

An Interview with
RUBY K. MOORE

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

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Ruby K. Moore
1987

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PREFACE

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

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

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

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally caress 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 known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern Nevada—too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

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

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

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each 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 interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

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

--R.D.M.

Robert McCracken interviewing Ruby Moore at her home in Tonopah, Nevada October 24, 1987.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Ruby, could you tell me your full name as it reads on your birth certificate?

MC: Ruby Catherine Keplinger.

RM: And could you tell me your birthdate and place?

MC: I was born in Chico, California, January 27, 1903.

RM: Could you tell me what your father's name was?

MC: Frank Keplinger.

RM: And when was he born - do you know?

MC: No, I was too young. My ancestors come from Bavaria, during a religious feud. They had to escape death back there because they were killing them, so they came here. Their children were Keplingers - and they settled all over the eastern country. I have some notes on that - if I knew exactly where they were - that could tell you more about it.

RM: Well, we're more interested in you; we just like to give a little background. Was your father a native Californian?

MC: Yes. They'd moved.

RM: What was your mother's name?

MC: Mary Jane Kooken. She was from back in Kansas and around in through there. And there was one area in Kansas that the Keplingers settled. They cut timber down and all. In fact, it was called Keplinger - the town of Keplinger - and then they changed the name. But the area that they had settled in . . . as their children grew up, they settled there too, you know.

RM: Did you grow up in California?

MC: Yes. When I was about 12, I lost my mother and father. There were 10 in my family. I'm the 10th child.

RM: Both parents?

MC: Yes. My mother got killed in a horse and buggy and my dad died 6 months later. [After that] I lived here and there - everywhere . . . I lived with one brother and one sister, and back to another brother, and I shovled around through the country. [chuckles] I have no education. I went to school, but I think I was smarter than the teacher. [laughter] I went to a little country school and she'd let me teach the little grades while she taught the higher grades, so we could get out of school early and go picnicking. [laughs]

RM: Where was it?

MC: It was between Vallejo and Napa - in that area. I was living with my brother at the time - it was during the war - and he was working at the navy yard there, and I would go out to this little country school. As I say, she would let me teach the little grades, and she would teach the higher grades. She had them right up to the 8th grade there. And then we'd go for a picnic. [chuckles]

RM: How old were you?

MC: I was about 14.

RM: This was about the time your folks died?

MC: Yes; right after my folks died.

RM: Then you just moved foam one family to another?

MC: Yes.

RM: What did you do then?

MC: Oh, I worked in stores. I worked in a little variety store in Vallejo for awhile, and then I worked in a laundry, and shortly before I had worked in the laundry, a young girl worked there and got her arms run in the mangle and she lost her mind. I went to work there, and I went to work on a shirt machine where I pressed shirts. They made than let me go, because that girl had been hurt and they didn't want anymore accidents like that. Then I went to work in a candy store, and I moved here and there, just . . . But somebody told me I could sing.

RM: And that was the beginning of a new career?

MC: Yes. I worked in a lot of nice places and bad places. I worked in bootleg joints and everyplace.

RM: Tell me a little bit about how you got into the music business.

MC: I just had a voice. My mother used to teach me to sing when I was a little tiny thing. She would stand me on the dining room table and . . . I don't know what caused this, but it must've meant something, because the way she was taken away from me, she left me with something. She used to stand me in the middle of the dining room table and she'd say, "Now you're in the middle of a big stage - and la la la la la." But if the boys or my dad would be coming in the back door from the field or something, she'd grab me and set me down on the floor. They weren't supposed to know about it; they were narrow-minded.

RM: They wouldn't have approved of it?

MC: Oh, that was terrible - disgraceful. That's what I had to go through afterwards, when I lost her, because I was sort of brow-beaten. I guess it didn't hurt me any, but it did at the time.

RM: What was your first singing job?

MC: I sang in a little bootleg joint in Sacramento called the Bungalow.

RM: How did you get that job?

MC: There was a big celebration in town - the 49er Week. This is way back in . . . Well, I wasn't of age, I know. I had to lie about my age - I wasn't 21 - but the manager of the place looked out after me. He never let me turn my head. He was an old man. I sang there for a short time. The first song I sang, which encouraged me so much, was "All By Myself." I knew 2 songs and I forget what the other one was. I got up on the floor and sang it, and that time they had a bunch of girls who sang; there'd be 6 or 8 entertainers.

One after another would take their turn and sing and then there'd be a dance played, and then the next singer, and all. I got up and started singing my song and I just froze to the floor. I was scared to death. A couple of fellows sitting at a table over a little ways started tossing dollars at me and I made \$35 off of my first song. That is what persuaded me to keep on singing.

RM: [chuckles] That was a lot of money, wasn't it?

MC: Yes indeed, it was! That [job] lasted during the celebration. And let's see, where did I go after that? I kind of forget - it's been so far back.

RM: Were you free-lancing, or were you with a band?

MC: Just myself.

RM: What kind of backup did you have?

MC: Generally at least 2 pieces - piano and drums and sometimes we had a horn man.

RM: Were you singing popular songs or traditional songs?

MC: Well, they were popular at the time. But I only knew 2 when I started. [laughs]

RM: And then you just added as you went along?

MC: Oh, I learned them; yes.

RM: So how long did you free-lance there?

MC: Oh, I just kept it up. I went from one little job to another, and I seemed to get along all right. As years went by I sang at a place in Sacramento again called the 922 Club. It was supposed to be quite exclusive. And this was still in bootleg days. We had business people, and doctors, and lawyers, and all, and it was just a lounge, with no dancing or anything, just a piano and a singer. I sang there for 7 years. I got \$3 a day for that. But my tips were terrific.

RM: What were they like?

MC: The piano player and I would split than - \$50 a night, maybe, or maybe \$100, or . .

RM: So you were doing pretty well financially.

MC: Yes. And my voice got real good. [Once] I went with a girlfriend of mine to Mexico. They had just finished a new place in Mexicali called the Owl Club, I believe. I went in and applied for a job. It was a big place with a big horseshoe bar, and there was a big balcony all around upstairs where people could sit and look over the crowd and drink and all. And there was an orchestra up there. The man said, "If you can get up there and make people hear you from up there, the job's yours." So I got up, with this band - about a 6-piece band - and I started blasting.

RM: No microphone?

MC: No. I didn't know what a microphone was - we didn't have microphones. I just blasted, and he said, "The job's yours." [laughs] I worked there quite a little while; of course, I was just barely over 21 then.

RM: This was before you got that job in Sacramento at the 922 Club?

MC: Yes; this was before that. When he'd give me my paycheck, he'd say, "Now I want you to go across the line and deposit that in the bank and bring the bank book back; I want to see it." And there were a lot of rules around there. That was quite a little experience for me. I liked it, but I didn't like to be around Mexicans; I was a little frightened [chuckles] at that day and age. And so I came back to the States. After that I went to the 922 Club.

RM: Did you stick pretty much to the Sacramento area?

MC: Yes, because my sister lived there. She looked out for me more than the rest of the family did. Her children now all live around the Bay Area. I go down there to visit them once in awhile.

Then there was a couple who ran a place up at Lake Tahoe. They were in the 922 Club one night, and they asked me if I'd like to come to the lake to work. And I said yes, I would. "It's just a seasonal affair -it's just 3 months out of . . ." at that time you couldn't drive in there [but] about 3 months out of the year.

So I went up there and the piano player was terrific. You could just start a little tune and he was right with you, just like that. He just knew what to hit, you know. Well, I married him. [laughter] We traveled all over . . . After the 3 months was up we went to Reno and I sang there for a little while.

RM: Do you remember where?

MC: It's torn down now - Harrah's Club is on top of it. It was a little place called The Silver Dollar. I sang there just a short time. There were different ones that wanted me. I went to Ely and sang for a short time, and I went to . . .

RM: Where did you sing at Ely?

MC: The Capitol Club. That's burned down. And then I went to Elko - for Pucinelli

.

RM: We're talking 1930s, now, aren't we?

MC: Just about '39.

RM: OK. Could we back up and tell me a little bit about the piano player that you married? What was his name?

MC: Roy Moore. We were married in Ely in 1939.

RM: OK, I interrupted you. You said that you had worked in Ely and then you worked for the Pucinellis in Eiko?

MC: Yes.

RM: Where else did you work?

MC: I worked in Las Vegas when the dam was going, for little Jimmy Jones, who had the Green Shack out on the Boulder highway. It was the only place of interest at that time. There was no Strip there then. I could've bought lots for \$5 a lot where the Strip is now. She was a lovely little person - I worked there for quite a while. Then I worked for a little fellow downtown just a few

doors off Fremont - the Nevada Club. And there were quite a few little clubs all centered in that area at that time. And then we went back - let's see, where did we go after that?

I think we went back to Reno and got a phone call that they wanted us in Tonopah. That was around '41. So we came down here and we were frozen here when the war broke out.

RM: So you got here before Pearl Harbor?

MC: Yes, but just a few days before.

RM: Why were you frozen here?

MC: Well, I couldn't get gas stamps, I couldn't get food stamps, or anything for traveling. What they were doing here was putting all gambling in, because the boom was on.

RM: With the air base?

MC: Oh, yes. There were 6000 or 8000 men here - [it] looked like an anthill. And so they took music out and made more room for gambling tables. So my husband and I learned to deal, and we dealt during the war a little bit. We set out to sing, but there was no singing to speak of.

RM: Because they could make more money with the gambling?

MC: Now, the Tonopah Club had a nice little cocktail lounge, so we played there occasionally. But that was more in the recent years, after it simmered down. It was a boom at one time and poor old Slim Russell, the man who owned the Tonopah Club, was just dumbfounded. All he could do was stand there and look over the gambling and wonder where it was all coming from. Dealers came in there who were trying to beat the war. They would sneak in without a dollar, and they'd have \$500 or \$600 in nothing flat.

RM: How would they get that? By cheating?

MC: Yes. Oh, yes.

RM: What club brought you here, initially?

MC: The Ace Club, for Bob Marker and George Barra. They were awfully fine men, and a real nice . .

RM: They owned the Ace Club?

MC: They owned the Ace Club. But after we'd worked there for awhile, they leased it out to some gamblers out of Las Vegas who wanted the whole area for gambling. So they took out the music stand, piano, and everything.

RM: How did you feel about turning to dealing instead of singing?

MC: Oh, it was something new; something different.

RM: Do you remember any interesting experiences or anything you had in connection with dealing?

MC: Yes, we had one soldier out at the base who was a cheater [chuckles] and I went to work for Art Martin, who owned the Rex Club at that time. He was up the street gambling, and he left me to deal the crap game and the 21 game. I'd sing a song occasionally, or serve somebody a drink, or [chuckles] run the crap game, or 21 game - just an all-around dealer. Well, this soldier came in. He had been down the street to the place that used to be where the Silver Strike is now. I had heard that he was down there and the cops were watching him. So here he came pretty soon, in to shoot crap. He was going switch and the table was full. It was a one-man table, no bigger than this. If I stood in the middle of it, it would go almost to the ice box. But I could move from here and here . . .

RM: About 6 or 7 feet.

MC: I didn't know what to do. I had never been in that situation before, and the boss wasn't there. So I said, "All you fellows go up to the bar and have a drink. I've got to take a break. I've been working here too long." Which I had been. I got them all up to the bar, and just about that time a cop came in and picked him up and took his dice away from him.

RM: He had loaded dice? What would he do - switch the dice?

MC: Yes. When it come his turn to shoot, you see.

RM: How long did you deal?

MC: Oh, when the war was over with, we went to Alaska.

RM: What year was that?

MC:1948. [When] we left Tonopah we went up north to Alturas [California] and went to a couple of little places where Roy used to work. I never worked up there, but he had worked up there, and he knew the folks. I didn't work, I just kind of took it easy, and he worked.

Then we left there and decided we'd go to Alaska. There was a boat strike on - we were going to go up on the boat - we sold the car and took a plane up. When we got up there, there was a new place that was going to be open in a short time, but we weren't supplied with too much money by this time, after traveling and all.

So we went to work for the railroad. Roy helped to unload the cars that can in from Seward, I think. And I checked than off as they come in and kept inventory of it. The little place that opened up was a real nice little place called The Green Lantern. It had a little dance floor -

all glass - with different-colored neon underneath it that flickered - it was real cute. Now it's just a klotch joint, they call it.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Ruby, I've never heard the term "klootch" joint.

MC: That's what the native women were called, I guess. They always called them "klootches."

RM: Oh, I see. Well, how long did you work at the Green Lantern?

MC: Over a year.

RM: Could you tell me a little bit about the group that backed you up?

MC: We had a 6-piece Dixieland band, and it was terrific. We used to broadcast at 1:00 a.m. every night.

RM: And this was in Anchorage?

MC: Yes.

RM: And you said you had a couple of good horns. men.

MC: Yes. They played in Jack Teagarden's band.

RM: And what did you do after that?

MC: Well, let's see we went over to Fairbanks and worked awhile. But I was getting awfully weary of the cold weather and all that, so we decided we'd come back to the States. We were going to Anchorage first and fly out of there. They insisted that we come back to the Green Lantern so we went back and worked for awhile, and during that time there was a crippled children's drive. I got up on an old flat-bed truck with a piano and a microphone and blasted tunes and sold tickets for the crippled children's drive. And the one who bought the winning ticket, when the drawing came up, won a Cadillac car. And the one who sold it got a Ford. And I sold the winning ticket and got the Ford.

RM: What year was this?

MC: This was '49. We were going to drive it out, but it hadn't arrived in Anchorage yet. There was a boat strike on. We took a plane to Seattle and were there 2 or 3 days before we went down to the distributor's to get the car. It had gone up over the Al-Can highway with a caravan of cars so I lost out on my car. I had my license plates and everything for it.

RM: Why couldn't you go back up to Anchorage and get it?

MC: Well, I could've gone back up and got it, but in '49 there were the most terrible snowstorms up north - cattle freezing right out in the fields and all that - and I was just as well satisfied. It would be dangerous. They sent me a check for it, so that was just as good.

While we were there we went to a studio to make a couple of records for some friends up in Anchorage, and a talent scout walked in. He said, "You're just the 2 people I want to go to Kalispel, Montana," for a job. It was over the holidays.

And I said, "I just finished 2 years up in Alaska." [laughs]

He said, "Well, it's just for 2 weeks - just over the holidays."

So we took it, and I went up and bought some new evening gowns and a few things, and we took the train and went to Kalispel, Montana. After the 2 weeks were up we'd partied around and stopped here and there, and we took the bus and came down into Nevada. We were over in - I think it was Winnemucca - and we were having a few drinks, and I said, "I think I'll call up George Barra and say 'hello.'" We were sitting on the side of the bed, and I called up George Barra, and he says [loud voice], 'Where the hell are you? Get down here!' [laughter] So we took the bus and we came down here. We'd been in and out of Tonopah 4 or 5 times, and always came back to Tonopah again, so I just figured I'd stay here. [laughs]

RM: When you came in, did you work each time?

MC: Yes, we'd always work some place.

RM: What are some of the places you'd work?

MC: Well, I worked at the Tonopah Club in the keno game, then.

RM: Oh, you weren't singing.

MC: I wasn't singing then; no. We were dealing; Roy worked the 21 game.

RM: So when Barra had you come back . .

MC: Oh, we sang for him.

RM: And he still had the Ace Club?

MC: Yes.

RM: But most of the time you dealt here?

MC: Yes.

RM: Which would you have rather have done - sing or deal?

MC: Well, I'll tell you. Rock was coming in style, and that wasn't my style at all. I sang all the old tunes and rock was taking over, so it was just as well.

RM: This would've been in the late '50s?

MC: Yes. It was just as well that we did get into the dealing. That was -we thought - the best thing to do, which it was. And then we went and both of us worked for Les Short at the Mizpah for a long while. I dealt keno and Roy dealt 21 on the graveyard shift.

RM: How long did you work for Short?

MC: Oh, quite a long while. I began to get arthritis awful bad and I was miserable all the time. Roy took me over to a doctor in Bishop who gave me something to dissolve the calcium.

RM: Were you getting it in your back, or your legs, or . . .?

MC: In my joints, mostly. I still have after-effects of it, but it's not bad like it was. It was in my hips and my back. And he dissolved that. I think I'm getting side-effects from it, now.

RM: How long ago did you get the treatments?

MC: It's been 15 or 20 years ago. The medication left the muscles - where they went through that calcium - all red and inflamed and mushy. I had no strength - I couldn't pick up my percolator, hardly. But I did get off crutches. I got rid of all that, which I was very thankful for, and I haven't had to use crutches since. I got over all that siege, and that doctor died - Dr. Curtiss.

RM: He was a physician?

MC: Yes.

RM: I wonder what he gave you?

MC: Butazolidin-Alka 3 times a day, with meals. And Erythrocin for the healing of the muscles.

RM: How long did you take the pills?

MC: I took them for 2 or 3 weeks. And then I went back and he checked me all over, gave me a thorough checkup - then put me back on another refill of it.

RM: It must've been pretty good.

MC :Yes. You have to have a certain type of arthritis. They say there are about 38 kinds of arthritis.

RM: When did you retire, Ruby?

MC: I lied so much about my age . . . When I started singing, I was putting it forward, and as I got older, I started backing up. So I had forgotten just exactly how old I was. I don't believe I had one legal card or paper that had my right age on it. So I sent to my oldest brother, in Chico, and he sent me a photostatic copy of the family records of the family bible. I was 68 years old before I applied for my social security.

RM: [laughter] You'd been dealing before that?

MC: Yes, I was dealing right up till then. [chuckles]

RM: When did counting cards in 21 come in?

MC: What do you mean, counting?

RM: It's a system of counting so you know how many face cards are out.

MC: Well, what they call the Crossroaders have come through. They [do] it all in the back of their head. I guess some of your sharp dealers watch for it.

RM: They'll throw you out, now - if you count?

MC: Oh, yes. I know there were several times some sharpies came through.

RM: When did you finally apply for your social security and retire?

MC: I was working for Short then; it was around '70.

RM: Was your husband still living, then?

MC: Yes, he was dealing. Shortly after I quit, he had a stroke while he was dealing. Short had to pry the deck out of his hand.

RM: Did your husband pass away with this stroke?

MC: No. I took care of him and doctored him and all for 3 years and then he passed away.

RM: So then you were retired.

MC: Oh, yes; I had quit work and was staying home.

RM: Do you do any singing on the side now and then?

MC: Oh, I don't make an effort to. [chuckles] I sang down at the convention center that one night, and I sang when I went to Las Vegas to this contest. Did I show you those pictures?

RM: Yes, you did. Tell us about the contest for Miss Senior Nevada in Las Vegas.

MC: Well, it was quite a long affair; it tired me out. I had to be there at 9:00 in the morning and they had a rehearsal for it, naturally.

RM: It was this spring, wasn't it?

MC: Yes. First I had to compete with anyone in Nye County - I had to go to Amargosa for that. Well, there was no one to compete with me; no one to challenge me. The next thing was to go to Las Vegas, to compete with the state. I had 10 contestants to beat. The woman who came in first recited poetry. I had to stand all through all these different contestants, waiting for my turn. I was almost the last one. I came out and blasted Sophie Tucker's tune - "Darktown Strutters' Ball" - and I got it and came in second.

RM: Ruby, could you talk a little bit about how musicians got their jobs, back when you first got in the business?

MC: Well, it was anyone who was able to play a piano, in those days. Now you have to belong to a union. I'm a charter member of the Reno musicians' union for the simple reason that during the war, when we were still playing and we lost our helpers, I got in and played the drums. I just picked it up by ear. I didn't know anything about it, but it was a help. And when I did that I had to join the union. I had belonged to it for about 25 years, so I am now a charter member

RM: And you didn't have an agent or manager?

MC: No. I have never during all my years had an agent. I've always promoted my own jobs, or somebody would say, "Well, there's such-and-such a singer in Reno. And maybe she'd like to come down here," or something. The way I came down here.

RM: Was it difficult to find jobs?

MC: Not back then. You know how a lot of jobs were back in those days. If they didn't like you, you're fired, and you're not held to the . . .

RM: Could you describe the nightlife in Tonopah during the war, when the air base was going here?

MC: It was really terrific. They had quite a time getting the contractors' help out on the job, so the bars all cooperated with them and closed at midnight.

RM: Oh, I see - they'd stay out all night and then couldn't work?

MC: They'd stay out all night, and get drunk, and wouldn't be able to get to work, and they had a contract that the job had to be done at a certain date, and so the bars closed at midnight.

My husband said, "Now [that] there's nothing for us to do, I'm going out to the base and get a job and work during the day. Then we'll come in and - on our job - work from 8:00 to 12:00 and I'll get plenty of sleep that way." So that's what he did - he worked in the commissary out there for quite a long while.

RM: Did you and your husband ever play music down in the red-light area, like the Big Casino? They used bands and everything, didn't they?

MC: No, that was before we came. The army closed them up.

RM: Do you know anything about the musicians who played down there?

MC: That was before we came here. They had same good bands, I understand.

RM: I wonder what happened to the bands after they shut them down?

MC: Oh, they probably all went back to their unions, or back to San Francisco, or . . .

RM: Do you remember any stories, or highlights of that period of time, in terms of nightlife?

MC: There were a lot of private parties that went on after hours amongst the help that worked in the places. But nothing that impressed me any.

RM: Well, I've gotten to know a few musicians nowadays - who play in Las Vegas and so on and travel and play a lot of the same towns you did, and my impression is that it's a very tough life. Being on the road and working long hours - maybe 5 or 6 sets a night. Would that be your perception -that it was a tough life?

MC: Well, it is. You've got to be on your toes. When the time comes, you've got to be there - that's the thing. Now, way back, I had a couple of chances to go on the road with big bands, but I was too much of a sissy - I didn't want to leave Sacramento. I didn't want to leave my sister and her kids. I was helping her raise them.

RM: What bands were they, do you remember?

MC: No, I don't recall, but they were good bands. They were going to New York, and I could've gone with them, but I was too much of a sissy. And I'm just as well satisfied that I didn't go, because you're not your own boss.

RM: Were the club managers that you worked for they difficult people, in general, or . . .?

MC: No. Everyone I ever worked for was very, very nice. Just like the one I told you about who said, "I want you to take that check over and put it in the bank and bring it back to me. I want to see it." The ones I worked for 7 years in Sacramento - you wouldn't want to work for anyone nicer. They were protective, and anyone who got maybe too much to drink and got obnoxious or something was put in their place.

RM: Did you ever have any children?

MC: No. I didn't believe in raising kids out of a suitcase.

RM: Did you feel you would've wanted to make it big as a singer?

MC: No. I thought maybe when I was offered that job with the band that was going to New York that maybe I made a mistake there. I don't know whether I did or not.

RM: How do you like living alone now?

MC: Well, I manage to keep busy. I go to the [Senior] Center every day, and that takes up the best part of my day, because I don't get up early, and by the time I get up and have a bite to eat and take my vitamins and get dressed, the van's about due and comes and picks me up. I take the cash down there - I'm the receptionist - and that gives me something to do. Then I have dinner down there and sometimes we play bingo afterwards, or go to the store. The van goes to the store for the ones who want to shop. And we stop and get our mail and all that. So our day is pretty well taken up, and when I come home, I'm tired.

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