# AN INTERVEIW WITH
# RALPH DENTON

## An Oral History conducted and edited by
## Robert D. McCracken

**LINCOLN COUNTY TOWN HISTORY PROJECT**
**LINCOLN COUNTY, NEVADA**

CONTENTS

# PREFACE

The Lincoln County Town History Project (LCTHP) 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 interview 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 LCTHP'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 LCTHP 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 LCTHP 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.

# 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, and the settlement of most of the suitable farmland, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that most of it south of the 38th parallel remained largely unsettled, even unmapped. In 1890 most of southern Nevada - including Lincoln County - remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be so for at least another 20 years.

Even in the 1990s, the frontier can still be found in Lincoln County in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area is also visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

A survey of written sources on Lincoln County's history reveals variability from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Pioche from its first newspaper, beginning in the fall of 1870, to the present. Newspapers from Delamar are available from 1892 to 1906 and Caliente from 1904 to 1868. In contrast, Panaca and Alamo never had newspapers of record. Throughout their histories, all Lincoln County communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities. Most of the history of Lincoln County after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

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

James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada.

The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite 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 view of community and county history that reveals 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 Lincoln County residents. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories. The oral interviews and written sources served as the basis for histories of the major communities in Lincoln County. These histories have also been archived.

The LCTHP is one component of the Lincoln County program to determine the socioeconomic impact of a federal proposal to build a high-level nuclear waste repository in southern Nye County, Nevada. The repository, which would be inside Yucca Mountain, would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Lincoln County Board of County Commissioners initiated the LCTHP in 1990 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions and quality of life of Lincoln County communities that may be impacted by the 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 in the area. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nevada, material compiled by the LCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--RDM

This is Robert McCracken speaking with Ralph Denton, Jim Gottfredson, Alyce Gottfredson and Elaine Eardensohn at Ralph Denton's home in Boulder City, Nevada, February 8, 1992.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: I'm talking to Ralph Denton, Alyce Gottfredson and Elaine Denton Eardensohn. We're going to be talking about the history of Caliente from the perspective of the Denton family. Now, you're all cousins aren't you? Related through whom?

Ralph Denton: Our fathers Ä they were brothers.

RM: OK. Ralph, why don't you state your name.

RD: My name is Ralph Lloyd Denton. My parents were Floyd H. Denton and Hazel Baker Denton.

RM: And when and where were you born?

RD: Caliente, Nevada, September 8, 1925.

RM: And Elaine, will you state your name as it reads on your birth certificate and your parents' names?

Elaine Eardensohn: Daphne Elaine Denton, daughter of J. Les Denton and Hazel Foster Denton.

RM: And when and where were you born?

EE: Caliente, March 28, 1924.

RM: And Alyce, would you state your name, rank and serial number? [Laughter]

Alyce Gottfredson: I'm Alyce Jeannette Griffith Gottfredson, born in Caliente March 3, 1935, and my parents were Mildred Denton Griffith and George Edward Griffith. And George Edward Griffith was from Ely.

RM: I thought you said your fathers were brothers.

AG: My mother was [Elaine's] sister.

RM: Oh, OK. You're a different generation, then.

AG: Yes, the next generation.

RM: OK. Where did the Dentons come from?

RD: They came from Waterloo, Nebraska, which is a little town just west of Omaha on the Elkhorn River.

RM: And how was it they happened to be there? Were they LDS?

RD: I'll emphasize that by saying, Oh, god, no. [Laughter]

RM: Were they farmers there?

RD: You know, I don't really know. I don't think so. I was always told, and I can't vouch for the accuracy of this, that our grandfather Denton was a cattle buyer. I know at one time he had a butcher shop operation in Waterloo. But I know very little about him, other than that.

RM: How did the family get to Caliente?

RD: Well, I'm going to tell you what my understanding is with the caveat that it's based upon stories that I've heard

through the years without any really direct knowledge of it. The first member of our family, whose name was James Denton, came west with the Union Pacific Railroad, I'm told. He was either working for the railroad, or perhaps he had the commissary contract to feed the workers on the railroad. When they got out here and the road had been completed into Utah and northern Nevada he didn't go back to Nebraska. He stayed, and went on into Utah and became involved in the mining business with a man by the name of Godbey. Now, keep in mind that my father was very young when he was brought to Nevada later on, and I sometimes may doubt the accuracy of things that he told me, because he would've been in no position to have really known other than through tales he heard as he was growing up in Caliente.

Godbey, historically, is a significant figure in Utah and in mining history. As I understand the story, Godbey was in the mining business in Utah at a time when Brigham Young didn't want the Saints engaged in mining. Godbey had some difficulty with the church, as I understand it, and was excommunicated. Again, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of that statement, but at any rate, our great-uncle James became associated in some way in mining in Utah with Mr. Godbey.

RM: Do you know where in Utah?

RD: The mining operations in Utah then were up around Bingham [Canyon] and those areas. I have been told that he came to Nevada in I believe 1887, advancing the Godbey mining interest to the then boomtown of Hamilton, in White Pine County. There came a time then when he moved from Hamilton Ä and I don't know if it was directly Ä to Pioche.

In checking the county recorder's office looking for early Denton deeds (and I haven't had an opportunity to do it thoroughly), the first deed I came across with a Denton was in 1896, I believe, and it was from James Denton and his wife. The brothers had married sisters. James' wife was the sister of our grandmother. And the deed described [the property] as being the Denton ranch, situated 14 miles north and east of Pioche. In addition to conveying the real property (that was the sole description of the deed) it conveyed some cords of coke. Remember, they used to use coke in the mining operations. It's my understanding, again based largely upon what would be referred to as hearsay testimony, that [Great-]Uncle James then moved from Pioche to what is now known as Caliente. At the time, there was not a town there. It was a ranch, and I believe the early maps show it identified as Culverwell. He estab-

lished a stagecoach line, put his headquarters in what is now Caliente, built a hotel . . .

RM: On the ranch, in effect?

RD: Well, he acquired the land somewhere. If you're familiar with Caliente, it would be right on the foot of what is now called Denton Heights. And right where Denton Heights joins the main street in Caliente Ä on that corner Ä was the location of the old Denton Hotel. And he established a stagecoach line that ran from Caliente up the canyon to Modena, where the railroad ended. The stagecoach came from the end of the railroad, down that canyon to Caliente. From there, to Pioche, out to Delamar and to Hiko. And that essentially was his business.

Now, I understand that the next member of our family who came to Nevada was Elaine's father, my uncle Les [Great-Uncle James's nephew]. I believe he came in the middle 1890s. I know that during the Spanish-American War he went into the army. You might recall, historically, that the states set up units, so if you were joining the army [from Nevada] in those days, you joined the Nevada brigade, or whatever they called it. He joined the Nevada brigade, and I think went to Reno, where they formed units, and then those units went out to different places. I never knew whether Uncle Les went on to Cuba or to the Philippines or the war ended and he came home. But he was the second member of the family to come to Nevada.

RM: What year was it when the original Denton set up the hotel in Caliente?

RD: I have no idea. The old Denton home in Pioche still stands, and one time when I was up there a man by the name of Louis Scott, who lives in Pioche, took me and showed it to me; he remembered. But I don't know what year he moved from Pioche down to Caliente. I suspect that because of the conveyance of the ranch in 1896 it must be about that time.

RM: Where was the ranch, again?

RD: It was due north of Pioche. I talked to Gordon Cole about it not too long ago (he is a Pioche resident), and gave him the description, and he said he thought he knew what ranch it is, but I don't know. Would you have any idea, Mr. Gottfredson?

Jim Gottfredson: I have a suspicion that it would be at the base of Wilson Mountain, and it's what has been know as the Edgar Nores ranch.

RD: Then, after my uncle Les got here, Elaine's father, then my grandmother, Elaine's grandmother, came out to visit her sister and her son. Her sister was married to James. For the sake of the record, our grandfather's name was Lewis.

And I'm not even sure what his full name was Ä my brother was named Lewis William Denton III, so I always thought my grandfather's name was Lewis William, yet when I went to Nebraska a few years ago and looked up some newspapers on his death, I discovered that his middle name was Wilson. So I'm not sure whether our grandfather's name was Lewis William Denton or Lewis Wilson Denton. But at any rate, my grandmother and Elaine's grandmother had a sister out in Nevada, and a son, Elaine's father [Les Denton], and she came out to visit her sister and her son, and brought her baby with her, and that was my father.

RM: And his name, again?

RD: My father's name was Floyd. People would know him by his nickname, Babe. There were 8 kids in the family. Elaine's father was the oldest and mine was the youngest. And much to his chagrin, all his life they continued to call him "Babe," and that offended him, but there was nothing he could do about that. But I think it affected his whole life. At any rate, they never went back.

RM: I see. Now what year would that have been?

RD: That would've been either 1900 or 1901.

JG: Could I make a comment on Babe Denton?

RM: Sure. Why don't you introduce yourself?

JG: I'm Jim Gottfredson, a long-time resident of Caliente, and friend of the people that you're interviewing. Babe was a very instrumental part of my life as a young fellow growing up in Caliente. I always had the utmost respect for the man. Whenever I called him Babe, it was in respect; it was not in a derogatory sense at all.

RD: OK. As I was saying [our grandmother and my father] stayed out here. They must have gone back for visits; to what extent they did, I don't know. I'm told that the father came out once, stayed a little while, and my dad just said he didn't like it here and he went back [to Nebraska]. There were 8 kids in the family, 4 boys and 4 girls. All 4 boys wound up out here in Nevada with their mother, and all 4 girls stayed in Nebraska with their father, which to me has always been . . . I'd give anything in the world to know what went on in that family. [Laughter]

RM: Did they get a divorce?

RD: No, they didn't get a divorce. As a matter of fact, when I read my grandfather's obituary in the Waterloo, Nebraska, paper, neither his wife nor any of his sons came to his funeral. That was a tragedy that was expressed many times to my father. The story said that Mrs. Denton and other members of the family were on their way to Nebraska for a visit, and they were in Denver on the train when they

learned of Mr. Denton's death so they just turned around and went back. [Laughter]

RM: That's interesting. So your father arrived in Caliente as a small child in either 1900 or 1901.

RD: Yes. I think it's 1900 because he always said that he was 9 years old when he came there, and he was born in 1891. Now, Elaine can tell you about [her father]. I would just add to where we are now, for continuity's sake, that they were followed by the other brothers, Lloyd and Lewis Denton.

RM: OK, since he came first, why don't you tell us what you know, Elaine?

EE: I think Ralph knows more than I do, but he did work on a telegraph line. He worked on the stagecoach with his uncle, first, didn't he?

RD: Right.

EE: He came looking for his uncle, was my understanding, and got off the train and here's the sign [for the Denton stage line]. So he worked with him, and then later worked on the telegraph line.

RD: Yes, as I understand it, when Western Union was constructed in Nevada, linking some of the northern and southern part of the state, he worked on the construction of the Western Union line where he met a friend of his that was a friend for life, Lester Burt.

EE: Right.

RD: I'll add that if you'll look in the political history of Nevada that's put out by the Secretary of State each year that goes into back elections, Uncle James Denton served in the Nevada State Legislature from 1896 until 1909, either as a senator or as an assemblyman.

RM: Representing what?

RD: Lincoln County. Lincoln County and Clark County in those days, as you'll recall, was all one county up until 1909, and Pioche was the county seat. After the counties were divided, he was never in the legislature again. I think during that period of time there were one or two sessions when he did not serve, having been defeated.

RM: What do you know about the Denton Hotel?

RD: I've got some early newspapers from 1903 and in that area, and they show ads for the Denton Hotel and the subdivision of Denton Heights Ä selling of the lots . . .

RM: Was that the first subdivision in Caliente?

RD: No, I would suspect that the first one was when the railroad came through. I would assume that the old Caliente town site would've been the first one after they got the land from the Culverwells.

RM: OK, so the railroad got the first land, and then probably Denton was the second, do you think?

RD: I would think it was probably the second subdivision.

RM: And it was bought from the original ranchers.

RD: I never checked title, so I don't know. It was up at the east end of town, and he might have even acquired title directly from the government. My father told me that when he came there, that whole valley was all meadow, except for the Culverwell home and what became the Denton Hotel. And the big channel that goes through town wasn't there, then.

RM: Where was the Culverwell home?

RD: I assume where it is now. The ranchers in those days would've built houses on the high part so they'd have the level part for cultivation.

JG: As far as I know, Ralph, that's correct.

RM: Do you have any of the old original plat maps or anything from the Denton subdivision?

RD: No. There's one thing that I think is significant from an historical standpoint, insofar as it relates to the growth of Caliente. Our uncle James gave to the county, the unincorporated town of Caliente, its water system. Those wells . . . that land up above where they built the tanks. My source of information on that comes from an old gentleman I knew when I was growing up in Caliente, Tom Dixon, who's dead. He told me how much he admired my great-uncle James and how James had given the water system to the town.

RM: Where were the wells located?

RD: I have absolutely no idea. I would assume up near his property someplace.

RM: You would've thought the railroad would have controlled the water supply for the town.

RD: Well, the railroad did, to a large extent. When we were kids, the railroad controlled everything. I don't know if Elaine remembers, and I'm not sure whether I remember it or was told it, but the railroad company generated the electrical power. But it only went until 11:00 at night. They didn't have power service all night long or all day long, and what hours it was open, I don't know.

RM: What time did it come on, do you know?

RD: I have no idea. But I suspect that as far as the railroad was concerned the water system probably served the railroad's interest and whatever installations they had in the way of homes. I don't know; that would be interesting to find out, because the city of Caliente has always owned the water distribution system in Caliente.

RM: Do you know when your uncle James gave the town the water system?

RD: I have no more idea than the man in the moon. I have no recollection of him; I think he died before Elaine and I were born. Elaine's older sister knew him and our grandmother, and she was also dead before Elaine and I were born. Mildred, as far as I know, is the only one of our generation of Dentons who knew the grandmother.

RM: Can we talk a little bit about what you know of your fathers growing up in Caliente?

RD: Sure, I'd be delighted to tell you the things that I remember about my father, again with the caveat that when you talk about someone that's so close to you, you're often biased and do not get an objective view of history.

RM: Oh, sure. That goes with the territory.

RD: The outstanding character or quality that I remember about my father is his sense of humor. In those tough Depression years, I don't think our family would have survived as a family unit without his sense of humor, because no matter how tough things got Ä and believe me, during the '30s they got pretty tough from time to time Ä there could be great tenseness and tension and worry, even some inter-family animosity in the home. But no matter how difficult it became, he'd think of something funny and the first thing you know the whole family would be laughing and it would all be forgotten. The second quality I remember very well is his generosity Ä he was generous to a fault. The third quality is optimism. You know, there's the old saying, "Optimism springs eternally in the prospector's heart."

RM: Yes, right. [Laughter]

RD: No matter how tough it was, we were convinced we were all going to be millionaires within 2 weeks. We were going to strike the motherlode. [Laughter]

RM: Was that a characteristic of most people in town at that time?

RD: I don't think so. I don't think it's any different than it is now. Some people take a look at a glass half full of water and they'll see it half full and others will see it half empty.

Another quality I remember about him Ä to what extent he was influenced by my mother in this, I don't know Ä was the constant pressure for an education. He resented his lack of education. He didn't blame anybody else for it, he blamed himself. Apparently when he grew to young manhood, he wanted to be a lawyer. And in those days you could do it, like a man Jim and I just talked about a minute ago, Al Scott did Ä he became an attorney in Pioche. You could do it by reading law, or taking a correspondence course. As a young man our father had gotten a complete set of legal encyclopedias from one of the extension colleges, and it

was at our home, and he would read that. But whether he had some feeling . . . You know, most of us, when we suffer economic losses or business losses or something like that, it's the result of a self-inflicted wound. And he always lamented the fact that he hadn't gotten an education, but even more so, he blamed himself because he could've become a member of the bar. He used to say, "You have to get an education. That's the only thing they (the collective pronoun they) can't take away from you. You know that you can have the world's wealth and [through] some economic factor completely beyond your control you could lose it. But the only thing they can't deprive you of is what you have between your horns." And he used to stress that. I don't know to what extent my mother influenced him in that regard, but that's a quality of his I remember. And I've talked about his generosity and love.

RM: What about his first years there? He got there when the town had just been formed.

RD: I don't remember him talking too much about childhood. I can remember him talking about some of the kids that he grew up with, and had a life-long affection for. I'll name a couple of them. Mame Duffin. Mame Ryan was her name. She was a Ryan Ä they were big ranchers. He was very fond of Mame Duffin. He was very, very fond of John and Dana Conway and Billy Culverwell, and some of the other kids that he had grown with there in Caliente. As a matter of fact, when he was undersheriff of Lincoln County, a big part of the job was to keep the drunks off the street in Caliente. We had about 14 saloons in those days. [Laughter] But his old buddy Dana, whenever Dana was in town, was one of them. Dad would have to get the drunks off the street, take them over to the jail, and then in the morning take them over to the State Cafe and feed them, but he never could do that to Dana. So none of us ever knew when we got up in the morning if Dana'd be asleep on the back porch. Because instead of taking Dana to jail, he'd take Dana home and put him to bed on the back porch, then Mom would feed him the next morning. [Laughter]

One thing that I don't think is typical anymore in the family, but was typical of all of the Dentons, was an absolute love and respect for the state of Nevada. If my dad wanted to give somebody a compliment, he'd say, "He's just a good old-time Nevada man." All of the boys felt that way. I know Uncle Les did and Uncle Lloyd did. By god, there was a pride. I've tried to analyze that pride, and I don't know that I can, but I've always thought there had to be a pride in people who settled and stayed in the most undesirable geographical area in the United States of

America, and tried to run a state government with fewer than 100,000 people; tried to have a university; tried to produce and have all of the things that an organized and civilized society should possess, and they were proud. "By god, we can do it. The rest of them . . . it's easy for them. But we can do it." I think that's part of the pride.

RM: I think you're right.

RD: But you don't see much of that any more.

EE: How did your dad lose his eye?

## CHAPTER TWO

RD: Elaine mentioned that my dad lost his eye. That's true. He lost his eye when he was a little boy as the result of a pistol blowing up in his hand. Uncle Lloyd had been postmaster there in Caliente for a short time and he had a pistol in his desk drawer. Dad was just a little kid, and I guess he was either there to see Uncle Lloyd or Uncle Lloyd was taking care of him when he was little. Anyway, Uncle Lloyd wasn't there when Dad was there and he got this pistol out of his drawer and there were some cartridges. He put a .45 slug in the .38 pistol, and of course the chamber didn't close and he fired it and it blew up and took his eye. He was a very little boy when that happened Ä he was probably 11 or 12, something like that.

RM: Oh, my goodness! Now, did he ever talk about social life or anything in Caliente say prior to 1910? What kind of a place was it?

RD: Well, it was a construction town. It was basically a railroad town, and people were still working up and down the line. It was a Western boom town; as opposed to a mining boom town, it was a railroad boom town. There were a lot of saloons. I don't really know to what extent the Denton brothers did things together in the early days or to what extent they did things separately. I think they did a great deal of things together in the early days. They were saloon keepers.

RM: So some of the brothers owned saloons?

RD: Yes. I've got a picture of the old East Side Saloon with my uncle Lloyd standing behind the bar. And here's a picture of the bar that says "Lloyd at the plank." My dad used to tell me about in the early days how the Mormon kids would come down from Panaca with a team and a wagon and a load of watermelons or something, and they'd want to get in a little game. He said, "I played casino with them. Of course I always kept the ten of diamonds and the two of spades." [Laughter] He had more fun than anything else Ä as well as their produce.

He did tell me one story which relates to Nebraska. I don't know how old he was, but he'd gotten a job with the railroad company. Steady work never did have too much of attraction to him, working for somebody else. But he got a job with the railroad company and he saved his money. How much of this was amplification and how much was actual fact, I don't know, but he said he saved his money to have enough money to buy a ticket on the train to go back and see his father. (Any time he ever [talked about] his father it was with an outpouring of love and sadness. I've

been curious as to how did he have such deep emotional ties to his father when he obviously couldn't have spent too much time with him after he was 9 years old.) But having said all that, he told me that he saved his money to get a ticket on the railroad to go to Omaha to see his father. And 3 or 4 nights before he was to go, he got in a poker game, and he lost every penny. So much for the trip to Omaha. And he decided, or so he told me, "If those bastards can do that to me, I can do it to them." He said he practiced and practiced. Every free minute he had he'd practice with cards until he could do it to them. And then I think, by god, he did it for a substantial part of his life (when he was real young). [Laughter] But I remember he was very good with cards. [More Laughter]

RM: He could palm them and everything else?

RD: He could do everything. [Laughter] I was told Ä not by him Ä that he could deal a 21 game and stack the deck by picking up the discards. He was that sharp. Picking up the discards he could stack them, shuffle them, move them through; never move a card. [Laughter]

Another interesting facet of his character is that when he went out of the gambling business in 1935, he never had a deck of cards in his hands from that day until the day he died, except to play bridge with Mom and some of her friends on occasion. He loved bridge. There was another exception Ä one time [he picked up a deck of cards] to teach my brother and me why we shouldn't gamble. It was when my brother was going up to the University in Reno. Dad called him into the dining room. I was just sitting there watching, and Dad said to him basically, "I understand you've been playing a little cards around town, you know, poker and things like that."

Lou said, "Yes."

And he said, "You pretty good?"

Lou said, "Well, I think I'm pretty good."

He said, "Well, let's me and you play." [Laughter]

They got a box of matches and I got to play! I had some matches and Lou had some matches and my dad had some matches. Pretty soon he had all the matches.

He said, "Now, I want to show you what I've been doing to you. You know, if a dealer ever throws a card high at you, you watch him care-fully, because he's coming off the bottom with the next one." The reason he threw it high was to catch your eye. And he said, "That's why I don't want you ever to gamble. Because if you go up to Reno and you get in games up there, they're going to do the same thing to you that I just did to you."

That's just an aside. The important thing is, Dad had been a gambler but he considered, when he had children, that was the end. He said, "Gambling is legal here in Nevada, but it's not anyplace else in the world, and I don't want my sons to ever have to be ashamed of me."

RM: Well actually, it wasn't legal then, was it?

RD: It was legal in '31. But it's interesting, I think, from a sociological standpoint Ä the attitude even of guys who'd been in the gambling business in the early days. Gambling was never thought of as being respectable, even when it was legal. Now it is. But the gamblers did not intrude into the social and political structure of a community to the extent that they do now. Isn't that true?

EE: That's true.

RD: I mean, if you were to go to Reno and look at the membership of the Twentieth Century Club (I think that's the big women's club in Reno) or the Mesquite Club or Junior League here in those days, you wouldn't find any of the gamblers' wives as members. The gamblers themselves were not admitted, for example, to the Masonic Lodge for years. The only way they ever got into a Masonic Lodge was by starting a new lodge Ä the Daytime Lodge. That would take gamblers, but the others wouldn't. And that's a sociological change in Nevada. I mention this because my father's attitude was:Gambling is essential to Nevada, but that doesn't mean that it's all right. We have to have it. We don't have anything else. But in his mind, gamblers were never really . . .

RM: Was there a lot of gambling in Caliente and other Nevada towns when he was growing up?

RD: Oh, sure.

RM: Do you know under what circumstances it was conducted? I mean, where did the games take place, and who held them?

RD: Well, they were open. We've always had gambling in Nevada, since the start. We've had a period of time when it was illegal, but that doesn't mean we didn't have gambling. It was illegal from 1912 to 1931, but it still went on. The Bank Club in Reno flourished. Reno was practically wide open, and it was all over Nevada.

RM: In those early years, where were some of the places in Caliente where they would have gambled?

RD: The same ones that are there now. But they had different names. I remember my family owned the East Side. They weren't hidden at all.

JG: Mercy had the one operation over there, too. Old Man Mercy, I know, had to go way back.

RD: Oh, sure. Well, the Amante family. They were an interesting family.

JG: Some of these boys are still involved in the gaming industry here in Las Vegas.

RD: Is Pete still down at The Showboat?

JG: No, he's over at Palace Station.

RD: That reminds me of a funny story. You probably don't want this on tape.

RM: No, I do. I like stories.

RD: The Culverwell family, as you know, owned the valley, so most of the buildings on that commercial street over there were owned by Charlie Culverwell. They were rented out to saloon keepers and whatever commercial endeavors you had going on over there, and one of them was a gambling and bootlegging joint run by a man by the name of Louie Amante. And Louie had quite a few sons Ä Albert, Ernest, Carlo and Pete. Now, Charlie Culverwell was sheriff, and one year, Albert ran for sheriff against Charlie. Well, Albert didn't have much of a chance, but as with every politician, Charlie was scared to death, so Charlie went to Louie Amante. Louie had been a tenant of his for years, and they'd been good friends. Also, Charlie was the sheriff and gambling was operating, and I have to assume, human nature being what it is, that the law enforcement officers of the period had some economic interest in the preservation of gambling and bootlegging. [Laughter] Whatever it was, Albert apparently had been campaigning around the county, telling everybody what a dirty son of a bitch Charlie Culverwell was. And it had Charlie really upset. The way my dad told me the story, Charlie went to Louie, and told Louie what good friends they'd been all those years. "We've been such good friends for all of these years, and your Albert's going around telling everybody what a dirty son of a bitch I am?"

And Louie said, "Can I help it, what you are?" [Gales of laughter]

Here's another Louie Amante story. I don't know if Uncle Les told me this, or Uncle Lloyd, or my dad. But Louie was talking about his boys one time, and in addition to the boys he had a couple of daughters Ä remember he had one named Nevada?

RM: He had a daughter named Nevada?

RD: He had a daughter named Nevada Amante, and another girl; I can't remember her name. But old Louie was talking about his kids one time, and he said, "Albert's a pretty gooda boy. Ernie's a pretty gooda boy. Pete's a pretty gooda boy. But that god damna Carlo is a dirtya no good of a son of a bitch, a just likea hisa god damn mother." [Gales of laughter, and more laughter]

EE: I guess I'd forgotten that.

RM: Boy, that's a gem. [Laughter]

RD: You know, one thing I am interested in, if you're doing some serious historical work on Lincoln County, is what sort of educational facilities were available at the turn of the century in Lincoln County, Nevada. What schools were present? Where were they? How did kids get to go to them? Because my father always said he only went to the third grade.

RM: So he didn't go to school when he came out here?

RD: Well whatever he went . . . And the teacher was a lady by the name of Mabel Murray.

RM: Here, you mean?

RD: Yes, in Caliente. She was related to the Ryan family.

RM: But he would have been in the third grade when he got here, wouldn't he?

RD: Yes. Mabel Murray was his teacher. He and Mame and Dana, and . . . [Laughter]

RM: Where was the school?

RD: I don't know at that time. I called the county clerk up in Pioche a few years ago to see if they had any separate school district records on the early schools, and she wasn't very cooperative or helpful. I don't think she regarded it as a significant request for information of any value.

JG: Ralph, may I just interject one thing that remember? In Ursine, out beyond Eagle Valley, on the old dirt road that we used to travel up through that canyon, on the left-hand side before you got up to the point where the canyon widened out, there was an old building set over in the background. And as I remember from what I was told when I lived in Pioche, that was one of the early-day schools that they had out in the Eagle Valley-Ursine area when the Mormons first came in and settled there. It was built out of adobe rock.

RD: OK. I've been curious about that. On reflecting on what we've talked about today, I feel kind of guilty for talking so much about my father, when he was just one of the family, and Elaine and I haven't seized the opportunity to talk about our mothers.

RM: Well, before we finish up, is there anything else that you recall your father saying about what Caliente was like when he was growing up?

RD: I don't remember from any discussion that it was any different than it was when we were growing up. I don't think there were essential differences.

RM: How many people were there, then?

RD: I don't know. I have a tendency, I think, to overpopulate Caliente during the Second World War. During those years,

people would say, "Where are you from? And how big is that?" I'd say, "2500."

EE: Did you say that?! [Laughter]

RD: Yes. And I think that during World War II, when the railroad was operating at a maximum, it was pretty close to that. But maybe I exaggerated considerably.

JG: I'm sure you were within a couple of hundred people, Ralph.

RM: What about the social classes, and the social life of Caliente? It was a mixed community of gentiles and Mormons, wasn't it? Were there many Mormons in Caliente in those first years, or were they more over towards Panaca?

RD: There were always Mormons there, but I'm not sure that they were the predominant group in those days.

RM: Were a good percentage of them Mormons?

RD: I have no idea. What would you say, Jim?

JG: In my earliest recollections of Caliente going back to 1931 or '32, there was a church up on the hill that the Mormons had. There was a fairly good congregation of Mormon people who attended that church at that time. And I would presume that because of circumstances in Utah . . . there were always young offspring on a farm who couldn't make it on that farm, and had to go somewhere else, and they either went to the mines or someplace else where they could get work. So there were a number of Mormon people who eventually found their way to Caliente on the railroad employment, and the farms and the ranches around that area.

RD: And that would be, I think, mostly after the [railroad] shops were moved from Milford to Caliente. There was a period of time when the railroad shops were in Milford. And then Caliente was made the division point between Los Angeles and Salt Lake, and the shops were moved there, and that brought down a lot of people who worked in the shops, many of whom were Mormons.

RM: Do you think there was any stratification in the town in terms of what Mormons did for occupations and what gentiles did, or anything like that?

RD: I don't really know. Elaine might have some idea.

EE: I don't think so.

RD: When Elaine and I were kids, there were women's clubs in town. And I don't know to what extent Mormon ladies participated in those women's clubs.

EE: Well, Mormon ladies didn't play cards all that much, I don't think, but I think Jim's mother did.

JG: She played bridge and loved it.

EE: Right. So she was always involved, but not all of them, probably, because they really didn't believe in playing cards.

RM: That was sort of against their belief, wasn't it?

EE: Yes.
RM: But it wasn't a firm one, like drinking or something like that?
EE: No.
RD: Plus in those days, remember the homemaker's club?
EE: Yes.
RD: And my mother had a literary club that met in her home when I was growing up, called the Delphinians. I'm not sure how frequently they met Ä there were about 10 of them. I don't remember who all the women were, but I remember Eula Jacobsen was one of them. They would meet once a month and review books.
RM: What year would the Delphinians have gotten started?
RD: What happened before I was born, I don't know. To the extent that it operated before 1925, I don't know.
RM: And how long did it go?
RD: Oh, I think it was going up through when I was in high school.
RM: And they would meet in people's houses?
RD: Yes. They'd meet in the evening. One of them would be assigned a book to review. That person would review that book, and then when it was over, they'd have refreshments.
RM: And would they all read the book, or would just the one person read it and then tell the others?
RD: Well, the one would read it and review it, and the others would read it if their interest took them so far. But I think generally the members were worried that they had to give the review at the next meeting, so they'd be reading that.
RM: And would they get the book out of the local library?
RD: I don't know. One thing that characterized our little home in Caliente was the presence of books. The walls in our living room were our bookshelves. But there was a little library over at the grammar school that my mother and Eula Jacobsen, who were both teachers at the school, ran on a volunteer basis. That little library would be open 2 or 3 nights a week, with my mother or Eula or some other lady. That was on a volunteer basis.
RM: Did they have a pretty good stock of books, like a few thousand, or a few hundred? How would you describe it?
RD: I don't remember it as having a great volume of literature there, do you, Elaine?
EE: No.
RD: But, of course, we had no basis to judge.
RM: And it was located at the grammar school. Where was that, at that time?
RD: Right where it is now. Speaking of that, most of the time when I was growing up, Elaine's father, my uncle Les, was

on the grammar school board of education and my mother was on the high school board of education. But I don't recall any particular significant social things. I do remember that both the Eastern Star and the Rebekahs were women's organizations in town that a great many of the non-Mormon women belonged to. And they carried on a social agenda of some kind.

EE: Yes.

RM: How many members did you say you thought the Delphinians had, again?

RD: My guess was 10 to 12.

RM: And they would meet in people's homes?

RD: Yes. Eula Jacobsen was always a member, and I remember one lady that Elaine and Jim will remember, Salome Scannel. Her husband was with the railroad company.

JG: He headed up the car yards.

RD: Yes, he was one of the executives of the railroad company. Just recently I've learned that Salome is still alive, and the daughter of a friend of mine here in Las Vegas just married Salome's grandson. Can you believe that? Salome Scannel Ä god she was a dresser. She'd come to our house and she'd have peroxide hair Ä the latest coiffure Ä and she dressed out of the best shops, and my mother would smile and say, oh, she wished she could dress like Salome. [Laughter]

RM: Do you want to talk a little bit about your mother? Where did she come from, and so on?

RD: My mother came from Richfield, Utah. She came to Caselton to teach school.

RM: Is that right? What year would that have been?

RD: I think 1915.

RM: Was she Mormon?

RD: Yes.

RM: So she came over to the Prince Mine to teach school in 1915?

RD: Yes.

RM: Tell me about that!

RD: Well, she came over there to teach school and never went back. She married a Nevada gambler. Her family in Utah didn't take too kindly to that.

RM: Your dad was known as a gambler, then?

RD: Oh, sure.

RM: Was that his occupation?

RD: Prior to marrying my mother I think he was a gambler. When I look back on it and try to be logical about it, he must have worked with his brothers.

RM: OK. And they owned bars?

RD: Well, Uncle Lloyd did. Uncle Lloyd was older. I think by then, Uncle Les was postmaster, wasn't he? When did he become postmaster?

EE: I was just trying to remember, because he was postmaster for 28 years, and I think he retired in '40 or '41.

RD: His first appointment was for President Coolidge, wasn't it? Was that the first one?

EE: Yes. Do you remember the year . . . the date on there, honey?

AG: That was 1913.

RM: What else did the brothers do? I mean they owned bars, one was a postmaster Ä what else?

RD: You know, I really could not accurately say that much. It's always been my impression that Dad was kind of working with Uncle Lloyd in saloons.

RM: OK. Maybe he was running the gambling?

RD: Well, for a time. At times, I guess they would be in different things. I think that they probably did everything that young men did to make a living on this desert in that day and age, up and down the whole track. They never were bootleggers. All three of those men had the highest regard for the law.

RM: Except for the gambling part.

RD: Well, gambling wasn't regarded as being against the law. You had tent saloons and gambling joints all up and down the line, from Las Vegas probably all the way to Omaha, would be my guess. But you certainly had it through Nevada.

AG: Ralph, did your dad [work on] the stagecoach?

RD: Well, of course, when Uncle James ran the stagecoach . . .

RM: How long did the stagecoach last?

RD: Until the railroad came in. And probably a while after that, insofar as going to Pioche and . . .

EE: And Delamar.

RM: And what happened to the hotel? Did they keep the hotel during these years?

RD: I have absolutely no idea when that went out of business. All I remember about that location . . . there's an old one-story house over there that our cousin Bill lived in, and his mother. That was my grandmother's sister. I remember being scared to death to go in there; everybody was scared to go see her. That's all I can remember.

RM: But you don't know what happened to the hotel? It sounds like it might have burned down, or something.

RD: There is one girl in Las Vegas who might know something. I regret the fact that Elaine and I don't take the time to get ahold of Dorothy Gerard to talk to her, because she would . . .

RM: Is she an old-timer from Caliente?

RD: Her grandfather was Bill Denton, who would have been our second cousin. She's done very well in Las Vegas, she's a real estate broker, and Novotny is her last name. I don't know if she knows anything.

## CHAPTER THREE

RD: I think that all of the [Denton brothers] were in and out of most of the turn of the century mining boom towns of Nevada. What they did there, I don't know, but I'm sure they went there seeking a fortune.

RM: So they were in and out of Hiko and Ely whatnot?

RD: Oh, sure. The stagecoach ran from Caliente. My dad used to say in those days the only difference between him and the horses was that he took his shoes off when he went to bed. [Laughter] But he told his story about . . . they had a stage station there at Oak Springs. Oak Springs is a spring up in those mountains right out of Caliente which we referred to as "The Summit." You'd go right out of Caliente, and you'd stop at Oak Springs to water the horses, then go on over to Delamar. He said one night he was camped there all by himself Ä he told me he was 13 years of age, and he was out there alone Ä and a calf was keeping him awake. This calf was right outside, mooing and crying, and he couldn't get any sleep. So he grabbed a pitchfork and went out and threw it at this calf, and it killed him.

RM: Oh!

RD: And man! he was scared to death that Jim Ryan would catch him if he killed one of his calves. So he said that he spent most of the night digging a hole to bury that calf. [Laughter] He said he buried the calf, and he just got finished with the calf, and the calf's mother showed up. And the calf's mother stood there Ä (moo). He was scared to death that Jim Ryan was going to catch him for killing one of his calves. All he was trying to do was scare it away so he could get some sleep.

I'm really interested in hearing Elaine talk about Delamar. I wonder if she knows more about the family's involvement up in Pioche than I do, because I think in the early days there was a lot of time spent in Pioche. Uncle James' first home was in Pioche, and I think there were times when they maybe moved up to Pioche and stayed there. Dad used to talk about dances up in Pioche and Bill Denton playing the fiddle at the dances.

RM: Well, Elaine, repeat the story you were telling about Delamar.

EE: My mother with her family, at 5 years of age, came from Canada to Delamar, and they opened a store there Ä it was general merchandise, as I recall. She told one story about the Indians. There evidently was an Indian camp out beyond the hill there in Delamar. She said they would come in every morning and the Indians would come up to the window

and put their face against the window and say "Beescut, get beescut?" (food), asking for something to eat. And they had to be out of town at sundown so she remembered at sundown watching the Indians all go back over the hill. That story always stuck in my mind, because I could just picture it.

RM: And that was 1904?

EE: Yes. That's when they came.

RM: Now that was your mother, you said? Tell me about her. They came into Delamar from where in Canada?

EE: Quebec, Canada.

RM: What brought them from Canada clear to Delamar?

EE: I've often wondered that; I don't know. I just can't imagine, but it had to have been the mining. Because at that time Delamar evidently was a booming mining town.

RM: They'd heard about Delamar apparently up there?

EE: Evidently, yes.

RM: Were they miners up in Quebec?

EE: Not that I know of. I don't recall being told what they did there. Maybe they were merchants there, also, because I don't think my grandfather went into the mining; it was the store.

RM: Do you recall any other stories of your mother's about Delamar?

EE: No. They came to Caliente when she was 13 years old.

RM: So they were there for 8 years?

EE: Yes.

RM: She went to school in Delamar, I assume.

EE: She went to school, and I remember her saying that she had to go to high school in Cedar City after she moved to Caliente.

RM: What else do you recall about her life in Delamar?

EE: Very, very little.

RM: Her father was a merchant for all of the years that he was there?

EE: Right. Then when they came to Caliente they opened a store there, and a boardinghouse. I recall hearing stories about a boardinghouse that my grandmother ran.

RM: Did she run a boardinghouse in Delamar?

EE: Not to my knowledge.

RM: I guess Delamar was kind of falling apart by 1912, when they moved to Caliente?

EE: Evidently so; I rather imagine that's what brought them to Caliente.

RM: What was the name of their store in Caliente?

EE: I don't know Ä it might have been Foster's Ä Mrs. Edna S. Foster.

RM: And what kind of a store was it?

EE: A general merchandise store.
RM: Tell about what you remember your mother saying about her life in those first years in Caliente.
EE: I remember her telling about a community Christmas tree that they had. And on this tree, there was a beautiful doll. Evidently the parents put gifts on the tree for their children. And I'm getting . . . I'm about to cry.
RM: That's OK.
EE: She saw this beautiful doll and she just hoped that was her doll, and sure enough, it was! [Laughter]
RM: So the parents would put the presents for the kids on the community tree?
EE: Evidently.
RM: I'll be darned. It must have been a big tree?
EE: I'm sure it was. We always had a big tree in Caliente. When we were kids ourselves, it would reach to the ceiling in the gym. It'd be a huge, huge, huge tree.
RM: And that was the community tree in the school gym?
EE: For us it was.
RM: You mean for the kids?
EE: For the kids. Yes.
RM: Do you know where they put the community tree in those years?
EE: No, I do not know. For some reason I thought it was outside, but maybe it wasn't.
RM: And she was hoping that doll was hers, and sure enough it was.
EE: And sure enough it was.
RM: Isn't that a nice story.
EE: I thought so.
RM: Then you've mentioned that she had to go to Cedar City, Utah, to go to high school? So apparently they didn't have a high school in Caliente.
EE: No.
RM: Didn't they have a high school in Panaca?
EE: That's where we went. There was a high school eventually, but what year it became a high school, I don't know, because I remember her saying she had to go to Cedar City.
RM: Maybe Lincoln County didn't have a high school at that time?
EE: I don't think they did. Do you remember seeing a date ever on the high school at Panaca?
RD: I don't. I don't know when it started.
EE: Do you remember your dad saying anything about going to high school in Panaca? It was third grade, you said.
RD: No, there was no high school in those days. I know Mame Duffin went up . . .

RM: How did they arrange going to school in Cedar City? I guess the county paid the county in Utah. But where did she stay?
EE: Well, she would've had to have stayed with someone. I don't think there were any relatives there. Probably there were board-and-room homes that took in children at that time.
RM: And she could've gotten over there on the railroad, couldn't she?
EE: I would think so, by then.
JG: I don't know when that spur line ran out to Cedar City from Elbert, but it's likely that there was rail transportation, although I think it was more likely they went by team and wagon.
RM: Oh. That was a long trip, then. Well, tell me about your father. He was an older brother of Ralph's father?
EE: Right. J. Les Denton. He was the oldest in the family.
RM: How much older was he?
EE: What was the difference?
RD: I've had in mind that it was over 20 years.
EE: Well, he was 19 years older than my mother.
RD: When was your mother born?
EE: In 1889.
RD: My dad was born in '91, so my dad was 2 years younger than your mother.
EE: So there would've been about 21 years difference between Babe and Les.
RM: OK. So the family was really spread through time.
EE: Right.
RM: He was a grown man, then, when he came into Lincoln County, wasn't he?
EE: Yes.
RM: Where did he grow up, again?
EE: In Waterloo, Nebraska, just west of Omaha.
RM: And they were farmers there?
RD: Cattle-buyers. There was one thing about that I do recall. My dad told me that his father and Creighton were very close friends Ä the man who founded Creighton University. And any of the Denton boys, had they wanted to, could've gone to Creighton University for nothing.
RM: Is that right?
EE: Gosh. That is interesting.
RM: Now when was your father born?
EE: My mother was born in 1889 and he was nineteen years older than she, so that would've been 1870.
RM: So he was a 30-year-old man when he got out here.
EE: Right.
RM: But he didn't have a family?

EE: Well, he had a family in Nebraska, and they divorced. He moved out to Nevada looking for his uncle with the stage line, Uncle James.

RM: Why was he looking for him?

EE: He knew he was in Nevada someplace. I guess he just wanted to come to Nevada, and there was a relative there. So he came looking for him, not knowing exactly where he was. But when he got off of the train in what is now Modena, here was the sign:"Denton Stage Line." Am I repeating this correctly?

RD: I think so, yes. That's what I was told.

EE: So there he was, and he worked with him. And what year he went with Western Union, I'm not sure. I recall another story . . . I don't know whether this is after they were married or before, but I remember stories of him cutting ice for the icehouse down the canyon someplace.

RM: You mean in Caliente.

EE: Yes, in Caliente.

RD: I remember, Elaine, one time in the early days I think your dad was a law enforcement officer.

EE: Yes he was Ä with the county.

RM: When did he meet your mother?

EE: I remember him saying that he saw her at a dance, and he said, "I'm going to marry that girl." [Laughs]

RM: And the dance was at Caliente?

EE: That was at Caliente. When we were growing up, there was a dance every Saturday night, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised but that was also the case way back.

RM: Where was the dance held?

EE: In the gym, if it were a big occasion. But on a regular basis they had what they called the Rose Don Ballroom next door to the Shamrock Bar. I think they still have a dance hall there. [Laughs]

RM: And was it live music?

EE: Oh, yes. They had the Wilcox orchestra at one time.

RD: But before the Rose Don Ballroom was built, I remember they used to have them in the theater.

EE: Oh, that's right! It was the gym or the theater. Our uncle Lloyd owned the theater and they could move all the seats back and have dances there. I'd forgotten.

RM: And where was the theater located?

EE: Right next door to the post office Ä the theater's right where it is today, and the post office at that time was right next door. I think it's a barber shop now.

RD: I'd like to interject there that Uncle Lloyd started that theater in 1912. And a couple years before he died there was an article in both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times about the oldest theater in America under one

ownership. That article has appeared in other publications in Nevada Ä Nevada Magazine and several things like that.

RM: He must've started a theater about the same time as movies were coming on the scene.

EE: Yes.

RD: They used to power it with a old Model T engine.

RM: Is that right? That is neat.

EE: [Laughs]

RD: He used to tell about how, if the engine would start missing, he'd have to run back and prime the engine to get it going again. [Laughs] The carbon arcs would go . . .

RM: That's fascinating.

EE: You were talking about what might've happened in Caliente during the early times as far as entertainment was concerned. This is a column about when my grandmother and grandfather got married Ä Les Denton and Hazel Foster. It says, "After the wedding

reception, at 10: all repaired to the opera house where an enjoyable wedding ball was held, and where all presents tripped the light fantastic until the wee hours of the morn." So someplace, there was an opera house.

RM: You're citing an issue of the Pioche . . .

EE: Pioche Weekly Record, May 16th, 1908.

RM: Can you say any more about the weekly dances? That's an important social function, isn't it? Important for the town.

EE: Oh, it was important. We were there every Saturday night. I can remember as a little kid, my older sister Bernice and my cousin George and I lived up on Spring Heights, so we were together a lot. Ralph lived in the lower part of town, and at that time kids couldn't cross the tracks, so we wouldn't have that much time together until I got on the other side of the tracks. My cousin and my sister taught us to dance as little folks because everybody went to the dance Ä moms, dads and kids. Everybody went, and it was wonderful!

RM: Did they dress up?

EE: Oh, I imagine so. Well, I can remember my mother Ä and I know that this would relate to Ralph's mother and Jim's mother . . . In Caliente they were social (and I think perhaps that was true most places in those days). I can remember my mother getting her work done in the morning and dressing up every afternoon because someone might drop by for cake and coffee. I don't ever remember her changing that, ever in her entire life.

RM: So she'd do her work in the morning, and then have to be ready to receive guests in the afternoon?

EE: I guarantee you, she was. She looked like a little doll every afternoon. I think that was true of the ladies in Caliente. They'd take their children and go visit, and have a little social life.
RM: What kind of clothes would they wear when they dressed up?
EE: Well, I have pictures of my mother sitting on the beach in Southern California, very dressed up, with hat . . . just sitting in the sand, for heaven's sake! (That was before I was born.)
RM: When people went visiting, did they just drop in or did they call ahead?
EE: Well, there were no phones, anyway. No, you just dropped in. That's why they were always ready.
RM: OK. And they'd have coffee, and cake that she had probably made.
EE: Exactly. From scratch, I want you to know. Well, that's the way it was then. It was a nice time. It was a beautiful time in our history. I think they did that most places.
RM: Yes. I think my grandmother did that in Cripple Creek-Victor, Colorado. She used to drag us around to these [homes] and we used to hate it.
EE: [Laughs] But it was a nice thing to do. People kept in touch.
RM: They visited in those days, and they don't do it any more.
EE: No. And no, you'd better not drop in without calling anymore, either, because people might not be ready for you.
RM: What about the dances in the Rose Don Ballroom?
RD: That came later, in the late '30s. I remember they had a contest over what they were going to name it.
RD: Remember the Shamrock?
EE: That's right.
RD: Joe Columbo and his son-in-law, Don Rowan, put it in right next door to the Shamrock. There was a big contest about what they were going to name it. And can you imagine that they were so clever that Don Rowan was the owner and his wife's name was Rose, so they called it the Rose Don.
EE: Yes, right! [Laughter]
RD: By god, you'd have to be a genius to make that one up. [Laughter] That won the prize.
RM: How long did the Rose Don last?
RD: I don't know, but I wanted to insert when you were talking about dances, they also had them in Panaca. The church had them, because I remember a story my dad used to tell. Nephi John Wadsworth was the bishop, and he announced one day that there was going to be a big dance in Panaca the next Saturday night, and everybody in Lincoln County was invited, except Babe Denton and George Jeffs. [Laughter]

RM: Why didn't they want them?
RD: They danced too close to the girls!
RM: Oh! [Laughter]
EE: Oh, gosh. That's a great story.
RM: How long did the Rose Don Ballroom last, then?
EE: [They still observed special holidays] long after I left there. I went to a dance there in the '60s.
RM: Do they still have a Saturday night dance there?
EE: No.
RM: When did the Rose Don end, and when did the Saturday night dances end? Did both things happen at the same time?
RD: The [regular dances] came to an end in the early '50s I think.
JG: I know they lasted up through World War II. I used to play in the orchestra there. And they were quite frequent Ä almost every Saturday night there'd be a dance. Then when World War II came on, I assume they probably continued it during the war. And what happened after the war I don't know, because I haven't been there that much.
RM: What killed the Saturday night dance there, do you think?
RD: I have a theory. I think that when the railroad folded up and a lot of the railroad people moved out, there was left a cadre of principally LDS people. And their life then, as now, is centered at the church. If they were going to have a dance, it would be down at the church.
EE: That makes sense.
RD: There weren't enough gentiles left to have a good drunken party. [Laughter]
RM: OK. Did they have liquor at the dance?
EE: Not at the dances, but they would have an intermission, and everybody'd go to the bar, and they were a lot happier when they came back for the second half of the dance.
JG: I might make the comment that I never went to a good Mormon dance in Utah or in Nevada where, if you got a little thirsty, you couldn't go out and open . . . [Laughter]
EE: I'm sure that's true, Jim.
RD: I remember one time at a dance up in the old Thompson Hall in Pioche, I was just a kid, and I was a lousy drummer, but I was the only one in town, so I was playing with the Wilcox orchestra. Prof [Wilcox] was the piano player and Evan Edwards was playing the tuba, and they had Carlise to fiddle. During the intermission, I couldn't go to the saloon, so I sneaked out back to have a cigarette. And I'm standing in the alley back of the Thompson and the cigarette's glowing in the dark. I look down and I see another cigarette; somebody else, hiding. I went down to see who had the other one. He saw me and he put his out,

and I saw him and I put mine out. It was Prof Wilcox. [Loud laughter]

RM: And who was he?

JG: He was the principal of the high school. [More laughter]

JG: He wasn't supposed to smoke tailor-made "cigareetes."

RM: Now that would have been the high school at Panaca.

JG: Yes.

RM: So the dance was a major social thing in the town in those years. And again, where did they have it before the Rose Don?

EE: In the gymnasium and the Rex Theater.

RM: And when do you think these dances started?

EE: Well, my dad saw my mother at the dance, [laughs] and that was 1908 or 1907.

RD: I'd like to make an observation about Elaine's father, my uncle Les, because I probably will never get another opportunity to do so. I know of very few men that I've respected through my life to the extent that I respected him. Also, I've been told that he was one of the most astute political thinkers in the state of Nevada. And the fact that he maintained his job as postmaster through Republican, Democratic, Republican, Democratic administrations would attest to that astuteness.

All of the family were very active in Democratic politics. As a matter of fact in my dining room I have a plate that was painted by one of our aunts back in Nebraska that is autographed by William Jennings Bryan and whoever his vice-presidential candidate was at that time. Our grandfather was a very close friend of William Jennings Bryan. Our uncle James, of course, was active politically in the legislature, and that carried on with Uncle Les as the patriarchal head of the family. They had a very close relationship with most of the Nevada high political figures, from Key Pittman on down. Uncle Les was very astute. I respected him very, very much. And there were a couple of times in my life when I really needed some help. It was a forbidding experience for me to go and ask my Uncle Les for help. I felt like a supplicant. I did, and he responded immediately.

RM: When did he become postmaster?

EE: He was postmaster for 28 years and retired, I think, in '41, so it had to have been 1913.

RM: And he was postmaster of Caliente all those years?

EE: Right.

RM: Continuously?

EE: Yes. Through, as Ralph said, many administrations.

RM: And that was when postmasters were more subject to the spoils system, wasn't it?

EE: Definitely.
RM: That was before civil service.
RD: They were patronage appointments.
RM: Right. Now, your father saw this girl at the dance, and said, "I'm gonna marry her."
EE: Right.
RM: And he was a bit older than she was.
EE: Yes, he was Ä 19 or 20 years older. I'm saying 19 because I thought I figured it out one time, but let's say 20.
RM: And how old was she?
EE: She was about 18 or 19.
RM: So they got married. And he would've been postmaster not too long after they were married?
EE: That's right. As Ralph said, he was very involved in politics. I remember all of my life, congressmen, senators, governors, all coming to our home, all the time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

RM: What was your father doing before he became postmaster?
EE: As Ralph said, he was a law enforcement officer at one time, and I remember the story about cutting the ice for the icehouse, and I don't know what period that was. He was in law enforcement when they got married because I remember a few stories about when Bernice was little.
RD: Yes, he was either deputy sheriff or the railroad bull, one of the two.
AG: I think he was a deputy sheriff.
RM: And your mother came from . . .
EE: Delamar. Both our mothers are named Hazel, so they were known as "Hazel B" and "Hazel F." They were very lovely ladies, I want to tell you.
RD: There's something worth commenting on about the 2 Hazels, as well as the other brother's wife, Mabel. These 3 women lived in a small town, married to brothers, for many years. There could be tension between the brothers; there could be hard feelings between the brothers; all of the sort of things that you would expect, but those 3 women were mature enough that I don't think there was ever, ever any antagonism or gossiping between the 3 of them.
EE: That's true.
RD: The 2 Hazels, I think, were always quite close.
EE: Especially close.
RM: Did the brothers generally get along well, or did they each kind of go their own way?
EE: I think they all got along well. I wouldn't even know what the problems might have been, but that would be a natural thing.
RM: Actually, your father was almost a father to Ralph's, wasn't he?
EE: Right.
RM: What did your uncle Lloyd do?
EE: He had the theater.
RM: All those years?
RD: He had other business ventures. And he was in a saloon before that. He was in the saloon business in the early days, and then in the saloon business with my father, and of course my father was the youngest one, and I think my father had a feeling that no matter what he did, it was wrong.
RM: So Lloyd was prosperous, financially.
RD: Yes.
RM: And Lloyd married and had a family in Caliente, too?
RD: Yes.

RM: Your father was 43 when he became postmaster, wasn't he? Then he was postmaster for 28 years, and then what did he do? He would've been past 70, wouldn't he?

EE: I'll tell you what he did. He retired, and then he died. My mother was appointed postmaster. He was afraid of retirement. He didn't want to retire, but because of his age, he had to. So my mother was appointed interim [postmaster]. She had to be there, which she didn't like too much, for him to be able to stay on in that capacity.

RM: Was he forced to retire because of age?

EE: Yes.

RM: Was it at age 70?

EE: It must have been 70, because he died at 73. She was still interim postmaster or -mistress when I went away to school in '42.

RM: Do you have any stories about the various politicians coming to your house?

EE: Well, I didn't think too much of it at the time, because it just happened. It was natural, as if anybody'd drop in. I do remember this, though. These politicians would start to whisper because of something they wanted my dad to do, or whatever. And he would say, "You do not whisper in this house. Nothing leaves this house." And I was very young at the time, but nobody said a word about what went on in that house as far as politicians were concerned.

RM: Is that right. Now, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

EE: I have 2 sisters and a brother Ä Lester Denton, Mildred Denton and Bernice Denton.

RM: Did you give the names in birth order?

EE: Yes. I'm the youngest [by] 8-1/2 years. It dawned on me one day, and I said to my mother I must've been a mistake. She said, "Oh, honey, let's not call you a mistake." [Laughter] And I thought that was nice, because I really was very spoiled.

RD: I can attest to that. [Laughter]

JG: I can attest to that. [laughter]

RM: OK, let's go back and pick up on your mother then, Ralph. She came from Richfield, and was teaching school at the Prince Mine. Do you know how she got her job at the Prince Mine?

RD: Sure. Her older brother was master mechanic in charge of the machine shop. He had a whole passel of kids, and there were other kids there, so he was able to get whatever the school organization was Ä I assume there was a board and it was an independent school district Ä to hire his baby sister as a teacher.

RM: Where did she go to school at?

RD: Well, she went to school at a place where she learned not to end a sentence with a preposition. [Laughter] She graduated from Ogden High School in 1908. And then she did some work at the University of Utah, and she first taught school in Kimberly, Utah. And in those days, you got what was called a Normal Certificate. I'm not even sure you had to have it.

RM: It was a 2-year degree, wasn't it?

RD: Yes. I'm not sure you even had to have any college education. One aspect of her character that I think is well worth mentioning is that all her life, almost every summer, no matter what the conditions were at home, she'd go off to some university someplace, and would drag me along. Her life's ambition was always, she said, to live across the street from the biggest university in the world, and just take whatever courses she wanted to take.

As a matter of fact, she must've been about 70 when my brother and I were going to law school in Washington, D.C., and she came back to visit us. We were both working and both going to school, so she was alone most of the day, and she made good use of seeing Washington during that period. I came home one evening and asked her what she'd done today. She said, she'd gone up to Wilson's Teacher's College, which is now the University of the District of Columbia, and signed up Ä she was going to summer school up there.

RM: So your family was really into education.

RD: As I said earlier, I wasn't certain to what degree my father was influenced by my mother in that. But she used to go to the University of Utah almost every summer. That was the closest one. It was more difficult to get to Reno to go to school than it was to get to Salt Lake City, but she always wanted to go to the University of Nevada. She became the same type of Nevadan my father was.

RM: Very proud of the state.

EE: Very proud of Nevada, and she was always active in women's movements. She was active in the women's suffrage movement and things of that nature. She was a supporter of Anne Martin, who ran for the United States Senate from Nevada. And she was very active in women's club matters and things of that kind. She wrote a column for the local newspaper and she was always a contributor to the Salt Lake Tribune.

RM: Is that right? On what?

RD: Oh, just different things that she'd write. There used to be a guy named Ham Park who had a column in the Salt Lake Tribune and it was called "The Senator from Sandpit." She contributed to his column a lot, and they became pretty good friends. Every year he'd have a big party . . . He

was non-Mormon. The Salt Lake Tribune was pretty much non-Mormon.

RM: Oh, I didn't know that.

RD: Yes. It was owned by the Kerns family. You have a large gentile population in Utah, and the Kerns family was one of the prominent Utah families and they owned the Salt Lake Tribune and the Continental Bank, mines, a whole bunch of stuff. And Ham Park was a columnist for them, and he would have a party every year at the Hotel Utah, and he'd have these correspondents like my mother come to it, and she always enjoyed that. She enjoyed writing and that sort of thing.

RM: How long was she at the Prince Mine?

RD: I think until she and my dad got married Ä probably 2 years. I've got an interesting picture of Mom and Missy Wah, when Missy Wah first came.

RM: Is that right. I'd like to make a copy of it.

RD: One time we were up there having dinner at Missy Wah's place, and I was telling my law partner, Earl Monsey, that my mother had taught Missy Wah to speak English.

RM: Your mother was Missy Wah's teacher, then!

RD: Yes. I didn't know Missy Wah until my mother died, actually. But I was telling Earl that my mother taught Missy Wah to speak English, and Earl says, "She didn't do a very good job." [Laughter] Which was true.

RM: We're transcribing Missy Wah's tapes right now.

RD: Somebody told me Ä not my mother Ä that my mother was instrumental in getting Missy Wah out of the cellar.

RM: Because Tom Wah had her locked up, didn't he?

RD: He had her locked up in the cellar. And I've got some pictures of my mother with some of the miners. She told me that at night she was helping these miners to speak English.

RM: What years would she have been at the Prince Mine?

RD: I think it's probably about 1915 Ä '14 or '15.

RM: So it was right before World War I.

RD: I'm sure she must've met my father at the same kind of dance that Elaine's father met Aunt Hazel, at a dance in Pioche or Panaca, or someplace. She married my father and that was the end of that. That was the end of Utah. [Laughter]

RM: She didn't continue in the church after she got married?

RD: No. And I don't know to what extent she had participated in the church before she got married. She never joined another church. She certainly was not anti-LDS, but she was never active in the church. She did not attempt to influence her sons . . . There was a short biographical statement about her in a book one time that she was what

you'd describe in those days as a really free thinker. She resented any attempt by anybody to control the process of human thought. In that sense she could've, I think, been fairly accused of being somewhat radical.

RM: What else do you know about her career at the Prince Mine? Did she have her own quarters or did she live with one of the families?

RD: She lived with her brother.

RM: Were they working a lot of men at the Prince Mine then?

RD: Yes. Incidentally, a cousin of mine who grew up there wrote a biography and he describes life at the Prince Mine. He describes it quite eloquently. And it's interesting Ä after the mines, you should pardon the expression, petered out, they all went back to Utah and different places in the country, but they maintained a love for Nevada. My cousin Evan Baker married Evan Edwards' sister, for example. That whole part of my mother's family in Utah had almost a reverence for Nevada.

RM: Why was that, do you think?

RD: I think it was the years growing up here. It was a freedom they'd never seen in their lives. I have the biography of one of my uncles who was from Monroe, Utah, and he used to come to Nevada in the wintertime to work in the mines, when the farms lay fallow because of the weather. In this biography of his, [it says that] one of the reasons he liked to come to Nevada was so he could read books. Because he was controlled in Utah, you know Ä what you could read, what you could see.

EE: Is that right?

RD: Sure. Everything was censored.

RM: Did he work in Pioche mines?

RD: He worked mostly in Delamar. Owen's biography is the best description of the conduct of a mining operation like the one in Caselton that I've read. He talks, Jim, about the burros being down underground all of their lives, and that kind of stuff.

JG: Ralph, one of my earliest memories in Pioche, when I was just a little shaver, was of the donkeys pulling the ore carts out of the tunnel that they had in the mountains there in Pioche.

RD: Yes. And those little burros had been down there underground all their lives. [Laughs]

JG: All their lives.

RD: Can you imagine? What would the SPCA . . .

RM: Now, who was it that wrote the biography? He was your mother's brother?

RD: That's one of them, and the other [one was my cousin]. She had a slew of brothers. Uncle Lewis, who was the oldest one, I think was remarkable.

RM: He wasn't the master mechanic.

RD: No. He stayed in Utah. You see, my mother and all her brothers were born in polygamy Ä my grandmother was the second wife of my grandfather. He was a real independent thinker and he had trouble with the church and completely left the church and would not let his children . . . They were the only non-Mormon family in Monroe, Utah - my uncle Lewis, my aunt Laura, and his children. They continued to live there, and he was elected Justice of the Peace every 2 years for most of his life, and was generally the commencement speaker at the high school. The only non-Mormon in town. Just from that standpoint, I would regard him as an interesting, outstanding man. I remember him as a kid. I can't make any judgements myself about him, but he had a great influence on my mother, I think.

RM: Was there more than one brother at the Prince?

RD: No, there was just one brother at the Prince.

RM: And who was it who wrote an account of life at the Prince?

RD: That brother's son Ä Evan. He was one of my mother's students. The other is a biography of my uncle Lewis, the one who stayed in Monroe and used to come to Nevada in the wintertimes to work in the mines.

RM: Did your mother later teach school in Caliente?

RD: Yes. I don't know when she started teaching in Caliente after she left the Prince, but she taught there until the Depression years. You may recall, if you've read Studs Terkel's book Hard Times, that it was national policy during the Depression to fire married women. That was national policy because in theory a job should be for a man with the responsibility of supporting the family. There was a certain degree of chauvinism running rampant in the country in those days.

RM: But it also made some sense, rather than have 2 incomes for one family.

RD: Yes. The problem was, Mother lost her job teaching at the same time my dad either sold his business or lost it. I suspect that he lost it, although for years I told people he sold it and went into mining. At any rate, we were all going to get rich at Irish Mountain in the mining business. So he went to hard-rocking it out there in the hills. At the same time, my mother lost her job teaching. At the same time, my oldest brother was ready for college. So during those years, my mother supported us by taking in boarders at our house.

RM: Just boarders, not roomers?

RD: Well, we had one roomer, too. In all of those years, I slept on a couch in the living room and the roomer had my bedroom. Mother fed people Ä she packed lunches for people, and the evening meal was taken at our dining room table.

RM: When did she run a boardinghouse?

RD: I would say, '35, '36, '37. Maybe a little bit before then. She tried like hell to get a job teaching and couldn't, basically because of the national policy, but finally she got a job teaching the year I was in the fifth grade. She got a job teaching at the Henry Ranch, which is a ranch below Caliente, down Rainbow Canyon. That was a one-room schoolhouse, and I went down and did fifth grade there, and we would come up on weekends.

Coming up on weekends was fun. In those days there was always one train that had to stop

at all these places, so we'd get up on the track Friday night about 9:and we'd wave and the train would stop.

EE: She taught me in the second grade in Caliente.

RM: What years did she teach at Caliente?

RD: I was born in '25, which means I was 6 in '31. Elaine probably started in '30, and Mom was teaching in the Caliente grammar school then, and had for many years before that. And Mom taught me . . . god, that was terrible.

RM: You and your mom in class.

RD: Yes, she taught me in third grade, and it was terrible because I always had to dance with Jimmy White. [Laughter] Whenever they they put on a program or something, poor old Jimmy . . .Well, Jimmy was a little thick between the horns . . .

EE: Bless his heart.

RD: . . . and the sweetest little guy you'd ever know, and he sort of stayed in my mother's room for years because he liked her. So when you put on a program, somebody had to dance with Jim, and it was always me. [Laughter] And Jim sometimes didn't smell too good . . . [Laughter] Although, if the truth were known, Mrs. White and that Price family kept him spotless.

EE: They really did. When he went out, he always had on a suit and a tie.

JG: I have genuine memories of going up to Caliente not too long ago, while Jimmy was still alive, and going in and having him shine my shoes. I always tipped him a couple of bucks extra, just to make him feel good, you know.

RD: Yes, my uncle Lloyd used to really . . . in later years, Jimmy was a shoeshine boy in the barber shop. He succeeded me in that respect, because there was a period of time that I was a shoeshine boy. Jimmy didn't have a big stool to

sit on, so you could put both feet out. He had a little box with [room for] one foot. Old Jim would shine Uncle Lloyd's shoes and he'd get the one shoe done, and Uncle Lloyd would put the foot down, and then Jimmy'd get the stuff to [put on the shoes], and he'd put the same foot back. And old Jimmy'd accuse him of doing . . . [Laughter]

But, that year I went down to the Henry Ranch . . . I think it's kind of an interesting observation on the social development of people living in extreme rural areas at that particular time in our history. The kids who were my classmates were the children of people who worked on the section. The Houc family were the railroad section family down at Leith. Then there were the Henry kids, and then there were grandkids of the Henry family, the Bundys. Well, this was the Depression. One of the Henrys had gone off and married a Bundy, and had lived someplace else in the country. The Depression hit them, and, like many people did, they had to come back home because there were no jobs. The Bundy kids lived out on this ranch with their grandparents and their mother and their dad, and they were very insular, as you can imagine Ä to the point that if we were up playing at recess (there was a little alfalfa field out in front of the school, and we'd be out playing and that sort of stuff) and a car came down the canyon, they'd run and hide. [Chuckles] It was the damndest thing I ever saw in my life. [Laughter] A car would come down the canyon and these kids . . . [Makes shussing noise] But can you imagine a society so insular?

EE: Yes. [With pity] Gosh.

RD: It was the fifth grade [for me]. That was an important grade in the Caliente grammar school, as Elaine and Jim will tell you, because the principal of the school had a full athletic program for kids; organized teams from the third grade on up. It was time for basketball on the fifth grade team, and I wasn't there to play. My mother and dad arranged for me to live with old Aunt Mae Dewey, so I came back to Caliente and boarded at Mae Dewey's house for the rest of that year.

RM: What years was it she was teaching down there?

RD: If I was in fifth grade, I would assume it was '35 and '36.

RM: And what did she do after that?

RD: There came a time when she got back to teaching in Caliente. I'm not sure what year, after the pressure was off, she was rehired.

## CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Do you want to go ahead and tell your story, Elaine?

EE: Well, Ralph said earlier that our fathers were especially fond of children, and they were Ä truly, truly. My dad was president of the school board when I was in elementary school and when I went into high school he became president of the high school board, and everybody's going, "Ho, ho, ho!" [not as laughter, but more as "Well would you look at that!"] They teased me about that Ä "Your dad's there to see that you're taken care of."

And I said, "You're probably right." And they probably were. But he was crazy about kids, as Ralph's dad was. Fourth of July was a big, big time in our town. I think that in the county, Fourth of July was Caliente's big day, and everybody would come there. They'd go to Labor Day in Pioche, and Twenty-Fourth of July in Panaca and also in Pahranagat Valley.

RM: Twenty-fourth of July was what?

EE: We referred to it as "Mormon Day," but it was actually Pioneer Day. Anyway, on the Fourth of July we'd have races. Of course we'd have a parade first, and that was wonderful. And then there were races, and my dad always got to hand out the money. No one lost. Everybody got money Ä the winner got the dime, and everybody else got a nickel. And I can remember the joy in my dad when he'd watch all these little kids run up with their hand out, to hand out money. I remember that especially. It was a great time in Caliente.

RD: One of those Fourth of Julys was [when] Jim Cashman, Jr., and Carol Burt burned the Rex Theater down. And Jimmy accuses me of being with them. To this day, Jim Cashman, Jr., will swear to god that I was with them. [Chuckles]

EE: Well, on the Fourth of July we had fireworks . . . we'd blow our fingers to pieces, and it was all over town. We just had the grandest time, and so these Cashman kids from Las Vegas always wanted to come to Caliente for the Fourth of July. This particular Fourth of July, yes, they did go up on the hill behind the Rex Theater and shot off a rocket, and burned the theater.

RM: Is that right? That's not the theater that your uncle . . . ?

EE: That's right. That's the one. And so, after that, you couldn't shoot off . . .

RM: What year would that have been?

EE: Late '30s, wasn't it?

RD: Thirty-nine, because I think the high school graduation in 1940 was in the new Rex Theater because the ceiling had fallen in on the auditorium down at the high school.
EE: That was '42. That was my class. My class graduated from the Rex Theater, because of that damage.
RM: Is it there now?
RD: Yes.
RM: Oh, they rebuilt it?
EE: It's still there.
RM: So it was an essential thing in the town and when it burned down, they rebuilt it.
EE: Oh, absolutely.
RD: And that's one of the reasons that they no longer had the dance in the theater. It's because the new theater wouldn't accommodate a dance. It was modern, with a sloping floor for the seats.
EE: I can remember when my sister Mildred got married Ä Alyce's mother Ä they had a big dance afterwards at the Rex Theater. To this day I remember parading in there ahead of the bride and groom, and there was a big dance in the Rex Theater. Do you remember that?
RD: Yes. Is it true that Uncle Les had handbills dropped out of airplanes when Mildred got married, to invite everybody in Lincoln County?
EE: Well, that's what I said, but Bernice told me it was when he and Mom got married.
RD: They didn't have airplanes!
EE: No, no. Not airplanes. But they passed them out all over the county. Everybody was invited.
RM: Well now Ralph, let's talk about your dad's bar. Did he start it, or did he buy it from someone?
RD: I think that he and Uncle Lloyd started it.
RM: Lloyd, in addition to another bar, probably.
RD: Well, there was an earlier bar, the old East Side Bar. There might have been another bar called the San Pedro Bar; I don't know. But when I was a kid, Dad had the bar. There was a restaurant, and there was a bar, and there was gambling. I remember as a kid that sometimes my dad would be gone maybe 2 days if he had a big poker game going. But generally he came home about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and he always brought his bankroll. In the mornings, if it was summertime and we didn't have to go to school, he would count [the money], and he would give all nickels and dimes to me and my brother, supposedly to go into a fund to save. He'd go to work about 4:00 or 5:00in the afternoon, and go back across the tracks carrying his bankroll and open some of the games. I remember that there were different men who worked in there as dealers. And in those days, they were

paid at the cage in silver dollars every day. You didn't have withholding or any of that stuff; he didn't even know some of their names.

There was one . . . I wish I could remember his name, because if this story is true, it's an interesting comment on the rugged individualism of the state in those days. He had one dealer who Dad said had worked for him for several years, who had a brother going through theological school. The dealer was supporting his brother, and he graduated and was ordained as an Episcopal priest. He came to Caliente to visit his brother, and he liked the saloon and the gambling business, and he never reported to his first parish.

RM: [Laughs]

RD: There was an old character in Caliente who worked for Elaine's father for many, many years, when he was sober. He was one of the finest ragtime piano players you'd ever hear in your life Ä as good as anybody you will ever hear, and it was all by ear. When he was sober, he worked for Uncle Les in the post office, but he initially came here playing piano in the saloons.

EE: That's right Ä Mac.

RD: Old Mac, yes, a remarkable guy.

RM: What was his name?

RD: Well, we called him Mac. His name was McCarty or McCarthy; I don't have any idea what his first name was. My mother and dad used to invite Mac to dinner every Christmas and every Thanksgiving. He lived in a shack up there, and he wouldn't come if he was drinking. So if Mac didn't show up, we knew he was drunk. He would never come to our house if he'd been drinking. But he would come to Christmas and Thanksgiving dinner, and after dinner play the piano, and we'd all sing.

RM: Is that right?

EE: Oh, yes.

RD: God, he could play the piano!

RM: What do you know about the bar business in those years? I mean, what you picked up around the house.

RD: Well, we never had liquor in our house. Never. My dad always said that whiskey was made to sell and not to drink.

RM: [Laughs] He didn't drink?

RD: On occasion. He was scared of it. One of his brothers, Lewis, died at a young age at Caliente. I don't know of what, but I have reason to believe that maybe Louie had a very bad problem with the booze. And my dad was scared of it.

RM: So he had seen that.

RD: Yes. If he took a few drinks, it might be a couple days before . . . I only remember that happening maybe 3 times when I was here. And one of them was my fault. I came home from the army on leave one time, and I insisted on taking my mother and dad up to the Cove for dinner. As soon as we hit the Cove, he was in the bar talking to Fred Lowry, and we had trouble getting him over to the table to eat Ä he was visiting with his buddies. We finally did and then we went home. He parked the car in front of the house, and he got out and walked over town. He came back very early the next morning and said, "See, I told you I didn't want to go." [Laughter]

RM: What was the name of the bar that your dad had?

RD: The last one was called the Caliente Pool Hall, I think.

RM: Oh, so he had several different ones during this period of years?

RD: Well, that's the only one I remember.

RM: Did he have pool tables there too?

RD: Yes. I think that was basically during Prohibition.

RM: Oh, OK. But they served liquor there.

RD: I don't know that. Because there was a period of time that my father was a prohibition agent. [Female laughter]

RM: Was that just a cover, though? I mean, the way Prohibition was enforced in Nevada, it basically wasn't enforced.

RD: Well, you'd be surprised. When I first went to work as a clerk in the United States District Court up in Carson City, I thought it would be fun to check the old criminal records for the Federal Court for that jurisdiction over bootleggers. And being a clerk, all those records were available to me. So I went down in the basement of the old Federal Court there in Carson City, and I looked up the records. I discovered that my uncle Lloyd had a little run-in with the Pro-his; and that my cousin Katy [Denton] had. [Female laughter] But I couldn't find anything on either my father or my uncle Les. Cousin Katy and Bernice Davis got caught out in the desert. They'd heard that the Pro-his were in town, and they'd taken this booze out of their house and gone over on the hill back of where the Davises live, and they were burying it behind the sagebrush and the Pro-hi nailed them. And they were charged with the possession of booze. [Chuckles] As far as I can tell, my father was never involved in bootlegging, nor was my Uncle Les, and they both had a high regard for the law. They didn't do things that were illegal.

RM: So he may not have been serving alcohol in this pool hall?

RD: Well, I don't know when it started. Roosevelt became president in March of '33, and one of the first things that happened in his administration was the repeal of the

Eighteenth Amendment. I think that probably happened in '33. I remember the place, when I was a kid, as being a full bar, casino, and restaurant.

EE: That's what I remember.

RM: Where was it located?

RD: Right down the street from the theater.

EE: Yes. I don't think they had a drinking fountain in the theater, and I'd run to the bar to get a drink of water. I remember grabbing some pretzels on my way back to the "picture show," as they called it then.

RD: Speaking of my father drinking, my mother said one time that she was taking me to the show, [chuckles] and we went over to go to the show and we went into the bar to see Dad, and he was up on the bar dancing. [Laughter] So that was one of the times when he did have a belt or two, apparently. [Laughter] He came right home.

RM: Tell me what the establishment consisted of.

RD: It was a typical Nevada bar. If you would come in the front door, you would see the bar on the right. Down the left side would be some gambling tables. And then down at the back there'd be a restaurant. And in the middle of it was a great big pot-belly stove.

JG: Look up at the headings above the building, you'll see the Caliente Pool Hall [sign].

EE: Did Caroll Miller have the restaurant there?

RD: Once. I've already indicated the lack of real rapport between my father and my Uncle Lloyd. Uncle Lloyd told me one time that he got out of the business with my dad because one Thanksgiving during the Depression . . . the Depression didn't really hit Caliente until quite late, because in the early Depression years there was a great deal of construction on the railroad, building tunnels.

The tunnel gangs. There were a lot of laborers building tunnels up and down the line, and they would come to Caliente on the weekend, and it was a marvelous sight to behold! "Isn't it grand the way the money changes hands," as they said in those days. So Caliente was fairly prosperous until the tunnel gangs were finished and left. After that, you had CCC camps come in, and that contributed somewhat to the prosperity of Caliente.

It was apparent to us, if we thought about it, that although things were pretty good in Caliente, they weren't so good in the rest of the country, because all of the trains that came through were loaded with human beings on the bum. But Caliente wasn't too bad Ä we had that railroad payroll, and that sort of stuff.

Uncle Lloyd told me that one Thanksgiving they expected a big business Ä which they had, in both the restaurant and

the bar and the casino, and all of that Ä and my dad was in charge that night. They bought a lot of turkeys, Uncle Lloyd tells me, to serve in the restaurant that Thanksgiving, and when he came over the next morning all the turkeys were gone, but there wasn't much money in the till for the restaurant. He said, "Your dad fed every . . ." He said, "I just couldn't stay in business with a man who gave everything away." Every bum who came by and wanted a Thanksgiving dinner by god, he got it.

In those days, their attitude was a little bit different. They used to have a bunkhouse, in the early days, out back of the saloons. If a guy came in and got drunk and lost all his money, he had a place to sleep. The gamblers don't do that any more, but that was pretty typical of the early-day gambling.

RM: Is that right? I didn't know that.

RD: They wouldn't steal a guy's money and then send him out the door without a meal. They'd steal his money, but . . . [laughs]

RM: What games did they play?

RD: I remember craps and 21 and the wheel, and poker.

RM: Was it a fairly prosperous operation?

RD: It was very prosperous there for a long time. We had a new car, an Oakland, we weren't in bad shape. That was the thing about my particular branch of the family that was different than the others, in that it had been very good, and then all of a sudden there was nothing. My dad's brothers had more stability to them, economically, than we had.

RM: Why did it suddenly turn to nothing?

RD: Because the saloon either went broke, or dad sold it, and put it in the mines. I choose to think that he sold it and put it in the mines, but I have no evidence that that's correct. It may be that he just went broke.

RM: Why would he have sold it?

RD: I don't know the truth of this story, but I was told that there was a teacher at the high school by the name of Joe Theriot. My brother was very interested in drama (my brother's 8 years older than me) and Joe was going back to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He arranged for some sort of a scholarship for my brother. And my brother enrolled in Northwestern University. (Then he transferred to the University of Nevada in Reno.) I cannot vouch for the veracity of this story, but I was told that he had pledged a fraternity at Northwestern University, and when it came time to go active, he was rejected because his father was a gambler. Now, whether that's true or not, I do not know.

RM: But you think that maybe that contributed to your father's selling the saloon?

RD: At that time, my father said that he didn't want his sons to ever be ashamed of him. And that was the end of the gambling business for him. Now, how closely that coincides with his getting rid of the saloon . . . whether he lost it; whether he sold it; whether the story's true, I do not know. But he was very prideful of that, because in those Depression years, when . . . god almighty, we'd have done anything for money. I used to stand out in front of the theater in Caliente, hoping my uncle would invite me in (which he never did in his life) because I didn't have 10 cents to get in. Dad had lots of people that he knew here [in Las Vegas] in the gambling business, and they wanted him to come down here and work in the casinos and he just wouldn't do it. He would not go in the gambling business. To him, it was morally objectionable. It's fine when you're a young man and you don't have responsibilities . . .

RM: It became morally objectionable after he had the family.

RD: Well, for him. Not for other people. I can remember . . . I think this has some significance insofar as how he regarded it, and how most of the old-timers in Nevada regarded it: There was an old madame up in Elko by the name of Gladys Collier. Her pimp was a dealer in Caliente. And the reason he was a dealer in Caliente is, the rules in Elko would not permit a madame to have a pimp there. All you had to do to be shut down, if you ran a whorehouse in Elko, was to get caught having a man living there. (That's the way it used to be. They were much more closely regulated in those days than they are now, when they are supposedly legal. They weren't legal then.) So Gladys Collier would come to Caliente to see her husband. My dad, at that time, was undersheriff, and he knew all of those people in the gambling business then. And of course then he knew who Gladys Collier was; I later met her when I started to practice law in Elko.

But one Sunday, we were having dinner in our dining room, which was in the front of the house, and there was a picture window you could see through. And coming through the gate were this guy and Gladys Collier, coming to our house. I didn't know who they were. I saw them, and I saw my dad almost immediately turn a fiery red, jump up, and hit the front door, and catch them right in the middle of the sidewalk. He said, "I have to do business with you people over town. Don't you ever come near my family." He turned them around and they went right out. [Laughter]

RM: What were they coming for, I wonder?

RD: To see someone they thought was a good friend. Sure he was their good friend. He had to be. But all the old-time . . . Jim, wasn't that your parents' attitude about gamblers and gambling?
JG: Pretty much, yes.
RD: We needed it, in Caliente; we had to have it.
RM: But a lot of the prostitutes in Tonopah wound up marrying local guys, and were always respected in the town. And the madame was highly regarded there. And the madame in Beatty is highly regarded in that town.
RD: Well, that is true, but in the old days . . .
RM: In the old days it was different?
RD: No, they were highly regarded in many respects. But they kept their place. That was the important phrase Ä keep their place. They're important to our community. We need gambling, economically. We have to have it. But let's not forget the fact that gambling basically is a parasitical industry that preys on a human weakness.
RM: That's right. I agree. I don't think that's the attitude now, though, is it?
RD: Not at all.
RM: Especially in Vegas.
RD: It's not even the attitude towards prostitution anymore. I speak like an old dinosaur, but I'm trying to give you what the feelings were . . .
RM: Right, that's what I want.
RD: Your dad felt the same way, didn't he?
EE: Oh, sure.
RM: Well, your dad was undersheriff, then? Under Jake Johnson?
RD: Oh, god no. Jake Johnson was way before. He was under Jack Fogliani.
RM: And that means he would've been in charge of law enforcement in that part of the county, right?
RD: Well, yes. He was undersheriff, and this was before Caliente was a city. My dad was the undersheriff and there was one other deputy. Most of the time, that was a man by the name of Gurr. Mr. Gurr was the deputy, and he was a good LDS fellow. And every time there'd be a drunk Indian, my dad'd call Brother Gurr and say, "Brother Gurr, we've got to go find another drunken Lamanite." [Laughter] Those were the happiest days of his life, I think, from the standpoint of his occupation.
RM: What years was he undersheriff, would you say?
RD: From about 1940 to 1948, I believe.
RM: So it was after he'd given up the bar?
RD: Oh, a long time after. It was after he'd even given up the mining.

RM: Can you give any insights into what it was like running a gambling establishment and a bar at that time?

RD: I would have no idea. I would suspect that every one of the joints was what you'd call flat. Most of them were, in the state of Nevada.

RM: I don't know what "flat" means.

RD: That means that the player wasn't getting a square shake. As a matter of fact, one time Uncle Lloyd came to visit me here in Las Vegas, and I took him to lunch out on the Strip, in the Aladdin Hotel. The way the Aladdin was in those days, you had the coffee shop and you could look right out on the pit and see all the gambling going on. Uncle Lloyd started laughing and he said, "Whoever thought it would have come to this when we legalized it in 1931?!" He said, "Your dad and I had so many wires on our roulette table if they'd have ever shorted out [it would have] burned the whole goddamn town down!" [Laughter]

EE: Is that right?

RD: They were all flat.

RM: Was that pretty much true all over the state?

RD: Oh, sure.

RM: How did they work? I've always wondered how they got the ball on a certain . . .

EE: Well, they controlled them.

RM: But how?

RD: I would assume they could give them an electrical impulse and drop a ball in about wherever they wanted to pop it in.

JG: A little magnetism here.

RD: I was talking to an old cross-roader the other day . . .

RM: Now a "cross-roader" is . . .

RD: A cross-roader is the term for a gambling cheat who was working on the outside. He's cheating the house. Now, this guy was just telling me this recently. He's a well-known old cross-roader Ä one of the best in his trade. He was telling me about taking off a roulette game in London in one of those casinos. And what he had done, he made a roulette ball with some metal right in the middle of it. Then he had a magnet on his arm and the magnet was covered by a cast, as though he had a broken arm. And he had a confederate down at the end of the table. Exactly what their method of communication was, I'm not sure, but they could indicate where he was going to put his bets. And he said they divided the wheel into eighths, I think. You've got [odds of] 37 to 1. There are 35 numbers on the wheel, and then you can bet black or red. It's 37 to one, but they paid 35 to 1, so they've got 2 for the house Ä they've got a 2-point edge on you right there. So they had the wheel divided into quadrants, and they could cut the odds

from 37 to 1 down to maybe 8 to 1. But he said he got so good that he could cut it down to maybe 2 to 1. So, here he is in this fancy casino in London [chuckling] and he's got this ball into the wheel . . .

RM: How does he do that, I wonder?

RD: Sleight of hand. He gets the ball into the wheel, and he's all set, and he gets up close to the wheel, and he gets too goddamn close, and the ball jumps right out of the wheel [laughter] right on his arm! He said, "God!" and he went right down, and said "Where'd that ball go? Oh here it is! Oh, here it is!" And he picked it up and gave it to them. He said, "That up and tumbled."

Now this guy happens to be (I'm not going to tell you where, except it's not in the state of Nevada) a casino owner now in another jurisdiction. But [the appeal of] cross-roading, from what he tells me, is the thrill. He says it's almost sexual. The more risky it is, the bigger thrill it is. He was trying to take off that Big Bertha slot machine at Caesar's Palace. Now here's a guy who owns a casino outside of here, but he's trying to take off this great big, enormous Big Bertha slot machine at Caesar's Palace.

RD: This involves him actually getting inside the Big Bertha at Caesar's with confederates on the outside.
RM: Is that right?! What a story.
RD: (This is within the last few years.) He's got to get inside of it so he can rig the electronics. Then he's got confederates outside, who're going to play at the proper time. Well, he gets inside the machine, and slot mechanics show up routinely, and it scares off his confederates. They take off [laughter], leaving him in the machine. [Laughter] He had counted on a great disturbance and an accumulation of people around the machine when the big payoff came, all of which would cloud his exit from the machine. So now his confederates are gone, there's no great big winner, and he's inside the machine. [More laughter] He said he finally just opened the door and walked off. Nobody knew what he was doing. He just walked away.
EE: Oh! Is that a story!
RD: But I think anybody's naive if they don't believe the same things happen in these joints that have always happened in these joints, if the situation's right.
RM: Maybe not as much . . .
RD: Maybe not as much.
JG: Maybe on a much larger scale, when it does happen.
RD: Well, one guy who was a very good friend of mine was head of what they called the bust-out crew at the Fremont for years.
EE: Bust out?
RD: Yes. Bust out a player.
RM: Which means what?
EE: Yes, explain.
RD: They sit in the back room, and maybe you've got a great big drunk Texan shooting craps or playing 21, and it's 2:00 in the morning and everybody's drunk. The Texan's drunk. There's money all over the place, so the bust-out crew will come out to that table and bust him out. They'll take every goddamn penny he's got.
RM: Is that right!?
RD: Sure.
RM: Through rigging it.
RD: Yes. That's a well-established phrase in gambling Ä the bust-out crew. And you can't tell me that these joints don't have bust-out crews today. It's the nature of the beast. It isn't going to be fun, otherwise. Like, the 21 dealer will bust out a player, just to keep in practice.
RM: Is that right?

RD: Sure. Say you've got a loud-mouthed drunk. He's driving you nuts and he's placing $2 bets. "Ah, let's take him off, let's clean him out. Get him out of here." You only get $8 and you won't have to put up with him any more. And some of them do it for practice.

RM: And the house goes along with it? Because they're watching him. They know he's doing it.

RD: Well, nowadays it's more difficult. They deal out of shoes. I don't know the way the house could cheat on shoes Ä it's hard for a dealer to do it. And don't believe this crap that when cheating occurs in the joint, the house doesn't know about it. Nowadays, every time they catch one of these places violating the gaming control law, there's some employee that gets fired. You can't tell me a guy's going to take big money working a gambling joint that the boss is going to get to keep. Just like this Steve Wynn thing that's going on right now. They'll bust this employee for apparently catering and hosting Mafia people. Well, 20 years ago, it'd have been the joint.

EE: Right.

RD: Who got the money?

RM: But they're not going to fool with Steve Wynn.

RD: They're not going to fool with any big club, nowadays. They haven't revoked a gambling license for a big joint in Nevada for years.

RM: Did your father's place have slots?

RD: Yes.

RM: Do you have any stories on that? I guess they used to have drillers and people like that.

RD: I guess they did. But you see, if you had the kind of background that my father had, growing up in it as kid, up and down the railroad in tents, you could probably spot any move that anybody was making. You could protect [yourself]. That used to be the theory . . . and now it's not the theory of gaming control. Gaming control today spends half its time protecting the joints. They ought to be protecting the public, and if a guy can't get his gambling license, and can't protect his own joint, he doesn't deserve a license.

RM: That's an interesting point.

RD: I don't mean to get off on that. I don't remember anything, didn't learn anything, was never told anything, don't know anything about the gambling business. All I know is what I saw when I was growing up, and they were a bunch of happy people . . .

EE: That's true.

RD: One thing that I think is worthy of note as far as my father is concerned Ä when he was growing up, he played

with Mexican kids, to a large extent, [whose fathers] worked on the railroad. When he had the saloon and restaurant, he had a Mexican cook, and my dad would go back and sit in the kitchen for hours, learning Spanish. And he spoke Spanish fluently. He'd chase a Mexican a mile, just to talk to him.

RM: Tell me something about the Mexicans, in and out of town. Was there a Mexican community within the town?

RD: As far as I recall, we only had one family, didn't we? The Huerta family.

JG: Yes, the Huertas are the ones I remember. There were a lot of them up and down the canyon on the track crews and in the section gangs and those who lived right there.

RD: Yes. Every election time, my dad'd take absentee ballots up and down the railroad, hoping all these Mexicans . . .

EE: [Laughs]

RD: He'd interpret the ballot for them and indicate a wise decision on their part.

EE: [More laughter]

RM: They would've been registered, then?

RD: Some of them. But there were some of them who weren't Mexicans who surely weren't too smart.

RM: Was he out working for the Democratic candidates?

RD: Always.

RM: Both your fathers were Democrats?

EE: Yes indeed!

RM: Where did they get that? Was their father a Democrat?

RD: Well, as I said, he was a friend of William Jennings Bryan. They were populist in their political philosophy.

RM: You know, when you go back into the history of Tonopah and Goldfield, I know for sure there was a strong Socialist element there. This is before World War I. Was the same true in Caliente?

RD: No, the Socialist movement in Nevada, the IWW and those people . . . Tonopah and Goldfield was the main part of that movement in Nevada, although you did have Socialist communities established all over the state. In the days when reclamation was the big thing, and with the Newlands project, you had socialist communities. None of them was successful, but there was one in Elko County out north of Wells . . .

RM: I've read about it.

RD: Yes. They did irrigation, but they failed. And there was one out east of Fallon, and it failed. But there was a strong IWW movement in the mining camps. One of the most abortive uses of military power was Goldfield, where they called the national guard. Teddy Roosevelt was President. Teddy Roosevelt, at the governor's insistence . . .

RD: George Wingfield controlled the state.

RM: Yes, he was the one who had it done. Apparently a lot of the leftist viewpoints were associated with immigrants from Europe who had been used to more liberal political thinking in Europe and brought their viewpoints with them. But this wasn't the case in Caliente?

RD: No, but I think you have to even take a more pragmatic view of what you just said, that the foreign elements brought it in. This was repeated in the great red scare in the '20s and McCarthyism . . . every rabble-rousing politician always wants to point to some group that they're protecting you from. And in those days, it was "those foreigners" Ä those Bulgarians, those Austrians, those Hungarians . . .

RM: That's true, yes. I'm not trying to blame it on them.

RD: But that would be the political rhetoric of the day. Just as it's pervaded through this century. I don't know what they're going to do now, but they can't blame the communists.

RM: They've got a real problem, don't they?

RD: They blame the communists, the Jews . . .

RM: Well, they're going to blame it on the Japanese.

RD: Yes, now it's the Japanese. But I don't remember any socialistic influence around. My mother was probably about as liberal a person as there was in Lincoln County.

RM: Was there an immigrant population at all in Caliente or other parts of Lincoln County, aside from the Mexicans?

RD: Well, we had Bull the Jap. [Chuckles]

RM: What was his name?

RD: We just called him Bull. I don't know what his name was. And then we had one Japanese family up on the section. What was their name, Jim?

JG: Takahara. And Takahara helped my wife remodel that little place of Ousley's down on the corner for my folks during World War II, when most of the Japanese had been interned. He hadn't; he was still there, but Porter Lee told me that Taki knew they should've taken him too.

RM: Tell me about Irish Mountain, now. Your dad sold the place, and apparently didn't have much money. Your mother lost her job, and she started a boardinghouse.

RD: He started mining out in Irish Mountain.

RM: Whereabouts in Irish Mountain?

RD: It was the old patented Illinois claim. The old Illinois was a big mine in the early days. Irish Mountain is right up from Hiko, and in the early days the Illinois Mine was a big producer and the mill was in Hiko. The mine had laid dormant for many, many years and my dad and Lester Burt . . . he was associated with Lester Burt in this, to

some degree. They formed a company called the Hiko Mining and Milling Company, and my dad was off in the hills.

RM: What years are we talking about here?

RD: I'm talking about probably 1935 to 1939, when he got his first job as a school bus driver. I was 13 when we built the mill there in Crystal Springs. Although Caliente was a pretty prosperous town because of the railroad, the valleys, like Pahranagat Valley and those areas, and their farmers, were really in bad shape. So many of them worked up at the mine with my father for no salary, just board and room. I went with my dad when I could, and we scavenged every old ghost town in Nevada and Utah, picking up parts from old mills, and they built a mill there at Crystal Springs. The remnants are still there.

They hard-rocked the ore up there. The hill was so steep that we brought the ore down the hill on a sled made out of railroad ties and tin, and a pulley hooked to mules. As the mules went up, the sled came down. Then the mules would come down and the sled would go up. Those mules came to us from old Dave Stewart in Pahranagat Valley, and his sons, Cyril and Gerald, worked up there in the mining operation because it was their mules and their hay. There was another man from Pahranagat Valley, and a man who had come through on a freight train.

To make a long story short, we got the mill operating. Now the mill consisted of an ore chute into what's called a big ball mill Ä noisiest thing I every heard in my life. The ore would go into the ball mill, and the ball mill would turn and pulverize the ore. Then there was a series of 3 flotation tables and down at the end we would sack up the concentrates that came off the flotation tables, put them into great big canvas sacks, and load them on a flatbed truck. Then my dad, one of the men and I would drive up to Magna or Garfield in Salt Lake City, where you had the 2 big smelters in those days, the United States Smelting and Refining Company, and the American Smelting and Refining Company. Generally I had to ride out on the back of the truck up on the ore sacks because the men would ride in the cab. We'd go to the smelter and they would take the ore and work it, and they would give my dad a check for whatever it was.

Then we would drive back to Caliente and cash the check at the bank in Pioche, then pay Blue Front Mercantile the bill for the groceries; pay Harry Underhill, or whatever hardware store there was, for the powder and all of the equipment; pay Walt Ray for all the oil and gas. Then if there was anything left, it would be divided equally among

all the men who worked there. There never was anything to divide, generally.

EE: [Laughs]

RD: Or, not very much. I remember one time we were taking a load up to Salt Lake, and [Elaine's] brother Lester was in town and he wanted to go with us because he wanted to go up to Salt Lake City to see if he could get a job. He was a musician, and a damn good one, and there were a few little bands working in Salt Lake in the different hotels. Old Lester and I were riding out on back of the truck and Lester felt the biological necessity of relieving himself [laughter] so he stood up on the back of the truck and started this process that's well known to all mankind, and he hadn't calculated on the wind [louder laughter] and it all blew back . . . [more laughter]

But I can remember the dates because, in connection with the mill, we had to have water. (You know, if you have water running over these flotation tables ...)

So we drilled a well clear up on a hill above Crystal Springs. The old ore chute's still there; you can still see it.

RM: I'll look for it.

RD: Do me a favor, when you're there. Go up to it. That water was pumped from the well into a concrete tank that stood about 4 feet high and was probably about 5 feet by 10 feet. And in the top of it when we poured it, I wrote my name and the

date: Ralph Denton, age 13, April 1938. Up until a few years ago, that tank was still there. (It's fallen down, now.) I keep thinking some day I'm going to go up there and get that and bring it home and put it on the back hill. But it was one of those things that people did to try and make a living.

RM: How many men were working at the mine?

RD: Probably about 4 or 5.

RM: And basically they were working just for a percentage of the profits?

JG: They were working for something to eat.

RD: For board and room and hoping, by god . . . you see, we were always just about 2 feet away from a million dollars.

RM: Oh, sure. And they were Pahranagat Valley farmers?

RD: Don Anders was a Pahranagat farmer, and Soup and Gerald Stewart. Dad had me convinced, for years, that he could talk any mule that ever lived out of a balk. Sometimes those mules would balk going up the hill, and he'd go up and grab them by the ear. He made me think he was talking to them. He'd put his mouth right up by that mule's ear. What he was doing, was twisting that mule's ear.

[Laughter] That mule gets going where he wants him to go. But he had me fooled. He told me, "Son, there never was a mule that ever lived, I couldn't talk out of a balk." [Laughter]

RM: How far underground were the workings there?

RD: Well, the old Illinois claim was deep Ä it had to have been somewhere between 700 and 1,000 feet. But they also developed new holes from outcroppings. And I remember one old guy Ä I was thinking just a minute ago, what a tragedy it is that we forget people so soon. I can't remember his name. One guy who was working for them fell. A rung in the ladder gave out and he fell. My dad and somebody else got him out of the hole and got him into a pickup and got him to Las Vegas. I'm not certain if he died before they got to Las Vegas, or if he died after they got to Las Vegas.

RM: So they weren't working in the deep shaft then, they were working on some of the smaller holes?

RD: Sometimes, and they would quarry all of the holes around the mountain, you see.

RM: What was it, lead and silver?

RD: Yes, lead and silver.

RM: But they were making shipments out of there?

RD: Oh, god, we hauled it up to Salt Lake. Until we just had to give up.

RM: Apparently, you didn't make that many trips to Salt Lake . . . ?

RD: I think 5 or 6 over a period of a couple years.

RM: And then, the mill was . . .

RD: We just abandoned it.

RM: It was a light tonnage, wasn't it? What was it Ä probably about 8, 10 tons a day?

RD: Something like that, I would think. I didn't know enough about the procedure at that time. I was there all the time we were building it, and helped as best I could, but . . .

RM: Did he buy the mine, or did they lease it, or what was the deal?

RD: I've never known whether they located new claims and had gone back, or just how they did it. I didn't know anything about mining then; know even less now.

RM: There wasn't much happening at Irish Mountain, then Ä or was there other activity?

RD: There was an old Italian fellow by the name of Rosie. He was over the brow of the hill.

JG: Cox was out there about that time, too. You remember the Cox family that lived there?

RM: What was his first name?

JG: The boy's name that I knew Ä he was my age Ä was George. I can't remember the old man's name, but he was out there, I know, on Irish Mountain at about that same time.

RD: You know, I was talking earlier about those Bundy kids being insular?

RM: Yes?

RD: My father suffered to a certain degree from that malady. One time we went to Los Angeles . . . first time I ever went there. Some man down there was supposed to invest in the mine, and my dad had to see him. So we went down there, my dad and my brother and I. We stayed in the old Roslyn Hotel, which was close to the office of this man who was supposedly going to invest money in the mine. And we were certainly going to be rich, without question, in a very short period of time. We got there late at night, and we checked into the Roslyn Hotel. The next morning my dad got up, got dressed and was taking off to go see this man. My brother and I lagged behind a little bit, and we got dressed and come down and go into the coffee shop and were having breakfast. I looked out, and my dad was still standing on the sidewalk out in front of the hotel. I went out and I said, "Dad, what're you doing out here? I thought you were going to go see Mr. So-and-so (whatever his name is)?"

He said, "Son, I'm just trying to figure out which one of those sons of bitches is going to run me down when I step off the curb." [Laughter]

RM: Ralph, your mother had a political career, didn't she? Could you tell us about that?

RD: Well, after she retired as a school teacher she ran for the legislature from Lincoln County, and served 2 terms in the Nevada State Legislature.

RM: What year did she run?

RD: It was after I moved to Elko, and I moved there in '51. It must have been the election of '52, so she was in the legislature in '53 and '55.

RM: Are there any high points, or any points there that you would like to focus on?

RD: No, not really. I wish I'd been a little bit older and a little more mature at the time, but I think she was quite disillusioned by the manner and method in which the legislature operated. I think she was patronized considerably.

RM: Really? Was she the only woman?

RD: No. There were 3 women in that session of the legislature Ä Maude Frazier from here was in the legislature. Maude later became lieutenant governor. She had been superintendent of the schools here, and had been at the Las Vegas High School for years. We've known Maude for years. And there was a lady from Reno by the name of Mabel Isbel, and my mother.

And my mother was not really a pragmatist. She was an idealist, and had the courage of her convictions. She wouldn't care what other people might have thought about her positions. Her principal interest was education. She worked with Maude a great deal in establishing UNLV. This was when the legislature did away with the multi-school districts, and came up with countywide school districts, following a study that was very controversial at that time that the state commissioned, making recommendations for schools. The one phrase that I can remember her using constantly was, "A kid in Eureka has just as much right to a good education as a kid in Reno, or a kid in Las Vegas." And she saw the countywide school district as a partial answer to the inequality of education in the state. She saw state funding for the school districts as an answer to inequality in education in the state, because up until that time, each school district was supported solely and exclusively by property taxes within that school district. So if your school district, say, involved 2 ranches, then the taxes from those 2 ranches were what supported the school. And of course that gave the ranchers a great deal of power

regarding the quality of education Ä the curriculum, the power to regulate thought Ä "Teach what we like or don't teach at all." So, as I mentioned earlier, she was one of the leaders of that change.

RM: And what year did that bill go through, do you know?

RD: I don't know if it was the first session she was in, or the second session Ä 1953 or 1955. But the legislature adopted most of that plan. Another thing, and she's never been given credit for this, she got special bills passed creating Ryan Kershaw, Beaver Dam and Cathedral Gorge as state parks.

RM: Oh, she was behind those?

RD: We'd always had a park commission that had never been active. And of course they said, "We have a state park commission. These are on our list of state parks." But that didn't bother Mom; she wanted a specific statute. They're the only 3 state parks in Nevada, I think, that have a special statute creating them.

RM: Were there any other legislative efforts that she was particularly . . . ?

RD: Yes Ä libraries. She was chairman of the library committee, and at that time there was a Caliente guy who was head of the state library there in Carson City.

RM: Let's focus a little bit on your growing up in Caliente. What do you recall about your early years of growing up there?

RD: I think it was a wonderful place to grow up. You know, it's only on reflection years later that you're prompted to remember some of the things that are in conflict with the basic premise that it was a wonderful place to grow up. It was. That doesn't mean that it was free of heartache; free of worry; free of concern; free of humiliation; free of many things. But the overwhelming thought that I would have on reflecting upon growing up in Caliente was that it was a wonderful place to grow up.

EE: Yes.

RD: Without question. The other things that I mention I'm sure are present no matter where you grow up. We had a freedom . . . you could run all over those hills. It was a lot of fun!

RM: What were some of the kids' play activities?

RD: Well, one thing that we used to do (I don't know if you ever did this, Jim) . . . we were all crazy about horses. The only guy who had any horses was Charlie Culverwell. So kids would go over to the Culverwell place during the summer and work all day long just hoping Charlie would let us ride a horse down the right of way to turn them loose at night. [Laughter] We cleaned the barns, we

pitched the hay, we'd do everything, hoping Mr. Culverwell would say, "Well, Ralph, why don't you ride old Single down and turn him loose tonight?"

JG: That's right. That was really a focal point for a lot of the kids in Caliente, the old Culverwell property and their barns and the things that went on there.

RD: Many of us became quite active and very skilled in stealing gasoline.

RM: Oh! How did you do that?

RD: You'd put hoses in somebody's tank and siphon it out. We got pretty good at that. I could get a hoseful quicker than almost anybody.

EE: [Laughs]

RD: I got caught one night. My dad caught us. We were down in back of the depot. As you know, there used to be a hotel there in the depot, so there would be cars parked out back of guests in the hotel. Lindsay and I just got the hose in the tank, and just had her going good, and we were standing back there and this guy sticks his head out the window and yells, "Hey, you kids get away from my car!" Jesus! Old Lindsay and I took off across the desert like you couldn't believe, and we were hiding down in the flats.

EE: [Laughs]

RD: And pretty soon there's a spotlight and, "Oh, my god!" So Lindsay and I, like John Dillinger, came out of the sagebrush with our hands up in the air, and it's my dad. [Laughter]
But I think we were basically good kids. Really good kids. And I think that we always believed (I'm not sure kids believe this today) that our teachers had an interest in us. Don't you?

EE: Oh, absolutely. And they did.

RD: And they did. Yes. I'm not so sure the quality of the education was that good because I certainly have many deficiencies, but that was my fault.

RM: Are there any activities or events that are worth noting?

RD: Well, we had a good Boy Scout troop there from time to time. And I was always (and I think Jim was, too) interested in the athletic programs at the schools, particularly in the high school.

EE: The elementary school started it.

RD: It was very good at the elementary school. Mr. Golden Hollingshead was outstanding at running the athletic program. He was a local boy, too. He was a teacher and coach, but he had athletic programs. It's remarkable when you think about it. He had athletic programs that

every kid in that school could participate in, including girls.

RM: What were they?

RD: Well, you principally think of basketball. You'd have basketball teams for third and fourth grades and fifth and sixth. Then you'd have the first team, and you'd go and play Panaca, you'd play Pioche, and you'd go over and play Ely and Lund, and you'd play McGill. Then they'd have a grammar school tournament in Caliente where they'd come from Las Vegas. It was a magnificent athletic program.

EE: Baseball, too!

RD: Baseball, and track. And a full program, plus he was principal of the school and taught eighth grade. Right down here at Boulder High School now, you've got about 10 coaches in a high school, with assistant coaches . . . But when you moved up to Lincoln County High School in our era, there was a coach by the name of Lee Liston who really earned the love and respect of every kid who went out for one of his teams. You would no more use a curse word in front of Lee Liston than you'd fly to the moon. You would worry if you were doing something that you knew was out of line.

RM: And that was in Panaca, right?

RD: That was the high school that was in Panaca. You certainly didn't want Lee Liston to find out. You didn't want your parents to catch it, but you sure as hell didn't want Lee Liston to catch it, either, because if he did you would feel diminished.

RM: Was there a football program?

RD: Yes.

RM: Did you play 6-man?

RD: No. We played 11-man. We played Ely, Las Vegas . . .

JG: St. George.

RD: St. George, Cedar City. The year I was a junior, we went and played Reno. At the end of the first half it was Lincoln County High School 6, Reno nothing. And then during the half, they figured out the double wingback system, and the game ended Reno 55, Lincoln 6. [Laughter] They didn't know what we were doing in that double wing system.

Jim was a little ahead of me. You were on the best team that Lincoln County High School ever had.

JG: I was a junior that year. Yes. They really took the honors all the way through the state. The only trouble we had during those years was the Las Vegas High School. We always claimed that those guys had been married 3 times and divorced and were still playing. [Laughter]

RD: One year after you and I both left and I came back home (I was going to the University of Utah Ä it was before I went in the service), Las Vegas was playing Lincoln there in Panaca and they were short of officials, so I became the linesman. And Lincoln beat Las Vegas that year.
RM: [Laughs]
RD: Not that I had anything to do with it.
JG: All those other men had gone to war, right?
RD: That's right. [Laughter] Feelings used to run very, very high when we played White Pine County High School. One game had some national significance because a congresswoman from the state of Maryland was a girl who grew up in Ely and attended this game that ended in a 13-to-13 tie. One of our yell leaders was a girl by the name of Helen Dula. Feelings ran very, very high after that game. Lincoln and White Pine were intense rivals. They ran so high that this girl from Ely cold-cocked one of our yell leaders, namely Helen Dula. And the girl who cold-cocked her was Helen Delitch, who is now Helen Delitch Bentley. She's a congresswoman from the state of Maryland.
EE: Is that right?
RD: Yes. She was a Delitch from Riepetown! She and Mitsy Piskovich were the two that cold-cocked old Helen. And now she's a congresswoman Ä Helen Bentley. She was labor editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, and was on the Maritime Commission during the Nixon administration and is now a congresswoman.
RM: And grew up in Ely Ä or Riepetown, really.
RD: Yes.
JG: You should have had the experience, Ralph, as I did, of moving to Ely and acquiring a business up there and having to live with those kids 20 years later. [Laughter]
RD: Right. When we went over there to play White Pine for my first time I was just a kid . . . I wasn't on the first team or even the second team at this particular time, but we were going over to play Ely and I was telling my dad at breakfast that we were going over to play Ely. He said, "Oh, my god, don't go play."
EE: [Laughs]
RD: And I said, "Why not?"
He said, "They bring these bohunks down out of the hills from around Kimberly. They're 14 feet between the eyes." [Laughter]
He had me scared to death. And I remember I got hoping the coach wouldn't put me in. [Laughter] And he didn't. A lot of our life centered around the schools. But it

was open Ä a livestock country; there were hills, old mine shafts you could explore; you could climb cliffs, you could hunt, you could just do everything!

RM: Where did you do your hunting?

RD: Most of us, I think, used to hunt rabbits right down on the flats, didn't we, Jim?

JG: You'd leave the last block of buildings and homes and from there on out to the west, you were hunting rabbits. There were stubble fields Ä old fields that used to be green alfalfa fields in the years previously. But there was a lot of rabbit brush and everything. And, gosh, it was not at all unusual to come home after school and get the .22 rifle out, or the .16-gauge shotgun or whatever . . .

RD: Four-ten Ä whatever you had.

JG: . . . and head off down the canyon, hunting.

RD: Then, when we were little, we used to go out and dig undergrounds. Did you ever do that Jim?

JG: Oh, yes.

RM: What are "undergrounds"?

RD: Well, you'd dig a great big hole and then a tunnel a long ways. Then you'd cover it, put dirt on it, and you could crawl down the hole and you were underground.

JG: That was a clubhouse, usually.

RD: Then some son of a bitch would come along and step on it and cave her in on you. [Laughter]

RM: Tell us about the Boy Scouts there.

RD: I think our Boy Scout movement had its ups and downs. When my brother was a Boy Scout back in the late '20s and early '30s, the scoutmaster was Loren Lee. Loren was a local man, and he would take the kids on camping trips to Ash Springs, and over to Pine Valley, Utah, where they used to go a lot. Then when I came along, Bruce Barnum was the scoutmaster, and he was a very good scoutmaster. Then Bruce left and then for a while . . .

Again, going back to what I said a minute ago, you remember all of the good things and then as you get older and you reflect on some of the things . . . I remember the last time I was a Boy Scout. The troop was down at the Mormon church, which meant the kids who were not Mormon were basically excluded.

RM: They were excluded?

RD: Basically. Not by the Mormons, but because of their own religions. And it dawned on me one time that my buddy Philip Boudreau couldn't be a scout because he wasn't Mormon. He was Catholic.

RM: But you weren't Mormon!

RD: Oh, I was.

EE: He was at the time.
RD: Well, that's interesting. I've indicated to you that my mother was not actually within the church. I don't remember her ever going to the Mormon church, except for a funeral or something. But when I became of age I started out going to primary and everything. And I can remember Ä now keep in mind, my father was a saloon keeper and was not a Mormon; he smoked "cigareets." I can remember who my teacher was in primary at the time; it was Lillian Barnum. At what age, Jim, do you become a deacon in the Mormon church? Twelve?
JG: Twelve.
RD: So I must have been about 12, because I was working on becoming a deacon. I was trying to memorize articles of faith, which you had to do in order to become a deacon. They'd give you a card with a picture of the temple on one side and the articles of faith printed on the other. I was trying to memorize the articles of faith, because once I did that, then I was progressing in the hierarchy to the position of deacon, which meant that I would get to pass the bread and the water Ä the sacrament. Lillian was a local girl from an old pioneer family, and her maiden name was Gentry. She was a teacher, and I can't remember exactly what she said, but it indicated pretty clearly that if you weren't Mormon, and if you didn't proceed properly, you didn't have much chance of making it all the way in the afterlife. And that struck me, even at that age, as sheer bigotry. And that excluded my father, it excluded my uncles, it excluded all of the people that I held dear. So I went home, and I told my mother! I'll never forget it. I told my mother what Mrs. Barnum had told me in Sunday school that day. And all she said was, "Ralph, you don't have to go back if you don't want to." And I never did. But I participated in their recreational things like mutual and the dances. They used to have the Green and Gold Ball.
EE: Yes, I used to go to the dances.
RD: We'd go to those things.
RM: So you went to high school over in Panaca. Was there a bus?
RD: They ran buses from Pioche to Panaca and Caliente to Panaca.
RM: And then when you graduated from high school, where did you go to college?
RD: I never did really graduate from high school. I started college up at the University of Utah before I graduated from high school.
RM: How did that work?

RD: Well, World War II was on us and we knew that as soon as you turned 18, you'd go in the army. The University of Utah, much to its credit, came up with a program that if you had so many high school credit hours, even though you hadn't graduated, you could be admitted as a provisional student at the university. And then they worked out a deal with the high school that the high school would accept those credits and give you your high school diploma. So that's what I did. I took off for the University of Utah at the middle of my senior year. And talk about humiliations and things like that! I completed the first 2 quarters, which entitled me to graduate from the high school, and I did. But many people objected, saying I had no right to participate in the graduation ceremonies. That became an issue with the school administration, whether or not I could be on the platform.

RM: Did you go into the army, then, when you were 18?

RD: As soon as I got my high school diploma, I transferred immediately to the University of Nevada. I'm a Nevada man, I'm not a Utah man. But it was more difficult. It was more expensive to go to the University of Nevada Ä to pay in-state tuition Ä than it was to go to the University of Utah, paying out-of-state tuition.

RM: Is that right?

RD: But I transferred to the University of Nevada at the end of the summer. As soon as I got my high school diploma, I took off to Reno.

RM: What year was that?

RD: That would be 1943. I got a job in Ross Burke Mortuary in Reno, and that scared the hell out of me. So I quit and went back to Utah and joined the army. [Laughter]

RM: And where did you serve in the army?

RD: In the United States. I was in the army 5 years; I wound up as a career regular Army officer. I took the regular army integration examinations and passed. They gave these at the end of World War II. The regular army officer corps up through World War II was 25,000 Ä there were only 25,000 regular Army officers Ä and the Congress doubled it to 50,000. They gave reserve officers and United States Army officers like me an opportunity to become regular Army officers. There were about 6 or 7 applicants, actually, for each vacancy.

I took the examinations . . . I'll never forget one thing, because this may be germane to my father. By then I was back in Washington going to college, and I was notified to go to the Pentagon to take the written examinations, which took 3 days. I took those and I kind

of forgot about it, and then I was notified to come over for an oral interview at the Pentagon. I was a civilian, so I was in civilian clothes, and at every board I'd ever appeared before in the army, the officers Ä the board Ä would be sitting behind a long table. You'd come in and salute; there would be a chair out front and you would sit in this chair and they would ask you questions. Every board I'd ever been before had been conducted that way. But as a civilian, I went into this room in the Pentagon, and all of these guys were generals Ä the lowest-ranking member of that board was a colonel and he was the secretary of the board. I think there were 4 generals and this one colonel. They were all sitting in easy chairs. And . . . "Mr. Denton, welcome. Won't you sit down?" I sat down in this easy chair, and, "It's all right if you wish to smoke, Lieutenant." And they started asking me questions. And they became interested Ä I guess they did this to all the applicants Ä in where I was from.

I said, "I grew up in Caliente, Nevada."

"Well, where's Caliente?"

I told them about that, and the last question that I was asked was, "Did Nevada ever produce any great men?"

I started to think, well, we've produced some prominent men, but I don't think you could call Pat McCarran great. You could call him powerful, but I don't think you could describe him as great. You could describe Key Pittman as powerful, but not as a great man. I was having trouble trying to think, and I'd said, "Yes." Then they'd asked me, "Who?" I was going through this convoluted mental process trying to decide who the hell could I call great in Nevada. And just on an impulse, I said, "Yes, my father." And that ended the interview. I've always been persuaded that that one phony question might have influenced them to . . . I must have done quite well on the written or I wouldn't have been that far along.

RM: You said you were a civilian. How did that . . . ?

RD: Well, it was because I got out of the army at the end of the war. I wanted to stay in, but I didn't want to stay in as a reserve officer. I either wanted to be a regular army officer or not at all. I didn't want to be subject to being thrown out any time they wanted to throw me out, so I got out. And the day I got out, I made application for the regular army commission, and by the time I got notified that I'd received the commission, a year had gone by. I'd finished college and was in law school at night.

I had absolutely no political help, contrary to what some people might say, in getting the commission. I did have some political help, though, in getting stationed in Washington. My argument was that I was in school at night. I wanted to continue at my own expense Ä not at the army's Ä but I didn't feel that I could compete with the guys with a ring on their finger unless I had a graduate degree, and I was willing to do that at my own expense. So I got political help from Senator McCarran in getting stationed in Washington, which allowed me to go to school at night.

RM: Where did you go?

RD: I went out to an installation called the Army Security Agency, which now is the National Security Agency. It was out in Arlington, Virginia, then, so I was stationed out in Arlington and went to school in Washington.

RM: Where did you go to school in Washington?

RD: George Washington. Then I started law school at American University. The war was over, the Korean War had not started, and the army had become absolutely decimated. Their career plan for me was to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and be with the troops in field artillery. I had been with the troops for 5, or 3 years at that point . . . but that was my career plan. And I was able to get stationed there in Washington. Then there came a time, to tell you the truth, when I had to decide whether to make the army my career, or be a lawyer. And my decision was prompted by the fact that the adjutant . . .

RD: This major was the adjutant. He had a little moustache (no offense meant; he was a prissy little fellow) [laughter] and he had a daughter about my age, and every time there'd be a party at the officer's club or something, this major would line me up with his daughter. She was a nice enough girl, but I didn't have any interest in her. Then there came a time that he was being transferred to Germany and of course his family was going with him. He called me in to tell me that he'd arranged that I was going to be transferred to Germany, to his same unit.

I explained to him I didn't want to go. If I was going to get transferred, I wanted to go back to a field artillery outfit, but I didn't want to go until I graduated (I had another couple of years to go). But he insisted that I go. I discovered that if you're a regular army officer, all you have to do to get out is resign. You send a letter to the President of the United States to resign a regular army commission. So I sat down and wrote a letter to President Harry Truman, submitting my resignation as a regular army officer. In due time, I got a letter back from the president accepting my resignation.

RM: Did you came back to Nevada then?

RD: I stayed there and finished law school and then came back to Nevada.

RM: What kind of law do you practice?

RD: General practice. I like to say I'm the last of the old-time country lawyers. Everybody's in big law firms, now.

RM: Where did you start off your practice?

RD: Elko.

RM: What made you go to Elko?

RD: I got a job. Grant Sawyer was district attorney up there, and he'd been a friend of mine, so I was the first deputy district attorney that Elko ever had. It was a good job. No salary, but you got your office and a secretary in exchange for doing the county's work, then you made your living on private practice. Grant Sawyer and I had been friends in Washington before. Sara was pregnant, and McCarran ran me off, so I had to . . .

EE: What?

RD: Yes, that was kind of funny.

EE: I don't think that's so funny. Why?

RD: Well, I had come out to take the Nevada bar in March of 1951. As soon as I got back to Washington, McCarran called me into the office. He said, "How was the bar?"

I said, "Oh, god, it was tough."
We talked about the bar exam for a while. Then he said, "Well, it's time for you to go home."
I said, "I know that, Senator, but I'd kind of like to stay on the job until the bar results come out because Sara's pregnant and I need a job."
And he said, "Well, you came back here to go to law school, didn't you?"
I said, "Yes."
He said, "Well, you've finished law school and it's time for you to go home. You've got to make room for another boy from Nevada who needs a job to go to law school."
I said, "Well, I certainly can't argue with that, Senator."
He said, "Oh, don't worry about a job. I've got you a job at federal court in Carson City."
So I was rammed down the court's throat up in Carson City as a clerk. He didn't consult with a judge. I stayed until the bar results came out and, in the meantime, in driving back and forth I'd stopped to see Grant and Betty in Elko. And Grant had said, "God, if you pass the bar, come up here and be my deputy, and we'll . . ."

RM: And you knew him from previously?

RD: I knew him from Washington. As a matter of fact, my brother was his best man when he and Betty got married. They had known each other first at the University of Nevada in Reno.
[Tape is turned off for a while.]

RM: [Ralph Denton has had to leave, and we have moved to] Jim Gottfredson's home in Boulder City, [where] we're going to continue the interview on the Denton family history with Elaine Eardensohn and Alyce Gottfredson, who is also a Denton. Where should we pick up on your family history?

JG: I think you ought to start out with Elaine as a little girl.

RM: OK. Why don't you start with some of your earliest memories of Caliente?

EE: Well, we lived on Spring Heights, and that's where I was born.

RM: You were born at home?

EE: Yes. There was no hospital at that time, 1924. And I just had a glorious childhood. I was spoiled; there's no question about that. And I enjoyed every minute of it. One thing that was very neat Ä I guess because my dad could put in telegraph lines, we had a telephone in our house and one in the post office (probably the only phones in town at that time). So every Christmastime I

got to speak directly to Santa Claus. I had a direct line to the North Pole, which was wonderful. And we had great times in the wintertime. The hill would be full of snow; we would sleigh ride and have great times when we lived up there.

When I was about 6 years old we, as a family, made a trip to Omaha, Nebraska. My sister, Alyce's mother, Mildred, was back there going to school and we went back to pick her up. And motels as they're known today were a brand new thing. They were called "cabins." You could rent a cabin and you could take your bedding or not. But this was a new thing to us, in traveling. And as we traveled across the country and stayed in these cabins, my dad got the idea that this would be a good thing to do in Caliente. And that's what he did Ä as well as being postmaster, he built cabins to rent.

RM: Where did he build them?

EE: Well, there are still some cabins there but they're not the original ones. Is it still called Midway?

RM: Yes.

EE: OK. The house we lived in is gone, and all the cabins are gone. Everything there is new. But this was a new concept and this is what they did after that trip to Nebraska.

RM: What year would it have been when he started those cabins?

EE: Probably '31 or '32. We went back there when I was 6, which would have been 1930. So it was in the early '30s anyway.

And then we moved down to the other side of town. And you were asking about what kids did to play. I can remember that every night there'd be a bunch of kids and we'd play "Run Sheepie Run!" or "Kick the Can" Ä all the kids from the whole neighborhood. Did you come up there Jim, when we would do that?

JG: I did after I got to Caliente.

EE: All the kids would get together and play, and it was just so wonderful. The last time I walked around Caliente at night, it was so quiet. Then I realized they were all in watching television. We had such a great time. As Ralph said, we'd just tell our folks, or our mom, "We're going to pack a lunch and we're going hiking!" and away we'd go, up to the mountains, down through the creeks, or whatever we wanted to do. Everybody looked out for everyone else's children at that time, for one thing. It was a great freedom, and I remember such a loving, loving home. I had a wonderful mother and father.

RM: Getting back to the cabins, how many cabins did your father have?
EE: Six. Then he bought the house next door and used that as a family unit for another cabin.
RM: How were the cabins furnished?
EE: It was very interesting what they did with that little bit of space, because they weren't very large. There was a wood stove in there and a 2-burner gas stove, a sink, and over on one wall was a cupboard-type thing with a table that went up against it. They'd drop it down, and there would be the table. And you could rent them with bedding or without. If you had your own bedding you brought that. And I remember that my dad would lay the fires every night so that when people walked in and wanted to rent it, he'd touch the match . . .
RD: Oh, he'd get the fire ready to light.
EE: Yes. And it would warm up real fast.
RM: Did they have a double bed in them?
EE: Yes.
RM: And a bathroom?
EE: No. The showers and toilets were across the way.
RM: Oh, so they didn't have plumbing inside.
EE: Well, they had running water for the kitchen sink, but no bathroom.
RM: So they were really what we call a kitchenette unit, today.
EE: Right.
RM: What did they rent for?
EE: I'm wanting to say $1 a night, but I can't remember.
RM: And if you brought your own bedding did you get cheaper?
EE: Well, maybe that was the $1 price and maybe it was $1.50 or $2 if the bedding was furnished.
RM: Why would you bring your own bedding? Was that fear of bedbugs, or what?
EE: Well, maybe you'd stop someplace and they wouldn't have one with bedding.
JG: Traveling on the roads and highways, and with the automobiles that they had in those days, you never knew for sure if you were going to get to the next destination. You might have to camp out overnight some-place, so most everybody did carry some bedding and some camping facilities in the event that they had to.
RM: Yes. Were the cabins a frame construction?
EE: Yes, and stucco.
RM: And your dad had them built with local help there?
EE: Yes. He had to borrow the money Ä I remember hearing this story Ä from Mr. James Ryan. He had the money in town. He had the ranch and he had the money.

RM: Where was the ranch?
EE: Where was that ranch?
JG: The Ryan ranch? Well, it encompassed everything from north toward Pioche (which at the time we remember was the Yoacum property), all the way down to the Conway property. That was a big ranch.
EE: Oh, wow! That was a big ranch.
JG: I've often wondered about Ä and would love to know the story of Ä the effort that Jim Ryan put into the success of putting that all together. And then how it got away from them in successive years.
RM: It's been broken up now?
EE: Oh, yes.
JG: There's nothing left of it, really, to speak of.
RM: What was it? A cattle ranch?
JG: Yes, they had a lot of cattle that they ran, and they also had a tremendous amount of alfalfa, and hay of all kinds Ä straw hay as well as alfalfa hay. In my earliest recollections in Caliente there were still fields that were green down below the edge of town that went all the way down through to the Conway ranch.
RM: You mean, going north?
JG: No, that would be going south. Going north was more of the hay-type fields. There was that Culverwell field on the right-hand side of the valley going up there, and then the Yoacum property on up beyond that. But it was my understanding that at one time Jim Ryan's spread ran all the way from the Yoacum property Ä what was then the Yoacum property Ä down to the Conway property. Do you remember the old Ryan home down the canyon on the right-hand side as you turned south from the bridge?
EE: Just vaguely.
JG: Over on the right-hand side of the hill they had the big Ryan . . . and then it became the Duffin home after the Ryan home. But that was the home ranch in the days that he built that dynasty.
EE: Where the Duffins lived? Not near Caliente proper.
JG: No, no. If you go down the canyon from Caliente, over on the right-hand side there was a big ranch house set up on the foothill and that was the old original Ryan home, from what I understood.
EE: They had lots of money. Anyway, they sold that property or whatever and their cattle, and I recall as a child hearing the story that my folks borrowed the money from him to build that motel (so called) and paid 12 percent interest. Now <u>that</u> was a <u>lot</u> in those days.
RM: It took a lot of courage to do that in the Depression, didn't it?

EE: It really did, didn't it?
RM: What was he thinking, I wonder? Did he see a lot of travel on the road there?
EE: Yes. Because he was also on the highway. He was out promoting Caliente all the time, my father was. I mean, we traveled places to go to all kinds of meetings and Highway 93 was "A-number-one" on the list. And at 2 bits a day . . . I said I traveled over that cutoff Ä the Sunnyside cutoff Ä coming back from Oregon and one time I said, "My dad'd turn over in his grave if he knew I was on this road." Because he fought it for years. You see, that cutoff cuts off Caliente and Pioche.
RM: Oh, yes, right.
EE: Yes! It's terrible! It never should have happened. Some Republican did that. [Laughter]
RM: I wouldn't be surprised. [Laughter]
EE: That's a fact.
RM: What other kinds of things do you remember from your earliest years in Caliente?
EE: I remember how I just loved all those old guys. We had more characters in Caliente than you can possibly imagine. And I used to play on the sidewalks in front of the shops Ä the theater and the post office and the pool hall, and all down that street, the barber shop and whatever. That's where I would play because that's where my dad was, and we lived on a hill and you couldn't ride your tricycle on the hill, so I would ride it down there. I spent lots of time in the post office. And we had all these old characters, and we loved them all, didn't we, Jim?
JG: Yes.
EE: They were drunks and dirty and everything, but they were always good to us kids.
RM: In what way?
EE: They would stick their hands in their pockets . . . we'd walk by and say, "Hello, Bull!" There was this man Ä he was a Japanese (I thought he was Chinese), but he'd pat me on the head and reach in his pocket (he was a gambler) and give me a handful of money, and away we'd go. And they were all just nice! I can remember my cousin coming from California to visit, and we'd start down the sidewalk and she'd see all of these old characters and she'd go way out in the street around Ä they scared her to death; but they were all my friends. They were part of our childhood, and they were great. It was just a fun time.
RM: How would you describe the role of women, and how women were treated and so on at that time?

EE: Well, women were homemakers. That was it, mainly. Aunt Hazel was, as Ralph said, a free-thinker and she did lots of interesting things, but she was a great homemaker, also, as well as being a wonderful teacher. My mother's role certainly was as a homemaker.

RM: Women were a lot safer in those days, weren't they?

EE: Oh, I think so.

RM: They didn't worry about being attacked like they do now, did they?

EE: No. But no one did.

RM: And the children were safer, weren't they?

EE: Children were safe . . . even my children were safe, growing up in Las Vegas. I was thinking about it the other day. Twenty years ago, my kids would go down Eastern to Sahara, and beyond Sahara there was nothing but desert. They would say, "Mom, we're going to the Sahara Desert."

And I would say, "Have a good time." They'd get on their bikes and go, and they'd build forts and ride all over the desert and I didn't worry about them. You know, people protected children in those days.

RM: Yes. Well, they respected them, too.

EE: Yes, they did. But they protected them. If they'd seen anyone hurting a child, someone would've come to the rescue. It's the saddest thing that's happened in this country. Because we enjoyed a wonderful freedom.

RM: Did people lock their doors in Caliente?

EE: No.

RM: Even though there were a lot of transients coming through in the '30s, you still didn't lock your doors.

EE: Right. I can remember when I was 5 or 6, because we were still up on Spring Heights, when men came knocking on the door and, "Can I chop some wood?" or, "Can I work for something to eat?" And my mother never, ever turned anybody away. That was just part of growing up at that time in our life. As Ralph said, people came through on the freight trains, and you would help them.

RM: What do you recall about going to school?

EE: Well, I loved school. We've already talked about sports; girls were just as involved in sports as boys were.

RM: They were?

EE: Oh, yes.

RM: What were their sports?

EE: I played baseball and basketball.

JG: But you have to remember, Elaine, you were somewhat of a tomboy.

EE: Yes, I was. And I was a real good ball-player Ä basketball and baseball. [Laughs] And I loved it. It

was wonderful. I don't remember anything negative about my childhood at all.

RM: In thinking about the children that you went to school with, what happened to them? Most of them left Caliente, didn't they?

EE: Yes.

RM: And the reason was, what Ä jobs?

EE: Well, jobs, mainly. And they would leave to further their education, or get a job, and most of them never returned.

RM: Did most of the girls marry local fellows?

EE: No. That's interesting, too. Ralph and I were talking about this not so long ago and he said, "Do you realize that none of the kids, with the exception of Donald Phillips and Dorothy Miller at the time (there were a couple others) married childhood sweethearts or high school sweethearts. The rest of us all . . . "

RM: Why do you think that is?

EE: I don't know. My own personal [chuckles] opportunity was . . . I was going to go away to business school, which I did in June of '42.

RM: Where did you go?

EE: Sawyer School of Business in Westwood, in Southern California. Pat McCarran at that time was still in office, and the big plan was that I was going to go back to Washington, D.C., after I finished school and go to work. (He and my dad had cooked this one up.) I did want to be a court reporter, and I was going to be the world's best. But in February of 1943, my father passed away. Now I was only 18 years old, and this was a traumatic, traumatic, traumatic thing for me. I came home, and I just felt like my mother couldn't be there alone.

RM: So you felt you had to stay with her.

EE: She insisted that I go back and finish school. And I went back and tried, but I just couldn't concentrate on it. I was very, very emotionally undone and I didn't want her in Caliente by herself. I felt she was by herself. So I came back, and I said, "I have to stay here with you. I can't Ä maybe later Ä but right now, I can't"

At that time the Union Pacific Railroad was hiring women, because all the men had gone to war. And I went over to the storehouse. In the railroad yards they had what they called storehouses where they stored all the parts for the engines and so forth. And one of the girls was going to go visit her husband who was in the war, and she was

the storekeeper's secretary, and they said, would I like to fill in a little bit while she was away.

"Oh, sure, I would," because I really wanted a job. There wasn't anything to do in Caliente if you didn't have a job at that time, that's for sure. Because you were past all the kid stuff. So I went to work and that was a very interesting experience. And when she returned, there was a vacancy working out, unloading freight cars and stuff. And he said, "Do you want that job?"

And I said, "Yes, I do." I had to go over and buy overalls and boys' shoes and get dressed up for this kind of work. And you had to wear gloves and so forth. I went to work with my hair all tied up in a bandanna. And the first day we were unloading brick [laughs] from a freight car.

RM: I've done that; that's a terrible job.

EE: I did this all day. I was supposed to get off at 5:00, I believe. At 4:00 I walked in and sat down, and my boss looked at me (he called me "Dafin" Ä my name was Daphne Elaine, so he called me Dafin) and he said, "Dafin, I think you'd better go home." I don't know what I looked like, but I guess . . .

I walked in the front door of my house, and my mother was sitting at the dining table writing. She looked up and saw me and she said [shrieking], "Elaine! What has happened to you!" I just fell on the couch, and I didn't move. She said, "You're not going back there."

And I said, "Mother, I'm going if I have to go on a stretcher, because no one will believe I'll come back and do this. And I will do it!" And I did do it, and it was one of the most fun times I ever had.

RM: How long did you work there?

EE: Not very long. Maybe 6 months, or maybe 4 months.

RM: So you worked at that hard labor?

EE: Oh, yes! [Laughs] We worked really hard, but we had so much fun! We just laughed a lot and had such a great time. There were a lot of gals working over there, you know. It was just a really, really fun time. And that's when I met my husband. My mother had said, "I will lease the motel and you and I will go back to Southern California, and you will finish school."

So I said, "OK, if you'll go with me and we get an apartment, then I'll finish school." So that was our plan. Now, she had made arrangements to lease the motel for a year for me to get finished. And in the meantime, I met this man. And like my father, when I saw him I said, "I will marry that man." He more or less thought

the same thing, I guess, because we had been going together for a week and he asked me to marry him.

RM: I'll be darned. Did you meet him at a dance there?

EE: No, I met him in a bar. [Laughter] Now, this is a story, too. I wouldn't have been in that bar because my mother wouldn't have allowed it in the first place, and I wasn't of age in the second place, but she happened to be out of town because my sister Bernice was having a baby and my mother had gone to be with her. A friend and I had gone down to the Union Pacific depot to eat.

## CHAPTER NINE

EE: As I was saying, my mother was out of town to take care of my sister when her girl was born, and my friend and I had gone down to the depot to eat, and on our way back somebody stuck their head out of what was then the 93 Club and said, "Come on in, we're celebrating Ida Mae Thompson's birthday!"

And I said, "I don't think I'd better go in there." My friend wasn't sure she should, either, but we decided, well, we'd just go in and say happy birthday and leave. So I'm sitting up to the bar Ä now, I'm not having anything to drink at this time, and I'm just sitting there. Everybody's having a good time, and I'm enjoying it, too, but I'm not drinking. I'm just sitting leaning on the bar like this, and this handsome man walks through the door, looking like a million dollars, and I said, "Oh, my god!" It was just like a bucket of water thrown on me. "That man is for me!" I didn't even know his name! He walked in and said hello to people and walked down to the end of the bar, and I walked down and I said, "My name's Elaine Denton."

He told me what his name was, and later that evening we all went out to the Cove and I went to tell him that we were all going out to the Cove.

RM: The Cove was what, now?

JG: Oh, it was a little roadside bar and . . .

EE: Roadhouse.

RM: North of town, or south?

EE: North.

JG: Towards Panaca about 3 miles.

EE: It was called the Cove Tavern. There was a dance floor and a bar, and they had food there also. We all went out there and we started talking and that was the beginning of the end of my being single.

But my mother (god bless her!) in the meantime had leased the motel to take me back to school. And to this day, I marvel at it. She never once said a word. She had to get out of her house, now! So this is September. We moved to California, she and I, but Bill and I became engaged just prior to that. She had to be gone a whole year, and I got married down there on November 19, 1943, at the Little Church of the Flowers at Forest Lawn. My mother had to live with her mother and 2 of my sisters (at that time Alyce and her mother and dad were living down there), so that's what she did. And to the day she died, she never did say, "Elaine, look what I had to do because of you." Not once!

RM: But she moved back after that?
EE: Yes, she came back after the year. But I didn't go back to school; I got married and came back to Caliente.
RM: She was basically living off the motel, then, after your father died, wasn't she? That was her source of income.
EE: That's right. So that was an interesting thing about her, I thought.
JG: She was really a sweet lady.
EE: Yes, she was. A special, special lady. There was something that I was thinking about that I was going to tell you about my dad. As we've already said, he was prominent in politics, and that was exciting for me, because that was another thing I truly wanted to get involved in. I liked it a lot. I loved knowing what was going on and watching it happen. Because it would happen right there in our living room. They'd talk about it, then you'd watch it all happen. Now that is exciting! It was a fun thing, and I always thought I would get involved in politics and I had fully intended to. Had I had any cooperation from my husband at all, I would have. But he did not go for it. He did not like it, he didn't want to get involved, and it was real hard for me to just leave him and go say, "I'm going to go do this because this is what I want to do." Therefore I backed off.
RM: Well, your grandmother ended up in Southern California, didn't she?
EE: Yes, she did. She had to have been a very, very bright woman, because she lived like a queen in Southern California, all from that store in Delamar and Caliente. She had to have made marvelous investments Ä she had lots of stock.
RM: When do you think she moved to Southern California?
EE: I don't ever remember her being in Caliente, so she had to have moved down there before I was born.
RM: Whereabouts did she live in Southern California?
EE: She was on Fourth Avenue off of Jefferson.
RM: Oh, right downtown!
EE: Well, yes, it would be now. At that time, it was a very, very beautiful neighborhood. I have a cousin whose son went to USC, and he rented a home in that area after she died, before my aunt left there, and it was all becoming a black area. It was very nice at that time, and it was a fun place to go visit. She was a very, very bright lady.
There isn't much said about my grandfather and that's a strange thing, but in those days if there was anything that wasn't just the way you wanted it to be, you didn't talk about it, ever! They said he was ill. And what

that means, I do not know. To this day, I do not know. But he died in Caliente; he's buried in Caliente. Then after that Ä and I don't know how long after that Ä she moved, but it had to have been before I was born in '24.

RM: What else do you recall about your involvement with Caliente, growing up there? Teachers in school . . . ?

EE: Well, I really loved my teachers. They were very special people I thought; didn't you Jim? They were very special people in the community as well as in the school. And it was a great time. I loved going to school; I loved everything that went on. I just had a good time. My dad was very much involved in the community in every sense of the word.

RM: What were some of the community organizations when you were growing up?

EE: There was a Rotary Club after a fashion. When did Rotary start there, Jim? Do you remember?

JG: In 1935. A Rotary Club from Las Vegas came up to Caliente and chartered it. My dad was a charter member.

EE: I remember that he was, yes. And then they had the Odd Fellows and the Rebekahs that my mother and dad both belonged to, and of course Eastern Star and Masons; the usual.

JG: There was a Legionnaires group there.

RM: American Legion?

EE: American Legion. There were always nice things going on in the community. I think I got involved in everything I could get involved in. A wonderful thing about the elementary school was that every kid got to be a part of everything. Every year there was a big play, generally at Christmastime. And then there would be an operetta sometime during the year. I sang, and I did participate in most plays Ä I loved being in plays; I loved being in everything. Every child in that school was involved in the Christmas program. The teachers worked so hard, and of course the children, too, and the mothers made costumes, but every child was involved and it was just wonderful. There were no few kids; it was <u>everybody</u>. That was another beautiful part of going to a small high school. There were only 250 of us from the 3 towns in high school, so you could be involved in everything you wanted to be involved in.

RM: What did you do for health care in Caliente when you were growing up? Was there a dentist?

EE: Yes, Quanah McCall was his name, and he was our dentist. He later came to Las Vegas and when I moved out here, of course that's who I went to. And his dad was the doctor.

He was a great old gentleman also. They were really great people.

RM: What about hospitals? Was there a hospital or a clinic or anything?

EE: There wasn't a hospital.

RM: The McCalls were in Pioche, weren't they?

EE: Before Caliente?

RM: Oh, they came to Caliente?

JG: Yes. Since we talked the other day, I've remembered the name of my first grade teacher, a Devlin girl from out in a rural area. She's the one who married Quanah.

EE: Oh, Grace! That's right, yes.

JG: Grace and Quanah later moved down here to Las Vegas, but Grace Devlin was the first love of my life when she was my first grade teacher in Pioche.

RM: Did most of the kids who left Caliente end up in Vegas?

EE: A lot of them did.

JG: A lot of them became involved with the railroad and came to Las Vegas.

EE: Right. My husband was an engineer on the railroad. That's why he was in Caliente.

RM: Tell me about being an engineer's wife.

EE: It's quite an adjustment, I'll tell you that. You have to be a good short order cook, because they're on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And that hasn't changed; my youngest son . . .

RM: Even when they had seniority?

EE: Yes. If you got enough seniority, when they had passenger trains, that was the plum. But it took a good many years before you got to that point.

RM: How much notice did they typically give you?

EE: An hour and a half.

RM: No kidding.

EE: No kidding. And it's still the same today. [Laughs]

RM: How long was a shift?

EE: It didn't go by shifts; it was miles. You travel from . . . for example, in Caliente it was helper work, so they'd go down the canyon and they might be back in 2 or 3 hours, and they might be gone for 8 hours. It depended on if the train that they were called for was on time and all that sort of thing. When they took the yards out of Caliente we moved to Las Vegas, and then he was on a run, originally from Las Vegas to Caliente, and then they changed that to Milford, Utah. So then they'd be on the train to Milford. If you were on a passenger train you got up and back in a hurry, but if you were on a freight job, you might be gone 2 days. But, when you came home, you were home for a couple of days, so that

part wasn't so bad. That's not true today Ä they don't allow them to have that much time at home anymore Ä but that's the way it was then.

RM: So most of the time they didn't stay away at night Ä it was just up and down the canyon.

EE: Well, on helpers out in Caliente, yes.

RM: And that's mainly what it was?

EE: In Caliente, yes. When we got married, that's what it was.

RM: What about when they put the diesels on in place of the steam engines?

EE: That was a sad day! Those steam engines were gorgeous, beautiful, big things.

RM: They didn't need the helpers then, did they?

EE: Yes, it did away with the helpers. That's why we moved to Las Vegas.

RM: That's really what did Caliente in, isn't it?

JG: That's right.

EE: Yes. And they could go farther in a shorter length of time so the terminal point, then, was Milford.

JG: They could put a couple or 3 extra diesel units on the train and there was no need to bring a helper in to get on the other end.

RM: Would they call your husband any time, day or night?

EE: That's right, and it's still that way. My youngest son is a locomotive engineer in La Grand, Oregon, and it's still the same way today.

RM: Just any time, day or night, they can call them?

EE: Right. But now they can carry beepers or phones, you know, where then you had to be by a phone Ä you'd have to sit home all day long. If you were expecting a call, you might sit there from morning until night before that call came, or if you were going to leave your house, you had to tell them where they could get in touch with you so they could call you there.

RM: So you're basically a slave to your job.

EE: Exactly. That's why our vacations were always so important. We'd plan our vacations carefully from one year to the next. And boy, we'd have a good vacation! [Chuckles] But I never felt it was that bad or that hard. One thing that is nice about it, that you can't do with most jobs Ä you can lay off. You don't get paid of course, but you can lay off to take some time. Like we'd go to Pioche and visit the Gottfredsons for a few days.

RM: So you got married in Southern California and then moved right back to Caliente?

EE: Yes.

RM: And your mother moved back, too?

EE: Yes. When the year was up. Then we moved to Las Vegas and eventually my mother did also. She just lived a few blocks from us, and it was really nice to have her closer Ä we could kind of watch out for her and have her nearby. Then my husband became road foreman of engines, which is working as an official for the railroad. We moved to Milford, Utah, for a year, and then back to Las Vegas again for a few more years.

RM: Can you think of anything else about growing up there in your early years?

EE: There's something I was going to say about my father Ä and I think this would have applied to anybody there, including Jim's dad. These cowboys would come to town, and maybe they didn't get their ride back.

RM: You mean real cowboys from rural Nevada?

EE: I'm talking real cowboys who had gotten a ride from down the canyon, and then they maybe had one drink too many and didn't get their ride back Ä they just had to have one more for the road. I can remember they'd come knocking on our door, maybe 1:00 - 2:00 in the morning. My dad would go to the door and [shouting], "Les, I missed my ride down the canyon . . . " I remember Bucky Rice especially Ä this was one of our town characters. My dad would get his clothes on and drive him down the canyon. There was just a caring about everybody. Everybody cared. It was such a nice thing, I think.

RM: Yes. Now nobody cares, do they?

EE: They don't seem to. In fact, if you smile at somebody in the grocery store, they look at you like there must be something wrong with you, and it makes me feel bad. I will not stop doing that. But it makes you feel kind of sad that they can't even accept a smile.

RM: My saying is that the rarest thing in Las Vegas is a smile.

EE: That's the truth. I was pumping gas the other day and this man smiled at me and I came back and said, "I want to thank you for that smile."

RM: Yes. Most of the time if you smile at somebody they think, "Well, now what's he after?"

EE: I know. I think it's very sad.

RM: Yes, it is. How did the war change Caliente?

EE: It took all our young men away. There were an awful lot of young men from Lincoln County who were killed in that war. It seemed like a lot for the size of our county population-wise. Do you remember how many?

JG: Right off hand, I can think of 5 or 6 from our high school. Tony Mathews, the Campbell kid from Pioche . . .

EE: Dale Edwards, Chan Hall . . .

JG: . . . and Bonnie Kromer's husband . . .
EE: Louie Price.
JG: Louie Price. They were all wonderful young people.
EE: It was a real tragedy in our little county.
RM: Can you think of anything else that stands out in your mind about your life there after you were married?
EE: Jim married this gal named Faye who I just loved. There were lots of young couples around there when the war was over, and we would have lots of good times. For example, the guys would all go out and hunt rabbits. And there was one fellow, Bud Duffin, who was especially good at baking biscuits in a dutch oven over the fire. These guys would go out and shoot rabbits and then we'd all go up on the summit out of Caliente towards Las Vegas and have a big cookout and have dutch oven biscuits and fried rabbit.
RM: Oh boy, that sounds good!
EE: Well, it was fun! You made your own fun. We played lots of cards. I can remember when we had left Caliente and we came home, say in deer hunting season, or just any time. We'd go to my mother's and a poker game would start. People would hear about it and it was just like a saloon! [Laughs] People were dropping in all day long to sit in on the game! We had lots of fun.
JG: Elaine, do you remember the frogs' legs in those fries that we had up on the mountain? Do you remember those pans full of frogs' legs?
EE: Oh, frogs' legs. There's nothing better than frogs' legs.
RM: Where did you get the frogs?
JG: Right there in the creek north of Caliente.
RM: There were that many?
JG: Yes. We used to go out at night, and we'd shoot them with a .22. The frogs' heads would be sticking up above the water and we'd shoot the head off with a .22 and then wade out and get them.
RM: Were they big frogs?
JG: Oh, they were nice big long frogs.
EE: Like a little thinner chicken leg.
RM: I'll be darned. And they're good?
EE: Oh, frog legs are good.
JG: They were the big bullfrogs that we used to produce in Caliente. And, boy, were they good!
EE: Oh, yes. But those are the kind of things that always went on. And I can remember on Christmas Eve all of the Dentons would come to our house to spend Christmas Eve and to have dinner. We always opened our gifts on Christmas Eve because my father wanted to open the post

office on Christmas morning, just in case a package came in that somebody didn't get.

RM: Oh, isn't that sweet.

EE: The family would all come Ä cousins, aunts and uncles and everybody Ä to our house, and we'd all open our gifts. And of course the children all had gifts from the different families to open as well. I remember what a fun time that was. The rest of them then would have their Christmas on Christmas morning but my dad would go open the post office. They all came to our house on Christmas Eve. And there was another cousin there, Caroll Miller and his family. He had the lumber yard and hardware store.

RM: What did Christmas Day consist of? Did you have a dinner and all?

EE: Oh, yes, all the usual things.

RM: Did the Denton family get together for any other holidays?

EE: We'd get together and go to each other's homes for dinner back and forth; I remember that. But for the whole family to get together Ä I don't remember us doing that, except at Christmas Eve.

RM: Not Thanksgiving or Easter or anything like that?

EE: No. We might go to one home or another Ä maybe we'd go to Ralph Denton's house for Thanksgiving; I do remember doing that. But when <u>everybody</u> got together, it would be Christmas Eve, always. That was the annual thing.

JG: Our family did the same thing she's talking about. We had Christmas Eve together and then Christmas you went your own way with your own family.

AG: I remember when I was little, we went to Caliente in the summers to spend time with my grandparents. My grandmother had a washroom where she did the motel laundry. It was out in the back, by the public facilities. And she had an Indian lady named Queenie who helped her. They used to put the sheets in the hot water and they would have to take them out and put them in the blueing, and then they'd have to wring them through a wringer and hang them on the line, and then they'd mangle iron them.

EE: Yes, I remember doing that. You would not put a sheet on a bed that wasn't ironed.

AG: And everything had to be hung on the line.

RM: I've wondered where the term "mangle" comes from.

EE: That was the name of the machine that you fed the sheets into. But we did it by hand for a long time before we got the Mangle.

RM: Did you do it with those old stove-heated irons?

EE: I didn't; that was before my time. I can remember living up on Spring Heights when I was a really little girl, and that is the way they ironed. But by the time we moved down where the motel was, we plugged in the iron.

AG: Then there were times when I'd go up to stay in the summertime (I used to call my grandmother "Gaye") and we'd get up in the middle of the night and go for a walk. It'd be so warm. We'd walk around the park, and there were times when we stopped in to see Ralph's mother. She'd be sitting up and reading and we'd go in and visit for a little, while we had on our robes and nightgowns.

RM: Is that right. You could do that, in those days.

AG: Just wandering around all over town and we'd stop and visit at 10:00 or 11:00 at night, and then go home. It was just so easy, pleasant and fun.

EE: It was such a nice, easy life. You weren't afraid.

RM: If you were going to write a history of Caliente, what would you name it?

EE: "My Wonderful Life in Caliente," I guess.

RM: No, I mean for a history of the town. Caliente, colon, then what would you say?

AG: Easy living.

EE: [Chuckles]. That's good, Alyce.

AG: It was prosperous, in its day.

EE: Boy, that's a toughie. Jim ought to be good at this. This is his forte.

AG: OK, Jim, do it.

JG: You might say, "Caliente: An Early-Day Railroad Town."

RM: Good; yes.

JG: And that's what it was. That's what caused Caliente to begin to . . .

EE & AG: That's right.

RM: Or, how about, "A Frontier Railroad Town?"

JG: Any combination of those words, but to give an effective play on words, yes. And there were so many problems that they had that centered in the Caliente area during an era before we were involved there. The folklore of the town came down through many and various sources, and I remember so many stories of early-day floods and washouts of the railroad down through the canyon; how they had to finally relocate the roadbed up on the side of hills because it seemed like every year there was a segment of that old roadbed that would get flooded and washed out and they'd have to go in and rebuild it. It was a tough world down through there in those days. They didn't have the machinery Ä the mechanical ability Ä to go in and rebuild the rail beds that would be down.

## CHAPTER TEN

AG: I think this might be a good story to tell. As Elaine said, people used to knock on the door and need work a lot of the time, so her mother would put them to work. One time this man knocked on the door and he needed money, so she had him dig some ditches out in the back. A year or two after that, my folks and I were living in Carson City. Well, Gaye came up to visit us in Carson City and we went out to the prison to take a tour of the prison. That's when Jack Fogliani was the warden out there; he happened to be a friend of the family. He took us through the prison and we were walking through looking at all these things and this man yelled, "Mrs. Denton! Mrs. Denton! Hi!"
She said, "Oh hi, so-and-so! How are you?" They stood in the middle of the prison and had the nicest chat. And he's the guy who had dug our ditches in the back yard.
She said, "What are you doing?"
"Well," he said, "as a matter of fact . . . " [Laughter]
At the same time, everybody liked everybody, regardless.

JG: There's a cute story about another person who lived right alongside Mrs. Denton Ä Mitch, the telephone operator. Mitch knew everything that was going on in Caliente because she had all the switch lines and her switchboard up front in her living room. Anybody who called anybody else had to go through Mitch to get to them. So she knew where everybody was.
An illustration of that happened during 1941, after the World War started Ä just after December 7. I was going to school in Salt Lake City at the LDS Business College, and I called home. This was in an afternoon, probably on a weekday. I had to get a message to my mother about some clothes I needed or something. I called Caliente and of course the call came in to Mitch's switchboard, and I said, "Hi, Mitch. This is Jimmy Gottfredson. Would you please connect me with my mother at home."
"Well, your mother isn't home." [Laughter]
I said, "Well, where <u>is</u> she?" [Laughter]
She said, "Well, she's up to Mrs. Denton's playing bridge." [Laughter]
And I said, "Would you please call the Dentons' residence so I can talk to my mother?" [Laughter]
So she connected me with Elaine's mother's house so I could talk to my mother there.

EE: That's right. Another story along the same line is, my dad would want to make a phone call to someone Ä a private call. He would send my mother down to visit with

Mitch (we just lived a few doors away). She'd plug him in and then Mother was supposed to keep her distracted while he made this call. I mean, it was a must, because she was listening!

RM: Now, who was Mitch?

EE: Flora Mitchell was her name. She had a little needlework store there Ä Bluebird Art Shop, it was called. And when telephones came in, then she got to be the telephone operator. And she knew everything. [Laughs]

RM: Did they put the switchboard in her house?

EE: It was in her house.

RM: So day or night when you made a call, she just . . .

EE: You went through Mitch, and we all understood this, of course. For example, my mother had called a friend she knew was going to Alamo, and my mother wanted her to pick up some of that wonderful cream that you have to spoon out. She asked Ruth to pick up [laughs] some cream for her when she went over to Alamo and Mitch chimed in and said, "Ah, get some for me, too, Ruth!" We didn't really think anything of it because it was just Mitch, you know. [Laughter]

JG: Yes. That was another little part of growing up in Caliente.

EE: That's part of the world of Caliente.

RM: When did they put the phones in?

JG: Probably the first phones showed up about '35.

AG: That's what my mother said.

EE: I was trying to remember how old I was . . .

JG: About '35, I think, was when the first phones got into the town and gradually, over a period of the next few years, anybody who had any wherewithal got a phone; got tied into the system.

AG: I think you were the first. The Dentons were the first, weren't they, to get the telephone in their house?

EE: Well, we had our own line into the post office up on Spring Heights, but I don't know about downtown. That's a possibility of course.

AG: I think that's what my mother said.

EE: Well, your mother would remember those things.

JG: I might just make mention of the fact that the telephone company was the Lincoln County Telephone Company, which still is there and still is independently owned. It was owned by a Pioche gentleman by the name of Jay Christian. Jay had begun Lincoln County telephone service in the very early '30s in Pioche and gradually it grew and covered the whole county.

RM: Was it the whole county including Pahranagat?

JG: Including Pahranagat; it still is.

RM: OK. Those are great stories.
[Tape is turned off for a while.]
SD: Oh, I'm Sara Denton, Ralph Denton's wife. I was just saying, I thought it was too bad that he didn't tell you 2 little instances about the Depression years at his house. One year he wanted a horse so badly, and the only thing he asked Santa for was a horse, and of course the Dentons couldn't afford to buy him a horse. So Christmas morning he gets up and his sock is filled with horse manure, and his father, who had this great sense of humor, didn't want to disappoint him that Santa Claus wouldn't fill his wishes. He said, "Son it looks like Santa Claus did bring a horse, but it looks like he got away." [Laughter]
RM: Oh, my god.
EE: And the other one was maybe that same Christmas Ä he wrapped up an axe and a mirror for Ralph's mother, and a note that said, "Hazel, you can chop wood or watch yourself freeze to death." [Laughter]
RM: Great. I've been collecting those kinds of stories from interviews. I'm going to put together a book and call it "Tales From . . . "
SD: Our daughter is a writer, and every time she comes home, she sits and just jots down some of her dad's sayings.
EE: All of our kids beg us, when we get together and start telling family stories, to tape them but we don't do it.
RM: Well, we've got some of them.
AG: Oh, I'll be thrilled to get this.
EE: Oh, gosh yes. Oh, this [is a picture of] that trip to Omaha Ä "1930." We took that old Oakland, and we had to stop every few miles on these dirt roads to change tires.

SD: I remember those days.
[Tape is turned off for a while.]
EE: Every Wednesday Queen Pete, the Indian, would come to our home to do the washing, and she'd wash on a board outside. Her youngest ones would be in one of these boards that they put the papoose on, and she'd hang them up and then the older boys would catch butterflies for me. I can remember that so well. We'd run out on the lawn and they'd take their hats off and throw them over and catch butterflies.
RM: We used to do that, yes!
EE: So Wednesday was a day I always looked forward to, because it was such fun Ä the Pete boys were coming.
[Tape is turned off for a while.]
EE: My mother said that when the flood hit in 1910 she had the table all set for dinner and my dad rushed in the

house and said, "We have to go right now." He took her and left, and they went up on the hill. I don't know who they stayed with, but they had to stay up there for a couple of days and when they came back, the dinner was still [laughs] on the table Ä everything just as they had left it. They had to leave because the town was being flooded.

RM: They thought it was going to take out the town?

EE: Right.

JG: Instead of that, what had been a flat valley floor across there became a big gorge that that flood cut. That's why you have to cross the creek now on a bridge. Before that flood, it was all flat.

EE: When Jim and I were kids, that gorge would fill up and overflow.

JG: It did in 1938.

EE: Oh yes, every once in a while. I can remember one night, the pounding on our door. We had been to a basketball game in Panaca and we had just driven over that bridge, not realizing that the creek was full to overflowing. Later that night somebody was pounding on the door, "Get out! Get out! The water's coming! The water's coming!" Again, we threw everything in the bathtub and up on the beds and took off.

RM: They would know from up above when it was really heavy, wouldn't they?

[Tape is turned off for a while.]

EE: My mother, Hazel Denton, would tell about going from Delamar to Ash Springs in a wagon for a little vacation Ä over to the Pahranagat Valley. She'd stay with some people, I believe in Hiko, and swim in Ash Springs. And we have done that Ä all of us Ä through the generations. We make it a point to take our grandchildren there, to swim in Ash Springs. I have some grandchildren who haven't done that yet, but they will, because I will see to it when they come back to Nevada again.

AG: Except it's closed to the public.

RM: It's closed?

EE: You can't even pay to get in?

AG: Not when we went to Caliente the other day. It's closed to the public, period. It's fenced up and closed.

EE: Oh, no.

JG: We're going to have to put a group together and go buy that place.

EE: I know what we can do: Floyd Lamb will take care of it, as soon as he gets to be county commissioner.

AG: Is he running? Good.

EE: He's running for county commissioner in Caliente, and that's where his political life started Ä right there. He will do something about that, I imagine Ä if it's possible to do anything. Is it privately owned, do you know?

AG: It was.

RM: It may be that they have the same problem there as they have at Warm Springs. I don't know if you've ever been to Warm Springs Ä 50 miles out of Tonopah? That used to be a lovely place where you could go for a swim, and they had a bar there and everything. We used to get our mail there. It's owned by the Fallinis up there, and they had to close the whole thing off because they cannot afford the insurance. The insurance is thousands of dollars a year. So they've had to close the whole thing down and nobody can swim there or anything now.

EE: Oh, isn't that sad. I didn't know Ash Spring was closed. I think that's terrible. When we drove by there a few weeks ago, I didn't notice.

AG: We did.