or not.

RM: It makes you wonder.

JM: It does kind of make you wonder, you know? That was 1,000 to 1,020 feet at hole number LM-300. I never did find out any more.

RM: Was the bottom line that even the federal government needs some supervision on these project?

JM: No, that hole was Nye County's hole. We did our own individual testing out there to verify the government. We're kind of a watchdog; we're using our oversight money to hold them honest. But how can we hold them honest when we were chewing up our own core samples?

RM: So Nye County had its own bore as a quality check on the government.

JM: Right. They actually work for us. Les Bradshaw was our overseer. He was a remarkable man and he was an attorney and a geologist.

RM: Yes, I remember - he replaced Steve Bradhurst as the project manager for Yucca Mountain. Were you a commissioner when Steve was working for Nye County?

JM: Yes. I had a few problems with Steve - he misled us. When I first got on the board, we had a five-person board, like I told you. And the money we were getting from Yucca Mountain, we put it to pretty good use, like in paying for the history books you wrote and many other individual projects. I asked Steve about wages, and he said, "No, you can't use that for wages."

I really didn't accept that answer so I called Las Vegas. I talked to their director in Las Vegas and they had a \$10 million budget.

RM: This would be Clark County's money?

JM: Clark County's money that AEC gave them, basically. Clark County was getting a lot more than Nye County was getting, even though Yucca Mountain was located in Nye County. I couldn't see why they were getting more. They had the greasy wheels, I guess. That was all for wages. I asked them, "How do you get away with spending this money for wages?"

He said, "Your county administrator, they're spending a lot of time at Yucca Mountain. You can't expect your taxpayers to be paying for that. The same way with your police protection, fire protection, the men you hire. Why didn't Nye County think of that?"

So that's when we changed it. Then we started taking so much of the D.A.'s time, and your county administrator, the budget director, the commissioners.

RM: Charging that to the Yucca Mountain project?

JM: Yes, at least part of it. It was totally legal. Steve had a different idea. He had a big pipe dream, to build a museum down at Lathrop Wells. When I heard museum, and I saw

the blueprint . . . I don't know if you ever saw the model that they built. It's a very huge, expensive model. I told them, "Please enlighten me, here. Name one museum that makes money. I don't know of any." He wanted restaurants in this thing, and I told him, "I can't even imagine people stopping to look at it." Even if it was free, it would be hard. I said, "You know, they're in a big hurry to get into Las Vegas, normally, to lose their money, spend the night. And when they're leaving Las Vegas, coming this way, they're pissed off, because they're broke." I said, "I just can't see it." I wasn't in favor of that museum being built, at all.

CHAPTER FIVE

JM: One of the things that we did do with the Yucca Mountain money, and it was quite an extensive project, was the watershed project. It shows the whole western United States in transparent maps that just overlay. We had a world-renowned water man, a hydrologist of some sort. He put together this map. It is unbelievable. The heaviest water flow that he came up with on the western United States map was located at Stonewall.

RM: At Stonewall?

JM: Yes. It comes right through that valley, there at Stonewall. Shows the heaviest water flow in the western United States.

RM: Is that surface water, or underground water?

JM: Underground water.

RM: You mean there's a river? No kidding? Does it come from around Cactus?

JM: Yes. It was neat, how he put that map together. I wonder if it's accurate or not.

RM: How deep is the water?

JM: I don't remember that. I asked him about it because there was a real big, blue arrow. We were sitting like we are now, and I said, "How come that arrow is so much bigger than the rest?"

He said, "That's the main water flow."

RM: From where to where?

JM: The whole western United States, starting clear in the Rockies and coming down. That's the place where it all meets. "You've got to be kidding me. That's right there at Stonewall Flats."

He said, "Yes, that's right."

RM: How interesting. That's one of the problems that inhibits development—people always say, "Where are you going to get the water?" I wonder where it goes. Is it feeding a lake or river?

JM: I think he had it funneling down into Amargosa Valley.

RM: Is that map available?

JM: Joni Eastley should know. Somebody should have it; Nye County paid something like \$60,000, \$70,000, \$80,000 for that.

RM: And there probably is a report with it, isn't there?

JM: Oh, yes. This guy was from India or Pakistan, something like that. We hired nothing but the best. We hired Bruce Babbitt, as you know.

RM: Right. And this was in what year?

JM: That had to be '82 or '83. You ought to find out what happened to that model for that science museum, too. You can't believe it. It was built to scale. Both pieces are very interesting.

RM: What was your feeling about the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository generally?

JM: I worked in Mercury, and I thought there was no better place in the world, to be truthful with you. We were always pretty well informed. They showed us how they made those canisters to transport that stuff and showed a train running over them, hitting that truck head on. I always had it in my mind that if that program ever did go, they would change the federal law and fly that crap here - build a runway up there, and fly it in. Load it on a DC-10 or a cargo ship and fly it in. Whatever - cargo ship.

RM: What's your take on why it didn't go?

JM: I really don't think it's over with.

RM: I think the same thing.

JM: When they said that it was [all off] about four months ago, I told them, "Hey, it's not done. I see where the judge ruled, and it's not a done deal yet." We can't stop the permitting - there's no mechanism in place to stop the permitting. It was an oversight on their part so they're going to have to try something else. Where else would you want to put the waste? Nobody wants it in their back yard.

RM: Yes, Yucca Mountain is a perfect place for it. And it's a perfect place for developing the new technology of reprocessing and transmutation of nuclear materials.

JM: Just to give you an idea, one of the things they told us was that on a cold morning, if they did store that fuel there, it would steam. That mountain would actually steam. [Laughter] I didn't realize that.

RM: I didn't know that, either.

JM: If there was any moisture, on a cold day, it would steam, just like hot water when you see steam coming off.

RM: What's your take on putting a few nuclear reactors in Nye County for some high-quality jobs?

JM: You've got them elsewhere. I really don't see a problem with that, either.

RM: Do you think the people in Nye County would support it?

JM: I think if they did put it here, they should slap a tax on the users. It's a part of the county. Bottom line, if you want to buy it by the kilowatt, that's fine. That's what I say about California - they don't want nothing built in their yard but they want it all.

RM: So we can supply it.

JM: Tack a few cents on it. Just like Arizona said, "We could turn down the power. If you want to boycott us, we'll turn down the power." I don't blame them for thinking like that.

RM: My dream for Nye County is as a power production center for a lot of the West.

JM: You've got everything. You've got geothermal and you can even have coal-fired if you want.

RM: And to learn that there might be water down there. When I mention this idea, people say, "Where are you going to get the water?" Maybe there could be a reactor out there at Stonewall Flats or two or three of them, like the three big reactors down at Palo Verde by Phoenix.

JM: If you look at it, it's not that far to the power grids in any direction. It's between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. It's feasible; there's no doubt in my mind. I'm not a big seller on solar or wind generators.

RM: I'm for it but it's not going to keep the lights on. I want to be able to turn on the lights at night and when the wind isn't blowing. [Laughter]

JM: If you get a good old dust cloud hanging around for a while, you won't have any power.

RM: We need something for the base load, and that's where I think nuclear's role is.

JM: I can see it coming, but I might not live to see it. It's just like these farmers we have here that are growing alfalfa, or anything else. They only use that water for six or seven months out of the year but they have to pay for it for 12 months. And they've got dedicated power for the pumps so they pay for it. I'm sure that's what's going to happen to these power companies. They're going to say, "Sure, you want this wind generator, or this solar. That's fine. But you're going to pay standby time for when our plants shut

down.ö They're going to pass it on. You might as well be generating the power to begin with.

RM: Yes, 24/7. While you were commissioner, how was the commission's relationship with DOE, the Department of Energy?

JM: Cameron McRae and I went back to Washington, D.C. We negotiated the first contract with the Department of Interior's Secretary Hazel O'Leary was the lady we talked to. I think it was \$32 million or \$36 million; we negotiated. We told them we were just two commissioners and we'd have to take it back to the other commissioners, but we felt pretty positive we'd get one more vote to go along with it.

I had kids in college at that time. Hazel O'Leary told me and Cameron that they offered the state of Nevada \$100 million a year just to build their infrastructure, or however they wanted to use the money. She said they didn't want any part of it, they were fighting it. She said, "You know, you could take that \$100 million and pay for all the college and education for the kids in Nevada for nothing." And those jackasses still wouldn't do it. I'd call them a jackass.

I mean, we accepted the \$32 million or \$36 million for a six-year contract. We weren't locked in on any deals; it was for us to get our infrastructure up. We wanted some roads built or better facilities, better schools. We financed quite a little bit for the schools. We didn't throw the money away, but we gave them a little bit.

I went to the school district and I talked to the superintendent. I said, "We're going back to Washington, D.C. One of your board members ought to join us. We're going back to negotiate with Hazel O'Leary, and we can't really talk for you people because you're your own school board, you're your own government. You have your own attorneys, your own bank accounts, your own tax rate. If you want to join us, you're more than welcome to." They told us it was a waste of time.

The school district is like Nye County. What the county did is put an assessed valuation on Yucca Mountain. State of the art. Only one in the world. We hired a company to come in and do a feasibility study on what it would cost to build that facility. And you tax it just like a power plant or some other thing and put a tax rate on it. Then we roll our unincorporated tax rate into it. At that time, the rate was around \$3.65 or \$3.62 a thousand, max. So you could come up with a figure. When we went back to Washington, D.C., we negotiated the \$32 million or \$36 million because we had an assessed valuation on that mountain.

And the school district was getting, like, \$1.30 for every thousand, so they could have had a piece of the pie. They could've got \$8 million, \$10 million, \$12 million a year for three or four years, whatever it was, and they could have built schools without going to the taxpayers. The money was for the influx. And they said it was a waste of time.

Well, we came back and they found out through the newspaper that Nye County received \$32 million or whatever, and they said, "Where's our share?" Well, your share's back in Washington, D.C.

RM: You forgot to pick it up. [Laughter]

JM: You've got that right. To this day, I don't know why they legally can't still go back and do it, if that mountain goes forward.

RM: In your view, being at the center of some activity and negotiation for a period, why didn't Yucca Mountain fly, in Nevada? What happened?

JM: It was just, "Not in my back yard." I don't think it was that critical up north, I think Las Vegas is the one that put all the pressure on. I think if you actually polled the individuals, it would be pretty close to a flip of a coin.

RM: That's what I always thought.

JM: I still believe it's that way. Especially now, with 14 percent unemployment.

RM: How much of it do you think was Dick Bryan, initially, and then Harry Reid, making political hay out of the whole issue?

JM: When you talk about Bryan, when they first staked that mountain down there, they came up with Bullfrog County, for Christ's sake. They tried to steal it from Nye County.

RM: And that was under Bryan's administration?

JM: Yes. [Laughter]

RM: I interviewed former Senator Chic Hecht before he died.

JM: I liked him.

RM: He was a really nice guy. And he told me that it was Bryan, I think, who beat him for the Senate race and that Bryan used the Yucca Mountain issue against him. I said, "How did Bryan know that it was a hot issue?" Because my sense was, like yours, that people were not that opposed to it.

And Chic told me, "Fear always makes a good issue for a politician."

JM: Yes. It's still that way. You look at Reid right now, it's still that way. One thing about Hecht is that he was a businessman and he had business head on him. He wasn't a politician. And you have to look at it like that. He saw the potential for jobs, he saw the potential for revenue for the state of Nevada. The way Nevada is now, they're laying teachers off but you'd be in fat cotton to this day [if you had Yucca Mountain].

RM: Speaking of that \$100 million offer, Chic told me, and it was confirmed by Troy Wade, that the then Secretary of Energy called Chic, when he was senator, into his office. Troy Wade was there. The Secretary said, "If Nevada will take the repository, the federal government will build a multibillion dollar radiation medical research facility on the Test Site. And in a few years, it will have more Nobel Prize winners working there than any other place in the world."

Chic said he took that to Bob Maxim, who was head of UNLV then. They wanted to make it a joint effort with UNLV, and Chic said it was dead on arrival. Maxim told him, "If I signed on to that idea, I would be out of a job tomorrow." A multibillion dollar medical research facility.

Chic told me that, and I was shocked. Later I met Troy Wade, and I asked him, "Was that true?"

And he said, "It's true. I was there at the meeting."

JM: Some of the things that you read about and hear about that happen in your European countries, they're ahead of us in research, stone throws ahead of us. When I came down with cancer and I was taking treatments for a year, my pill came from Switzerland or Sweden. Seventy-five dollars for one little pill that looked like a baby aspirin. It kept your stomach from getting like it's in a roller coaster. They were on a trial basis here in this country. And, jeez, they work wonderful.

RM: Well, you've got France's 80 percent of their power is nuclear energy.

JM: They're not worried about it. And they're reclaiming a lot of theirs over there, reusing it. They tell me, out of a spent fuel rod, you've only used two-thirds of it.

RM: I know a huge amount of energy is left. So your sense of the future is that sooner or later they'll be using Yucca Mountain?

JM: Yes, I think so.

RM: What other kind of things do you recall about your involvement with Yucca Mountain when you were a Nye County Commissioner?

JM: It was ground level for us; we were there from the word go on it. We saw it progress fairly rapidly, really. I know Nye County got \$1 million when they bought that drill rig. The sales tax on that was \$1 million. It cost something like \$12 million, and with a 7 percent tax on it, we got \$1 million dollars in sales tax. That dollar just started bouncing. I don't know what ever happened to that big old boring tool. I've toured that mountain a couple of times, and it was quite unique, how they built it. I really thought it was nice and very safe.

RM: And your sense of public opinion during those years was that people weren't that strongly against it?

JM: Not around us. North was a little more receptive to it than further south. They'd say, "Well, that's 90 miles from Las Vegas. Nobody will come here." Give me a break. Like nobody goes to France?

RM: Yes, right. [laughter]

JM: It's unbelievable, the seeds that these politicians plant.

RM: What other kinds of issues did you get involved with as a commissioner?

JM: We had it going our way. Then I got elected as judge, and I got off the commissioner board. And Art Wehrmeister got beat in the election—he was our D.A.—and Beckett took over and that was a big mistake. But we had the oil wells going.

RM: Out in Railroad Valley? Talk about that.

JM: We wanted to take the state to court on it.

RM: Because they were hogging the money?

JM: Yes, all of it.

RM: Nye didn't get anything, did it?

JM: I don't know if it's still that way, but this is the way it was when I was on the commission. They've got what they call new oil and old oil. There's a date out there, 1995 or something. That's old oil, and any oil well after that is new oil and the taxes are different. How do they keep up with it? I have no idea, and I don't believe they really do, tell you the truth.

But there's a threshold of \$10 million on it as a barrel tax. Nye County gets 50 percent on anything that exceeds \$10 million. So if you go over \$1 million dollars, we get \$500,000 and the state gets \$500,000. But that first \$10 million all goes to the state school distributing fund and Clark County winds up with about \$6 million of it. It goes by your population, your school enrollment. Every time we got close to that \$10 million, it seemed like they just turned down that well. When I was a county commissioner they only exceeded that threshold once, and they only exceeded it then, by \$100,000 or something like that.

They watch it very closely. I'm sure they still do. We were going to take the state of Nevada to court because it's not a renewable resource. It's just like gold. We should be getting it all because we're supplying the police protection, the fire protection, blading the roads.

Our school district, at that time, got \$230,000 out of the \$10 million, because that's how many kids we had here; that was the formula. We got \$230,000 for our kids and the rest of the state wound up with damn near \$10 million.

I went ahead and did a little research on it and I found that some county in Colorado had the same problem. They took it to court and they won their court case. So I shared that with Art Wehrmeister and he started doing a little research on it and he said, "By God," he said, "we could probably reverse the money on this." And the next thing we know, in November, he got his ass beat and Beckett took over and that was the end of that. Well, they did get back into court, but for some reason or another, they went to the wrong court. The county commissioners got some bad advice from their D.A.'s office or whoever represented them and they went to the wrong court.

RM: Are they still producing oil out there?

JM: That refinery's still going out there. I definitely think they're still hitting their threshold. I went through there about a month ago. I saw probably 15, 20 wells pumping. They've got quite a few wells out there. A lot of them aren't pumping and a lot of them are pumping. Is it new oil or old oil? I don't know. [Laughs]

RM: Now, you served two terms as commissioner?

JM: It was a total of four years. I had a four-year term but I only did two years because it was a new position, and then I ran for four. I got elected for four years.

RM: Was there any difference between the first and second terms?

JM: It was pretty much the same, really. We had a pretty good flow going. The second four years is when I was with Red Copass, because Barbara Raper stepped down.

RM: Oh, okay. Red replaced Barbara. Pahrump was undergoing explosive growth at that time, wasn't it? And that was kind of skewing the politics of the county.

JM: Yes, we redistricted. When we had the five commissioners, everything got redistricted. They had to try to get the population base in five equal parts. It took some doing, but they did it.

RM: But your district was Tonopah.

JM: All Tonopah.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: I remember you told me the story, once, of Solan Terrell suggesting to you that you run for justice court.

JM: Yes, he did. All that time, I would go up to the Station House to have coffee and I used to sit there with old Bronco Skanovsky and Solan Terrell and quite a few of the others.

RM: I'd give anything for a microphone and a tape recording from those sessions.
[Laughter]

JM: I was sitting there having coffee with him one day and he said, "Hey, I don't plan on running again. You think you're interested?"
I said, "I never really thought about it, but yes. I'd be interested."

RM: That was how it happened?

JM: That was it. I worked with him out at the Test Site, and I really liked the guy. I liked all three of those brothers. Jesus, they kept you in stitches. That Bud Terrell, he was a comic, I'm telling you. I used to bring rocks to him all the time. Some of the sayings that he came up with . . . I brought him one and he said, "That's so low grade, it wouldn't run down the dump." [Laughter] I'd bring another rock, and he said, "Oh, that's manure-ium." [Laughter] He was a kick.

Old Starle, he was the serious one. He didn't want anything on his shoulders. If you touched him on the shoulder . . . he said he marched in that Second World War over all those hills, carrying that backpack. He said, "Never again." He didn't want anything on his back or on his shoulders. He was dead serious. He wouldn't even wear suspenders.

RM: How would you describe Solan?

JM: What you see is what you got. I really liked him. I mean, he didn't pull any punches. And he was a hard worker. He was more of a judge than he was a carpenter, far as I was concerned, but he was a very good carpenter. He was very particular. In fact, all three of the brothers, the quality of their work was very particular.

RM: So he made this suggestion to you up at the Station House. What did you decide to do?

JM: I told him I'd seriously think it over. He said he couldn't think of anyone more appropriate. That's what he told me and I said, "Well, by golly, I appreciate that."
And he said, "Well, you ought to try it."

Basically, the same thing happened to him. He was out there at the Test Site. I can't remember who he told me approached him and said, "Ah, don't be a carpenter. Come on in and be a judge." And when Tom McCullough retired, he slipped right in there and became J.P.

RM: So you ran the next time. Solan supported you?

JM: He did, yes. Well, I felt his support, anyway. My wife was a big support with the paper trail . . . a good campaign manager. [Laughs]

RM: And what did your district include?

JM: I had Tonopah, all of Sunnyside, and Belmont and Round Mountain.

RM: Not Gabbs?

JM: Gabbs was incorporated, and had their own judge.

RM: And what was it like, moving from commissioner to judgeship?

JM: There was a lot of schooling, and I enjoyed that. I went back to school. Before you could take the bench, you had to go to school for three weeks. Then you go back for a minimum of two weeks every year. You get a pretty good education. I attended the National Judicial College in Reno for years. I took a lot of classes.

RM: I'd bet you have some really good experiences, doing things where you felt like you really accomplished something.

JM: You know, I do. I've saved quite a few letters that I received over the years. I had six kids get into trouble out at Round Mountain. Two of them were juveniles and four of them were 18. They were seniors in high school. I gave them all ten days of community service to do and they had to have it done at a certain date. This was just before graduation. I told them, "If you didn't have it completed at graduation time, then when you're graduated, I'm going to put you in jail for the ten days."

Three of them had it completed, and one little girl never completed it. She was a cute little thing. Her parents were divorced. Her mother lived in Texas, the father worked out there at Round Mountain, and that's where she lived. And she didn't graduate. She was a half credit short but they let her walk through. At the end of graduation, I had two deputies there, and they hooked her up and brought her right to jail. I thought her old man was going to come unglued. I told him, "Hey, this is the way it is. She's going to do her ten days."

So she did her ten days, and she was madder than hell at me, too. She went back to Texas. When she got back to Texas, she kind of pulled up her boots a little bit and she dug right in, and went on and got an education, and got her diploma. I got the nicest letter from her saying that I really got her attention, she appreciated everything that I'd done, and that she'd changed.

RM: How many letters like that do you have?

JM: I've got quite a few. And you get some nasty ones. But usually they're not about you, they're about the sheriff's department or something. Guys just doing their duty.

I'd answer maybe a couple, but normally I don't get into pencil writing. It's a no-win situation there. If you want to defend yourself, come into court. Usually they send in the money and say what a son of a bitch the town is, and the deputy's an asshole—that's the way they put it—and they're going to tell the governor.

My first impression is, "That's who you should be talking to." Your state of Nevada sets the speed limits on the Main Street because it's a state highway. Don't talk to us about it, talk to the state. That's the place you should be." [Laughs]

RM: Do any difficult cases come to mind?

JM: Boy, you get them all. You absolutely get them all. I've had two murder cases that came in here. They're just about as gross as they could get. It happens in small towns, too. Maybe not as often, but it does happen. Child molesting cases; it does happen. And a couple of them are still locked up.

RM: Is that right? In the state?

JM: In the state. They're naturally all settled in district court, but you hear the preliminary hearing here. It kind of gets to you after a while.

RM: Do you have a hard time just keeping your distance sometimes?

JM: Oh, yes. Judges have feelings, too. You see these six-, seven-, eight-year-old kids take the stand and it's gut-wrenching, it really is. It's hard for me to believe a little kid's lying about their parents. It's usually the father.

RM: It's the men who are misbehaving?

JM: Yes. There were a couple where I felt the father was being railroaded. From the terminology these little kids use, you know they were prompted. I could separate a lot of crap, but there's some here that I really have doubts on.

RM: Do you see people lying a lot in court?

JM: You've got two sides to a story, and you've got to pick. You do have to make some type of determination. But I just can't imagine a deputy lying on a \$50 ticket to ruin a career. It doesn't mean nothing to him—\$50. And they think a deputy's lying? I don't. I just don't believe a guy'd stoop that low.

RM: Do you see some gnarly divorce and child custody cases?

JM: They're not mine, thank God. They all go in district court. I'm what they call a limited jurisdiction. My limit is \$10,000 on civil actions and \$5,000 on small claims and no property disputes. Anything like that bounces into district court.

RM: Do you ever get cattle rustling cases?

JM: I'd do the preliminary hearing on it. I had just one. It was just over one cow.

RM: What is your greatest pleasure, in being a judge?

JM: I'd have to pick the guys that are total alcoholics. I've had three that were actually convicted on their third offense and went to state prison.

RM: You mean for drunk driving?

JM: Yes. And they haven't had a drink now in beaucoup years.

RM: So they can be rehabilitated?

JM: Oh, yes. They're sentenced to a year. They do about six months at a halfway house. And boy they straighten out.

RM: That's wonderful.

JM: It's always nice to see stuff like that. And they're very productive citizens.

RM: Do you have kind of an overall philosophy as a judge?

JM: The only thing that I really get upset about is our state legislature. They mandate some laws, and they regulate some sentencings.

RM: They just take you out of the picture?

JM: Yes - if you're guilty, this is the sentence. Well, give me a break. And they order all this counseling, and we have no place to send them. They say that you have to be evaluated. You have to go to anger management for 40 hours and you have to have certified counselors. Well, give us the money.

RM: So what do you do?

JM: I wave the magic wand. [Laughs] There's nothing I can do. They don't have driver's licenses. They're broke.

RM: So basically they are supposed to get anger management, but you can't send them to anger management.

JM: I do send them to anger management. We have one place here in Tonopah, but they're not certified. Under the state, they're supposed to be certified counselors. They're not. You do the best you can. You send them.

Some of the other ones, your victim's impact panel on a DUI - we don't have a victim's impact panel here. The closest place is 180 miles, and they don't have a driver's

license so how are they going to get there? They don't have the money for a tank of gas, normally. There's this stuff that they mandate that you just can't provide. I call it waving the magic wand. I don't know what else to do.

RM: How do you see the future of Tonopah, and this part of Nevada?

JM: With all the technology that we have, we have the capability that we could dial in on Pahrump and Beatty, court to court. I'm sure that there'll be a time when you'll be talking to a judge through a closed circuit TV; it's already happening. If it's not a very serious offense, they keep lawyers from traveling. If they change a few state laws, and allow you to do it on a closed circuit TV, I don't know why not. You're not in the same room, but you're there, you know. I'm sure you're going to see that. I think it would be a step in the right direction, too. I'm sure that you couldn't handle jury trials and things like that, but 90 percent of the other stuff, you probably could.

RM: Do you have any further thoughts as we wrap this up?

JM: I have a lot of very good memories and a lot of bad memories. I felt so sorry for my mother. I mean, she lost two husbands and two sons. In the first six years of my marriage, I buried my father and two brothers. Some of that stuff that comes in bunches; it just comes. But, there are a lot of very good memories, too. I think Tonopah is the best place in the world to raise kids.

RM: I would agree.

JM: I went down to Vegas yesterday . . .

RM: Horrible, isn't it?

JM: I've got two grandkids down there. I want to cry. They're a number. They're not a name, they're a number.

RM: That's right. I feel very lucky that Bambi went to junior high and high school here. It was a good-quality, decent environment, which is hard to find.

JM: You tell them to be home at such a time, and if they're not, you could find them in five minutes. But down there, kids get off a bus and they get shot at, for Christ's sake.

RM: I feel so sorry for them because I know their lives are not going to be A-1.

JM: I wouldn't want to be a judge down there. I'm very thankful. You've been in this country. A 20-minute drive, you're in heaven. You go into some of the country and you could hear a pin fall, or a pine cone come off a tree. You drive into Vegas and you see a big iodine cloud down there.

RM: Joe, thanks so much for talking with me.

INDEX

A

alcohol and mischief,
alternative energy sources,
Amargosa Valley, Nevada
Anaconda Copper Mine,
anger management mandates,
Antelope Lake, Nevada
Area 9 (Nevada Test Site),
Area 12 (Nevada Test Site),
arm wrestling,
athletic programs, school,
Ault, Chris,

B

Babbitt, Bruce,
Bailey, Del,
Banovich, Baba,
Banovich, Dave, Sr.
Barr, Craig
basketball team,
Baxter (football coach),
Beatty, Nevada,
Beckett (district attorney),
Beko, Bill
Bellehellen, Nevada,
Belmont, Nevada,
Blackie the dog,
BLM (Bureau of Land Management
Bootlegger Canyon, Nevada
bootlegging,
Boscovich, Bozo,
Boundy, Wally,
bowling alley
Bradhurst, Steve,
Bradshaw, Les,
Bryan, Senator
Bureau of Land Management (BLM),
burro adoption,

C

Cactus Peak, Nevada

California Edison Power Company,
Carver, Dick,
Catholic religion,
cattle rustling cases,
Cedar Pipeline, Nevada,
central Nevada, attractiveness of
Cherry Creek Ranch,
child molestation cases,
Clifford (bootlegger),
closed circuit TV court hearings
Coleman's grocery store,
contamination at Test Site,
Cooley, Denton,
Copass, Red,
Curieux, Miss (teacher),

D

Darnell, Lena
DeBakey, Michael,
Del Papa, Miss (teacher),
Department of Energy (DOE)
Department of Interior,
Douglas, Alaska
downwinders,
drunk driving cases,
drunken chickens,

E

Eason, Danny,
Eason, Taskar "Tak
East Oddie Street, Tonopah,
Eastley, Joni,
Ely, Nevada,
Eureka, Nevada
European research advances,

F

Fabbi, Peter,
Fallini ranch
Fallon, Nevada,
family deaths and house sale,
farming,
FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)

federal government payments to Nye County,
fires
Elks Lodge fire
tent fire on Yucca Mountain,
floating teeth
football state finals,
Forest Service,
fossil hunting,
Foster, Byron,
France and nuclear energy,
Friel, John,

G

Gabbs, Nevada,
game warden as career,
gas crisis of 1973,
Georges Water (spring),
Gilbert Developing,
Gold Reed,
grudges, holding,

H

Halbrook, Sonny (Meacham
Hannigan, Dave
hard targets,
Harges, Bert,
Hawthorne, Nevada,
Hecht, Senator Chic
high school athletics,
horses / horseback riding
floating teeth,
mustangs,
visiting petroglyphs
water traps,
wild burro adoption,
Hughes, Howard,
hunting / fishing
bighorn sheep,
deer,
mountain lions,
Hunt's Canyon, Nevada,

I

Ichthyosaurus Park, Nevada,
infrastructure financing for Yucca Mountain,

J

Jackson, California
Jameson, Arlen,
Jeffrey, Irene (Petrovich
Jim Butler Days
Johnson, Joaquin,
judgeship experiences
approached to run,
child molestation cases,
DUI cases,
elected judge,
high school kids at Round Mountain,
murder cases
training,
Juneau, Alaska,

K

Kennedy, John F.,
kids from Tonopah, success of,
Kimberly, Nevada,
Klapper, Johnny,

L

Las Vegas, Nevada,
Lathrop Wells, Nevada,
Lawrence Radiation Laboratory (LRL),
Lemich, John,
Lemich family,
Lepore, Mr. (school principal),
Lida, Nevada
Lida Livestock-JV Ranch
LM-300 drill hole,
Lone Mountain, Nevada
Loviches, Nick
LRL (Lawrence Radiation Laboratory
Lydon, Catherine "K. O
Lyon's dress shop,

M

Magnolia Street, Tonopah,

marriage longevity,
Maslach, Andrew (Joe Maslach's father)
boarded with Lemiches,
bootlegging,
as card player,
civic interests,
death from silicosis,
descended from Montenegrin royalty
immigrated from Yugoslavia,
Joe's discipline when arrested,
as miner,
as Mucker fan,
wedding vow renewal,
Maslach, Joe (Joe Maslach's son)
arm wrestling
father on school board,
high school wrestling,
Nevada Department of Wildlife,
return to Tonopah,
at UNR,
Maslach, John (Joe Maslach's brother), 2
Maslach, Jordan (Joe Maslach's granddaughter)
Maslach, Joseph Matthew "Joe"
arrested for mischief
on basketball team,
birth,
Blackie the dog,
at California Edison Power Company,
cancer treatments,
commissioner terms,
drinking wine as children,
family deaths and house sale,
and FBI,
grandchildren in Las Vegas,
as high school coach
living at Area 12,
marriage longevity,
at Nevada Test Site,
as Nye County Commissioner,
at phone company,
and Pop Warner football,
school,
as school board member, .

service station business,
sold service station,
stomping grapes,
Tonopah Elks Lodge officer,
See also judgeship experiences
Maslach, Judith (Joe Maslach's daughter)
father on school board,
as newborn,
at UNR,
Maslach, Junee (Joe Maslach's daughter)
congenital heart condition and surgeries,
father on school board,
Reno business college,
return to Tonopah,
Maslach, Mildred Petrovich (Joe Maslach's mother)
and Blackie,
bootlegging,
death,
loss of husbands and sons,
as non-drinker,
Serbian Christmas traditions,
widowhood and children,
Maslach, Nancy (Joe Maslach's wife)
as campaign manager,
as hunter
return to college at fifty-one,
Serbian Christmas traditions,
wild burro adoption,
Maslach, Sylvia (Joe Maslach's sister),
Maxim, Bob,
McCracken, Robert G
McCullough, Tom,
McRae, Cameron,
Meacham, Sonny,
Mellon Mountain, Nevada,
Mercury, Nevada,
Merlino, Bernie,
Metscher, Bambi (McCracken),
Metscher, Bill,
Metscher, Billy,
Metscher, Phillip,
Metscher, Robby,
Mighty Oak nuclear test,

miner's consumption (silicosis
mines / mining
Anaconda Copper Mine,
early 20th century mining,
Kimberly, Nevada,
molybdenum mining,
Reveille Mill site,
Round Mountain Mine,
silicosis,
Summit King Mine,
Monitor Valley, Nevada,
Moore Station, Nevada,
Morey Peaks, Nevada,
Mount Charleston,
Mount Magruder, Nevada,
mountain lions,
mountain sheep,
mustangs

N

National Judicial College, Reno, Nevada
Nevada Rangerettes,
Nevada Test Site
Area 9,
Area 12,
contamination,
downwinders,
erasing nuclear test records,
gold on,
hard targets,
miscalculations and explosions,
radiation medical research facility proposal,
Rebel rockets,
Roller Coaster nuclear test,
underground test holes,
untruthfulness of,
vented nuclear tests,
wages,
workers' contamination,
and Yucca Mountain,
Nixon, Darren
Northumberland, Nevada,
nuclear reactors,

nuclear tests on Test Site,
nuclear waste disposal. See Yucca Mountain, Nevada
Nyala, Nevada
Nye County
*contaminated water from Test Site,
and federal government,
LM-300 drill hole,
nuclear reactors,
oil well remuneration imbalance,
oversight money,
as power production center,*

O

Odd Fellows,
oil wells
O'Leary, Hazel
Otteson (Jim Butler Days),
overburden,

P

Pahrump, Nevada,
parents' marriage certificate,
Pavlich (Joe Maslach's mother's first husband),
Pavlich, George (Joe Maslach's half-brother),
Pavlich, Gregory (Joe Maslach's half-brother),
Penny Singers,
Perchetti, Bob,
Perchetti, Buddy,
Perchetti, Minnie,
petroglyphs,
Petrovich, Irene. See Jeffrey, Irene (Petrovich)
Petrovich, Jovo (John) (Joe Maslach's maternal grandfather)
Petrovich, Mildred. See Maslach, Mildred Petrovich (Joe Maslach's mother)
Petrovich, Sam (Joe Maslach's uncle),
Piscevich, Annie,
politics,
Pop Warner football,
Posich, Slova (Sylvia) (Joe Maslach's maternal grandmother)
potatoes for bootlegging,
power company office,

Q

Quas, John,

Quinn Canyon, Nevada,

R

Rad Safe,
radiation medical research facility proposal
Railroad Valley, Nevada
Raper, Barbara,
Ray, Maggie,
Rebel rockets,
Reese River,
Reid, Harry,
Reipetown, Nevada,
Reveille Valley, Nevada
robberies at service station,
Roberts, Johnny (Joe Maslach's brother-in-law
Roller Coaster nuclear test,
Round Mountain Gold,
Round Mountain Mine,
Round Mountain, Nevada,
RS-2477 (dirt roads in Nye County
Ruth, Nevada, 1

S

Salvie, Miss (teacher),
Sanders, Hefty
Saunders, Bud,
school board terms,
schools in Tonopah
athletics vs. academics,
Blackie the dog at school
football state finals,
high school athletics,
high school condemned and torn down
new schools built,
school district and Yucca Mountain,
Schwin, Jack,
Serbian Christmas,
service station business
after previous jobs,
Christmas treats,
employees,
as full service,
gas crisis of 1973,

gas suppliers,
purchased in 1976,
robberies,
sold in 1997,
working long hours,
Sharps family
silicosis (miners' consumption),
Silver Bow, Nevada
Skanovsky, Annie,
Skanovsky, Bronco,
Skanovsky, Bruno
Skanovsky family as bootleggers,
Slavic language,
Slavin, Ed
Smokey Valley, Nevada,
state legislature regulations,
state mine inspection findings,
Station House,
Stephens, Leonard (Nancy Maslach's father
Stephens, Nancy. See Maslach, Nancy (Stephens)
stomping grapes,
Stonewall Flats underground water,
Stonewall Mountain, Nevada,
Summit King Mine,
Sunnyside, Nevada,
Sweeney, Dan

T

Terrell, Bud,
Terrell, Solan,
Terrell, Starle,
Thomas, Bill, sheriff
Tomany, Eddie,
Tonopah, Nevada
Anaconda Copper Mine,
bowling alley
Coleman's grocery store
football state finals,
Joe Maslach as County Commissioner,
Joe Maslach's vision of future,
Lyon's dress shop,
Odd Fellows,
power company office,

Station House,
success of kids from,
Tonopah Elks Lodge,
Tonopah Muckers,
work ethic of population,
Yugoslavian community,
See also schools in Tonopah
Tonopah Elks Lodge
Tonopah Muckers,
Traynor, Felix,
Traynor, Jo
generosity of
women's estrangement
Trueba, Dick,
Tube-Alloy,
Tunnel Springs, Nevada,
Two-Track nuclear test,

U

underground water,
unions and picket lines
University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV),
University of Nevada, Reno (UNR),
Unocal (gas brand
UNR (University of Nevada, Reno

V

Valyo, John,
victim's impact panels
Virginia City, Nevada,

W

Wade, Troy,
water
Stonewall Flats / watershed project
water traps for mustangs
waterfalls
Wehrmeister, Art,
Wells, Nevada,
Westerlund, Joey,
white lightning,
wild horses. See mustangs
winemaking,

work ethic,
wrestling,

Y

Yerington, Nevada,
Yucca Mountain, Nevada
financial advantages for Nye County,
future of,
infrastructure financing,
money allocations,
museum proposal,
NIMBY resistance
nuclear waste disposal,
project managers,
purchase from Buddy Perchetti,
state mine inspection findings,
tent fire,
watershed project,
Yugoslavia,