AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL AND JOHN BALLOW

An Oral History conducted and edited by
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LINCOLN COUNTY TOWN HISTORY PROJECT
LINCOLN COUNTY, NEVADA

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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 talking to Rachel and John Ballow at their home in Caliente, Nevada, March 7, 1992

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Rachel, could you state your name as it appears on your birth certificate.
RB: Rachel Josephine Schlarman Ballow.
RM: And when and where were you born, Rachel?
RB: At the time I was born, it was called Florence, but now it's a suburb of Los Angeles.
RM: Is that right. Where is it located in Los Angeles?
RB: On east 76th Street.
RM: And what was your birth date?
RB: September the l4th, 1911.
RM: And what was your father's name?
RB: Henry Joseph Schlarman.
RM: Do you recall when he was born, and where?
RB: Well, he was born in Germany.
RM: Do you recall his birth date?
RB: It was April the 1st, I believe, or 2nd.
RM: Do you know what year?
RB: No, not really.
RB: What was your mother's maiden name?
RB: Rachel Ismae Ralston.
RM: And do you know when and where she was born?
RB: She was born in, I believe, San Buenaventura, California.
RM: Is that right. How many brothers and sisters did you have?
RB: There were 9 of us altogether.
RM: Which one were you?
RB: I was the third child. I had a brother and a sister older than me and then 2 brothers and 3 sisters, younger.
RM: You told me you didn't stay in California too long after you were born, did you?
RB: No. When they had that 1910 flood here it washed everything out on the railroad. My dad worked for a fellow by the name of Johnny Enis in California, and they brought him out here to work on the bridges. He was working on the piers down in San Diego, I believe, and they brought him up here to help rebuild the bridges that were washed out. He came out to the state of Nevada in 1911 to work on the railroad.
RM: And then what happened?
RB: Well, he stayed out here and was a section foreman on the railroad, up until I believe it was 1929. They promoted him to roadmaster, and he was killed by a train just a couple of days before Christmas in '29.
RM: Did he move his family up here?

RB: Yes. We came up here on my third birthday, in 1914.
RM: Where did you live when you came up here?
RB: The first place we lived was at Carp. We got off of the train there and there weren't hardly any houses there at all. We lived in a tent for one month, and then they sent him out as a section foreman and he moved us to a place called Byron Ä but that's out in Clark County.
RM: And it was a stop on the railroad?
RB: There was just a passing track there.
RM: How many families were there, do you know?
RB: In Byron?
RM: Yes.
RB: I think there were 3 Mexicans who worked for him and then, of course, us.
RM: Most of the hands on the section were Mexicans, is that right?
RB: Yes. At that time it was hard to find white people who would lower themselves to take that kind of a job.
RM: Yes, that was hard labor; that was hard work.
RB: [Laughing] Yes, that hurt.
RM: How many families were there at Carp? Do you remember Ä you were so young.
RB: Yes, I was only 3.
RM: How long did you stay at Byron?
RB: We only stayed there about 8 months, I think. Then we moved down here to Stein, where those buildings are. Just the walls are there, and the reason they're there is because there's a landmark built in one of the walls in the building. They were going to tear it down but they wouldn't let them because of the landmark.
RM: Did your older brother and sister go to school at any of these places Ä Byron or Carp or Stein?
RB: They started school at Stein.
RM: How long did you stay at Stein?
RB: We didn't stay at Stein too long. I think it was probably about a year, and then we moved. Dad had a chance to buy a ranch from a track walker. This man wanted to leave and he had a squatter's right on this piece of ground down there. He sold it to Dad, I believe for $400.
RM: What is a track walker?
RB: They go up and down the track. At that time they had little what they called speeders . . . there'd be 1 wheel here and 2 over here.
RM: Oh. They pulled a handle . . .
RB: Come to me, go from me. [Laughs]
RM: Oh, yes, right.
RM: So the guy who ran this thing was a track walker?

RB: Yes. He was selling my dad the ranch, and we went down there on the l6th of June, 1917.
RM: And where was the ranch located?
RB: It's down Rainbow Canyon along the railroad track, possibly 32 miles down from Caliente.
RM: And what was at the ranch, when you went there? Was there a building, or anything?
RB: Yes, made out of old railroad ties Ä it was a tie shack.
RM: Was it one room?
RB: Just one room.
RM: One room for all your family?
RB: Right. Well, there was just me, my older brother and sister and mother and then my brother just younger than me.
RM: Was there water there?
RB: They pumped water with a centrifugal pump out of the river onto the ground. It didn't didn't water very much ground. [Laughs]
RM: What river was it?
RB: They call it the Upper Muddy.
RM: Did it run water all year?
RB: It did at that time.
RM: It doesn't anymore?
RB: Well, it dries up when the people all take their water in up there.
RM: How many acres did your father have there?
RB: We had a regular homestead, which I think is 350 acres.
RM: Did he quit the railroad then?
RB: No, he stayed on working for the railroad. He moved to Elgin and he was section foreman there after we'd been down at the ranch for about 6 months, I think.
RM: How far was the ranch from the tracks?
RB: Well [chuckles], the railroad track goes through it. Part of the ranch was on one side of the track and part of it was on the other side.
RM: What did you raise on the ranch?
RB: We raised everything we could eat, almost, there. We had beans and potatoes and carrots and onions and cabbage and lettuce and . . .
RM: So you had a big garden?
RB: Yes, we always had a big garden.
RM: Did you raise grain?
RB: We planted grain on it, but we planted hay Ä alfalfa Ä in the grain. It was oats, I think, that he planted with alfalfa in it. When he harvested that we had to do it with a team and an old McCormack mowing machine.
RM: So you planted the oats and alfalfa together. How did you get the oats out?

RB: We just made hay out of it and fed it to the horses. We had 3 or 4 horses there, and a couple of cows.
RM: The oats don't come up the second year, do they?
RB: No, unless some of the seed drops that's mature enough to sprout.
RM: Did you raise cattle and so on there?
RB: We just had the 2 cows and then Mother started selling the calves off of the cows and she'd buy another cow.
RM: I see. Did she build up a herd?
RB: Yes, she finally had 50 head; that was all they would allow her to run down there when the Bureau of Land Management came into use.
RM: So your mother ran the ranch and your dad worked on the railroad?
RB: He worked for the railroad up to the time he was killed in 1929.
RM: Did you go to school there when you became school-aged?
RB: I went to the first grade at Stein. They had an old school they called the Red Rock Schoolhouse down at the bottom end of Stein. There's a bridge and a tunnel, but the school building is off towards the creek.
RM: Were there quite a few kids in this school?
RB: There were 2 Ackland girls and 2 Ackland boys and then my brother Bill and my sister Ena and me.
RM: How long did you go to school at Stein?
RB: I didn't go there very long because at Christmas time we had a great big snow and we couldn't go anywhere; they closed the school down. The snow was so high you couldn't [get there].
RM: What happened then?
RB: We stayed there the rest of that year Ä until the 16th of June Ä then we moved down on the ranch.
RM: And what did you do for school? How far was the ranch from Stein?
RB: The ranch we moved to is quite a ways from Stein Ä about 12 miles.
RM: Did you grow up on the ranch then?
RB: Yes, till I got married. [Chuckles]
RM: Where did you go to school when you lived on the ranch?
RB: In Elgin.
RM: Were there other ranches there at that time?
RB: There was a ranch across the way Ä it hits the corner section . . .
RM: Who was there?
RB: A guy by the name of Albert Barnett.
RM: Were there any other ranches in the area?
RB: Yes, there was the Henry ranch on down there, and Merrigers had kind of a ranch, and there was the Bradshaw ranch. And

then up this way there was the McGuffy ranch right next to the Elliott ranch.

RM: So there were ranches up and down the valleys there. Did you have grazing rights besides the land that you'd purchased?

RB: We did. We've sold all that now Ä we don't have it anymore.

RM: Tell me what life was like growing up on that ranch.

RB: Well [chuckles], we didn't mind it and we never saw anybody.

RM: The railroad would come through it though, wouldn't it? You'd see that.

RB: Yes, we'd see the trains go by. One morning we looked out and here came my dad up on a loader car. He had all the camera people and they were making a picture they called "Union Pacific."

RM: Is that right.

RB: We were so excited! We thought the train was going to run into them, but [chuckles] they were just taking the pictures of these . . .

[Tape is turned off for a while.]

RM: Tell us that story, Rachel.

RB: My brother came home and said he was sick so he crawled in bed.

RM: Was this Bill?

RB: No, Dutch Ä Oliver was his name. And Mom said, "There's a car pulled up there; go look see who it is."

I looked out the window and I told Momma, "Momma, it's the undertaker."

And that guy came out of bed with the quilts all wrapped around him and said, "I'm not dead." [Laughter]

He came down there because he'd brought a couple of boys from Utah. They'd come down there looking for work and they knew us. But, "I'm not dead." [Laughs]

RM: That's funny. Did you get into town much, when you lived on the ranch?

RB: Well, we had to go up there every day during the school year.

RM: What was at Elgin then?

RB: They had a couple or 3 operators and a maintainer.

RM: What's an operator?

RB: The telegraph operator Ä tap man. And then they had a signal maintainer and the Bradshaws lived there.

RM: Were there any stores or anything at Elgin?

RB: Rube Bradshaw built a store and ran it for 2 or 3 years.

RM: When you were a kid?

RB: Well, it was before I was married; and even after I was married he was still running it.

RM: Was it a little general store?
RB: Yes, it was a general store where you could go buy pretty near anything you wanted.
RM: Were there any other shops or buildings or anything there?
RB: He finally built a big dance hall across the track from the houses. There was a big water tank there, and trains would stop to get water so they could come on to Caliente. But they've torn that down now.
RM: What's down there now?
RB: I don't think there's anything . . .
RM: And, of course, there was a school there that you went to.
RB: Well, the schoolhouse still stands there.
RM: Was it a one-room schoolhouse?
RB: Yes, but they finally built 2 rooms on the back. They had a library, and the schoolteacher would stay in the back 2 rooms.
RM: Oh, she lived there?
RB: Right; he built it for her to live in because there were no houses to rent.
RM: How long did you go to school in Elgin?
RB: Till I graduated out of the 8th grade. At that time they had the 8th grades in the rural schools.
RM: What did you do after you graduated?
RB: I went to Las Vegas to high school for 6 months. I started in September and then Dad was killed that December, so I came back and I finished off the 9th grade in Panaca.
RM: Who did you live with in Las Vegas?
RB: My dad had a house down there of his own; they furnished the roadmaster with a house.
RM: He was a roadmaster for what part?
RB: From Caliente to Las Vegas.
RM: That was an important job, wasn't it?
RB: Yes.
RM: And who did you stay with when you went to school in Panaca?
RB: I stayed with James Wadsworth.
RM: What did you do after the 9th grade?
RB: I just stayed and helped Mother on the ranch with my little brother and little sisters. My brother Joe was there, too, but he was just 2 years younger than me. Then I got married in 1929.
RM: You got married the same year your father died?
RB: Yes.
RM: Was your dad on the road a lot with his job?
RB: Yes, he was hardly ever home.
RM: So everything was pretty much left to your mother, wasn't it?
RB: Yes, Mother did all the [ranch work].

RM: Tell the story about your sister, Rachel.
RB: Well, my little sister Barbara got mad at my mother and told her she was going to go up on the track and let a train run over her. She went up there, and if she had laid with her head over on the rail, it would have killed her, but she laid between the tracks. This helper engine [came along] Ä a helper is a lone engine they would send down to help the other trains up here at Caliente. Mom heard her a-screaming and she looked out there and she was a-standing up there in the middle of the track, just a-screaming her head off. She was in hysterics because she had gone up there and let that train run over her.
RM: And the train had just run over her!
RB: It ran over the top of her.
RM: And it didn't hurt her?
RB: No, it didn't hurt her a bit.
RM: Good thing she didn't rise up while the train was going over her.
RB: Yes. She went to sleep there, you see, and the train going over her woke her up and scared her. [Chuckles].
RM: How old would she have been then?
RB: She was about 5-l/2.
RM: How far was your house from the tracks?
RB: It's about 300 feet from the fence.
RM: Did the trains wake you up at night and that kind of thing?
RB: Well, like I told somebody, you get used to them going by and they don't bother you. When I lived in Elgin we lived right against the track Ä there was the track and then room for a road and we had 8 feet of yard there, and then the house.

CHAPTER TWO

RB: The train would stop at the ranch and they used to pick up the grocery list. And Mom used to sell them all turkeys for Thanksgiving. He'd throw off a note with the money for the turkeys and order some more turkeys (sometimes he ordered them through the mail). They'd stop there to pick up the turkeys and take them to people who had ordered them from him.

RM: In Caliente or Vegas, or . . . ?

RB: Well, some of them would be up here in Caliente and others would be in Vegas and some in Moapa.

RM: So your mother was raising turkeys?

RB: She raised turkeys and chickens. Some people would want chickens and some of them would want turkeys. One day a man and his wife came down and Mom was out there cleaning one of the turkeys to send to Vegas and they said, "Gosh, she's cruel. She just pulls the feathers off of them turkeys while they're still alive."

RM: [Chuckles] But she didn't.

RB: No, the turkey had had its throat stabbed, but it would still be kicking and flapping its wings.

RM: How did you meet your husband?

RB: I'd known him ever since he was a kid.

RM: Where did he live?

RB: He lived up at what they call the old Dooley ranch.

RM: What was his name?

RB: Carl Ballow.

RM: And you got married in 1929?

RB: Yes.

RM: What did you do after you got married?

RB: I stayed there on the ranch and he got pneumonia, and pretty near died.

RM: What was his occupation? Did he work for the railroad?

RB: Yes, he worked in the tunnels.

RM: What did he do in the tunnels?

RB: They were relining the tunnels with cement. They'd have to build the forms but they left the old forms in there and built the new ones around them. They had to muck all behind the old forms and put new forms up, and whatever they mucked out through the day they had to shoot the cement up into so the dirt wouldn't come in. While he was working there they had an accident in the tunnel and a bunch of those forms fell in and killed 2 men and broke one's back. He lived till he died up in Salt Lake City.

RM: Was your husband one of the ones who were injured?

RB: No, he happened to go out of the tunnel just as it caved in. He was mucking, and he was taking the muck out on the motor car.
RM: So he worked in the tunnels and you stayed out on the ranch?
RB: Yes.
RM: How long did that last?
RB: Well, I stayed down with my mother on the lower ranch. And then I went up and stayed with his folks Ä his mother was going to have his baby sister, and this was in 1930 Ä Mark was born in 1931, wasn't she?
John Ballow: Yes, '31 or '32.
RB: Joe was born in '32, the son who's right there [pointing]. She was born in 1931 and I went up there to stay with her.
RM: On the Dooley ranch?
RB: No, she went up to their home in Lavine, Utah. I went up there and stayed with her. The baby was born on the 15th of April and I stayed there till she was able to get up, and then I came back down here.
RM: How long did your husband work on the tunnels?
RB: Till they finished them.
RM: Did it take a couple of years, or did it take a long time?
JB: Twenty years.
RM: It took 20 years to fix the tunnels?
JB: They started on the first tunnel up here, I think it's tunnel 18, and they went clear on down to tunnel 3, all down this canyon.
RM: So there are a lot of tunnels on the railroad; I didn't realize that. Then he basically had a career on those tunnels, didn't he?
RB: The tunnels are all between here and Las Vegas, except the 2 right up the canyon here.
RM: Two north of Caliente.
JB: There are a whole bunch of them north of here.
RB: Tunnel 23, I think, is up there. Tunnels 1 and 2 are below Las Vegas.
RM: Are they long tunnels?
JB: They're varying lengths.
RM: Did they build those tunnels when they originally built the railroad or did they build them after 1910?
JB: No, they got washed out in 1910 so they put the track on high ground. At that time they built a lot of them just for single track, and those people were smart enough to know that someday they'd have some earth-moving equipment that they could use to daylight the tunnels. And if they couldn't, if they really went in the mountain solid, they made them for double track.
RM: Oh. Let's just introduce you on here Ä you're John Ballow?

JB: John Ballow, that's right.
RM: OK. And, Rachel, your husband worked on the tunnels for 20 years?
RB: Yes, then we went down into California and he worked on something down there Ä I think they were putting in a side track or something.
RM: And when did you move to Caliente?
RB: I moved up here when the boys started school.
RM: Your children?
RB: Well, they were adopted children. We adopted my daughter's son and daughter. (My daughter's the one who was here a while ago.)
RM: So you had a daughter and then you adopted her children?
RB: Yes.
RM: How many children did you have?
RB: I had 3 of my own. I had 2 boys Ä the one here was Joe, and I have another son who lives in Reno and he's executive director for the state department of agriculture.
RM: Oh, and what's his name?
RB: His name is Thomas Warren. They call him Tom up there.
RM: When did you move to Caliente?
RB: In 1975, I guess. The boy was born in '72.
RM: So you didn't come here until later years. Where did you live before that?
RB: I lived on this ranch down here . . .
RM: Now, that's your mother's ranch?
RB: No, we bought a ranch Ä the old Elliot ranch.
RM: When did you buy the Elliot ranch?
RB: In 1945.
RM: Where is the ranch located?
RB: It's down the canyon from Caliente about 13 miles.
RM: How big a ranch is it?
RB: It was 160 acres, and the grazing rights went with it.
RM: Did you want to say something, John?
JB: She was talking about Thomas. He was the youngest director of a state agriculture department for any state in the United States. He graduated from high school when he was 16, and I think he was one of the youngest ones ever to graduate out of the University of Nevada with a degree.
RM: That's impressive. Now, how did you come to buy the Elliot ranch?
RB: Well, we wanted a place so we could have a place to go to. [Chuckles]
RM: And it was an operating ranch?
RB: Yes.
RM: Was your husband through in the tunnels by then, or what?
RB: He worked on the railroad.

RM: He continued to work for the railroad? Her husband was a section foreman, John?
JB: Right, an extra gang foreman also.
RM: The extra gang foreman is what, now?
JB: That's a foreman who does work like steel relays, putting in ties, ballasts. At that time it involved anywhere from about 25 to 150 men.
RM: And he was in charge of that? How long did you keep the ranch, Rachel?
RB: We just sold what, in September?
JB: No, October the 21st is when escrow was . . .
RM: So you kept it all these years?
JB: Yes, and besides working for the railroad, I used to run a deer camp. I spent 30 years on the railroad, and when I was working for the railroad if I got any deer hunters, many times Rachel would take them out. She was quite a horseman.
RM: Tell us about running a deer camp, Rachel.
RB: Well, we had a tent and we moved it up there. There's an old cabin up there but . . .
RM: Up where?
RB: At Riggs Ä back in the hills in a westerly direction from Elgin about 10 miles.
RM: What mountain range would that be in?
JB: Delamar.
RM: And there a lot of deer up there?
RB: There used to be; there aren't any more deer.
RM: And you would take hunters up there?
RB: Yes. Sometimes they'd show up without a permit, so we'd have to buy a permit in order to take them out.
RM: You bought it from the state?
RB: We had to buy it from the state fish and game department.
RM: How many hunters would you take out in a party?
RB: Well, 2 and 3, sometimes 4.
RM: Were they people from other states or from Las Vegas or what?
RB: Quite a lot of them came up here from California. And there were some from Las Vegas, and . . .
RM: How did they find you?
RB: We had to advertise in the paper, didn't we?
JB: Yes. At that time, I used to furnish a guide service and the horse for $20 a day. And we had to guarantee them that they'd get good shooting at 150 yards, and a 4-point buck or better, or I'd take them the rest of the season for nothing. And I never did have to take one over 2 or 3 times.
RM: Is that right. How did you know where to find the deer?

JB: We ran cattle in the area and at that time there was lots of deer in what's known as Area 24 right now.
RM: Area 24 Ä is that the Test Site?
JB: No. The state is divided by a lot of areas for hunting, and that was where we'd hunt Ä they call it Area 24 now.
RM: Why were there a lot of deer then and not now?
JB: Well, mostly during the war there were no hunters Ä all the young guys and hunters and all were in the service. And Las Vegas was a very fraction of the size it is today, so there was no pressure on it. And at that time we got a lot of moisture and the feed was good and the deer multiplied and did real well.
RM: Oh. And so after the war the hunting was good?
JB: Real good.
RM: And then it deteriorated?
JB: Right.
RM: From over-hunting?
RB: Well, the deer got some kind of a disease and they died. I had some cattle in there to graze, and I went to a water hole and these deer were sick; some of them there were still a-paw; they hadn't laid down. They were sick. When I found these sick deer, I came and tried to call the fish and game director, who was Frank Groves at that time. I tried to call him collect, and he wouldn't take the call. So I went and got the money, and came back and called him and told him about these deer. And then he tried to say that he would pay for the call . . . he felt so bad he tried to cover it up and I wouldn't let him.
The next morning there at Elgin we woke up and there were veterinarians from Cal Poly out of San Francisco, and all the top veterinarians of Nevada. I took them all out there horseback. We went as far as to Riggs in a car and then I had to horse it. I took them up there and we killed several deer and took stomach samples, blood samples, and lungs and joints, and they couldn't find out what killed those deer. But from that day on the deer population has been practically nothing.
RM: What year would that have been?
JB: That had to be around '57, Ma?
RB: I think so.
JB: Right at '57; that was a droughty year.
RM: Did it kill the deer all over the state or just in that area?
JB: Just in that one area. They tested the waters from the Caliente summit to the bottom end of the Kane Springs Valley, and all the water was fit for human consumption. They took samples of all the plants and they couldn't find a plant that should have been responsible for the death of

the deer. Now, it did not kill horses, nor cows nor anything but just deer. They had some very knowledgeable men there at the time, and they seemed to think that maybe the frost or something had hit a plant that the deer were making a diet of and partially killed it where these other animals weren't eating that much of it.

RM: Oh, and it changed the plant and made it poisonous?

JB: Right.

RM: But why did it keep killing them after that?

JB: It didn't. They just died at that time, and they never came back.

RM: Why didn't they come back?

JB: The hunting pressure got worse and at that time the deer weren't migrating like they are now.

RM: Oh, they migrate now?

JB: Oh, yes Ä and a heavy storm will move them, and things like that.

RM: Tell us about hunting deer. What are some of the trackers' secrets?

JB: Really, when there are lots of deer you don't have that much of a problem getting them. The thing is that everybody nowadays wants a trophy buck. We were hunting once and we killed a deer that had 40-some-odd points Ä a cactus buck.

RM: That's got to be a record, isn't it?

JB: Well, not for a cactus buck.

RM: What is a cactus buck?

JB: It's a buck that's been injured sometime when it was a fawn, and it hurt his genetic outfit, and when the horns come out they're soft and there'd be an awful lot of points on that horn, but they're soft and flexible.

RM: So really it's just a long horn with all kinds of points on it? I'll be darned.

JB: Rachel was registered in one of those club contests down in Las Vegas and she took that head down there and she and a guy from California were tied for first place.

RM: Is that right. Are the cactus bucks pretty common?

JB: Seems like we used to see them much more than we do now. But anyway, they called a color on a roulette wheel. Her choice would have been red, but they gave the other guy the choice and he took red and it fell on black and she got the gun [as first prize]. I was sure proud of that gun. It was beautiful Ä it was a .270 and it had a big scope on it and a blond stock and everything. I had a '57 Ford touring car and I went around town and showed it to my friends and had it on the back of this Ford covered over with an old saddle blanket. When I went to show it to another friend it was gone.

RM: Somebody stole it?
JB: They stole it from me. The club where we got it from Ä the Golden Nugget Ä checked all the hock shops in Las Vegas, Cedar City and Salt Lake City. They had the numbers and everything of this gun, but they never did come up with it.
RM: Somebody's got it in their collection.
JB: I never did get to fire it.
RM: Is that right. How long did you run that deer camp?
RB: Well, 10 years.
RM: How many parties would you take out in a deer season?
JB: At that time the deer season used to run 6 weeks to 2 months, and I daresay we'd take out on an average of 3 or 4 parties a week.
RM: You mean a party would only stay a day or two?
JB: Right.
RM: Oh, I thought they went out for a couple of weeks.
JB: They went out for deer, you see.
RM: Oh, they'd get their deer and be back in a day or two.
JB: Yes.
RM: That must have been a pretty good source of income.
JB: It helped. That was a 39-inch spread.
RM: Wow. John is showing us a picture here of a deer head with a 39-inch spread. How did you get into the deer camp business?
JB: I liked to hunt deer and I had a lot of friends who liked to hunt them and they had friends from out of the area.
RB: They'd come up and want to go out hunting and he'd take them out and we wouldn't get anything out of them, so we started charging them.
RM: So you'd furnish the horse, the camp and . . . ?
JB: The horse and the guide service. We couldn't furnish the eating part or anything because you've got to go through the health department to do that. In other words, you can't put up a camp and feed everybody; they bring their gear and cook themselves.
RM: I'm curious to know how you'd find deer. I used to go deer hunting and I never had any luck.
RB: We had a little horse and we called him Amigo. We'd go up there and that horse knew when you were going to run onto some deer. I don't know Ä he smelled them, I guess. He'd be pointing up his head and looking around to see where it was.
RM: Is that right? So he was kind of your tracking dog, wasn't he?
JB: Then to kill the deer you make drives Ä put one guy on a point, then the rest of you come up through the trees and the brush and start them going in that direction.
RM: Oh. Behind him?

JB: Yes. And we always tried to push the deer uphill.
RM: Oh, you pushed the deer towards the guy on the point, I see.
JB: We tried to push them uphill so we'd get a better chance to get a good shot at them.
RM: Oh, I see. And you knew what area they'd be in?
JB: Right.
RM: And you could go out and get a deer in a day?
JB: Yes. Two days would be outside.
RM: And would people make reservations?
JB: Yes, and that was a very poor system. If they didn't show up, you were stuck there waiting for them with 4 or 5 head of horses. We didn't have a telephone at the ranch, so we couldn't communicate with them.
RM: How could you make reservations when . . . let's say you were going out with a party, and you had another party who was due in a day or two Ä you knew you were going to get that guy's deer that quickly?
JB: Yes, they were that plentiful.
RM: I'll be darned.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: John, why don't you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?
JB: John Ballow.
RM: And when and where were you born?
JB: I was born in old Mexico.
RM: Is that right. When?
JB: The l9th of May, 1919.
RM: What was your father's name?
JB: John Franklin Ballow.
RM: When and where was he born?
JB: He was born in Chico, California. His mother was an Englishman and his father was a Frenchman.
RM: What was his occupation?
JB: He was a blacksmith. I have a pair of spurs here that he made.
RM: You were showing them to Bambi; they're beautiful. And what was your mother's name?
JB: Bita Escamilla.
RM: And when and where was she born?
JB: She was born in Mexico.
RM: Was she Mexican?
JB: Yes. I don't really know when she was born; do you, Ma?
RB: Her birthday was June the 15th, 1882, I believe.
RM: Whereabouts in Mexico?
JB: In the state of Chihuahua.
RM: How did your father happen to meet her?
JB: My grandfather was tied up with a gold and silver operation out of San Francisco and they went into Mexico with a mining outfit and that's where he met my mother.
RM: Where were you raised?
JB: I was in Lavine, Utah, for a while, and the rest of the time I was up and down the railroad, all the way from Caliente to Tunnel 4 Ä that's below Elgin. We used to have a little 14-by-16 tent with a board floor in it; it had 1-by-12s on the outside up to about 4 feet and the rest was a tent. Then we had a little place they called a cook shack, and it was about a 12-by-14 building with a wood stove.
RM: Were these on wheels?
JB: No. Every time we moved from one tunnel to the other, they had to tear them down and take them to the next place.
RM: So you were the tunnel man all those years.
JB: Well, I was a little boy at the time; I was growing up then.
RM: Oh, you grew up in the tunnels.
JB: Yes, with my dad working there.

RM: I'm a little bit confused. Are you Rachel's first husband or . . . ?
JB: No, I'm her second husband.
RM: Was her first husband your brother?
JB: Yes Ä my older brother. They got a divorce. He remarried and then he went to Peru to work for Andaconda Copper. He went to get a hernia operation and had a heart attack and died on the operating table.
RM: Is that right? How old was he?
RB: He wasn't too old; about 57.
RM: What year would that have been?
JB: About '65.
RM: When did you and Rachel get married?
JB: In 1953.
RM: And Rachel had been living on the ranch down there?
JB: At that time, yes.
RM: I see. So you grew up then up and down the track following your father, who was a tunnel man?
JB: Yes.
RM: How did your father get into the tunnel business?
JB: I don't know, except that during the Depression it was awful hard to get a job anywhere. He was a good blacksmith and he hustled a job and they put him to work.
RM: How did he wind up in this part of the country?
JB: He came to Las Vegas first; then they moved to Lavine, Utah.
RM: Where is Lavine?
RB: Eleven miles out of Nephi, going this way.
RM: Was your family LDS?
JB: My mother got to be, but my father . . . well, I believe he did get baptized.
RB: Yes, he went over and got baptized.
RM: Was your family LDS, Rachel?
RB: No, my family wasn't anything. [Chuckles]
RM: When did your father start working on the tunnels?
JB: Gosh, it had to be '28 or '29.
RM: So at that time the railroad had decided that they were going to redo these tunnels Ä take out the timbers and put in concrete lining?
JB: Right.
RM: Why did they want to do that?
JB: Well, timber's always a fire hazard; and they wanted to make a lot of them wider, for double track.
RM: Oh. Before that, they were single track?
JB: Yes.
RM: The timing for the trains had to be right Ä otherwise they'd collide in there, wouldn't they?

JB: Well, they'd get . . . today you'd get a permit to work so many hours in between trains. This is all handled through dispatch, and it was in those days, but then it was done through the old Morse code.

RB: As they widened the tunnels, they had what they called a rip track. This motor car would go in on rip track and they'd load the muck car up with the muck and bring it out and then, of course, they'd lay some more rip track when they got enough dug out.

RM: Oh. It must have been tricky working in the tunnels, because you would have to work a little while and then stop so that a train could come through.

JB: Right.

RM: And you had to have everything cleaned up when the train went through.

JB: Right. They had flag men out there to make sure that no train came in there without their knowledge.

RM: Were they working on one tunnel at a time?

JB: Yes.

RM: So they would move the family from one tunnel to another as they went?

JB: Right, yes.

RM: Did they have a school then for you kids, or how did that work?

JB: Yes, they brought us to Etna Ä that's just below Caliente about 5 miles from tunnels 7 and 8 Ä in a little school bus. It was a double-seated Dodge car at that time.

RM: So all of the time you were up and down the track from one tunnel to another you were going to the same school?

JB: No, the railroad built another school down at tunnel 4 Ä that's west of Elgin about 5 miles.

RM: So basically they were moving a little community from one tunnel to another, weren't they? How big was this little community that was moving along?

JB: I think there were around 100 men involved in the tunnel.

RM: And how many families; were most of them single?

JB: No, there were a lot of people who lived in the same kind of outfits that we lived in all up and down the canyon.

RM: Did everybody have a tent house?

JB: Well, some of them had lumber houses.

RM: And they would move them when they moved the camp?

JB: Right.

RM: How did they move them, on the railroad or on trucks?

JB: They had little trucks. The railroad had bunkhouses and they would move for the single men. The guys with families had to provide for themselves.

RM: How many families would you say were in that traveling camp?

RB: I think there were about 7. Two of them lived in the bunk cars and . . .

JB: Oh, they had more married men. At tunnel 4 there were 15 houses at least.

RM: And they had a little school which they would move with the camp?

JB: No, and yes. And it had one schoolteacher for all the grades. The teacher at tunnel 4 was named Felton Hickman. He was a big fine-looking man weighing about 200 pounds, 6 foot 2. If any of us kids got out of line we only did it one time.

RM: He would work you over?

JB: Yes, he was the teacher; and it wasn't like today Ä he was the teacher and if your dad didn't like it, he would put him in his place, too.

RM: [Laughs] Some of those railroad men were probably pretty tough, too, weren't they?

JB: Yes, and when we took our state tests that year, we were higher than the average for the state.

RM: Is that right? Now, how long would they stay in a tunnel, typically?

JB: It all depend on the length.

RM: How long do the tunnels range?

RB: I think tunnel 4 down there was the longest one.

JB: Yes, and that's about a quarter of a mile long.

RM: And then what are some of the short ones Ä 100 feet or . . . ?

JB: No, tunnel 3 was over 100 feet but they made a cut out of it Ä they daylighted it.

RM: The idea of this town moving with the tunnels is really fascinating. Were there any stores or anything with the town?

JB: No. The tunnel itself had a commissary, and if you worked there you could get whatever you wanted, and they would take it out of your check.

RM: The single men ate at the boardinghouse, didn't they? Where did the families do their shopping? Could you get your food at the commissary?

JB: You could order it there and they would load it on a train. It ran once a week, didn't it Ma Ä the B C & H? They'd ship it out of Ogden, Utah.

RM: Describe what it was like growing up in one of those tent houses.

JB: Well, it was hard. I wouldn't want anybody to work like my mother had to work. There was a little wood stove. If you washed you had to make a fire outside to heat the water in the tub. They'd do the washing on the washboard and when they got a little richer they got a washing machine that

you had to turn by hand. And, of course, she ironed on an ironing board with a flat iron that you heated on the wood stove.

RM: She had to cook on this little stove, too, didn't she?

JB: Yes.

RM: Was it a regular wooden cook stove?

JB: Yes, just a great big old cast iron thing.

RM: Was that in this part-boards and part-tent house?

JB: No, that was in the other place that was all boards. We called that the cook shack. That's where we ate.

RM: Was it only one cook shack for all the families?

JB: No, everyone had to take care of his own. But we called that the little cook shack.

RM: It was a part of your house?

JB: They were 2 separate outfits. One was a kitchen and the other one was where we slept.

RM: How big was the kitchen?

JB: I'd say maybe 14-by-16.

RM: And it was just made out of boards?

JB: Yes.

RB: It was made out of ties, wasn't it?

JB: Well, there probably were some ties in it; it was very crude lumber. I remember that distinctly.

RM: Did the wind whistle through it?

JB: Well, I think it was windproof, but that's all.

RM: It must have been cold when that fire went out on a day like this.

JB: Yes. And there were so many of us the first one up dressed the best. [Laughter]

RM: You had a lot of brothers and sisters? How many were there?

JB: There were 8 in the family, 6 boys and 2 girls.

RM: And which one were you?

JB: I was right in the middle, really.

RM: Do you want to name them, from top to bottom?

JB: Carl, Frank, Edward, Pete, Henrietta, myself, Bob and Ellen.

RM: So your mother had a big family in this community that basically moved with the tunnels. And the family took their meals and she cooked and everything in the cook shack?

JB: Yes.

RM: What all was in the cook shack beside this cook stove?

JB: Just a little cupboard . . .

RB: And I think Frank slept in there.

JB: There might have been one of them sleep in it, too; that's all.

RM: Was there a table and chairs?

JB: Yes Ä powder box or whatever.
RM: You sat on powder boxes . . .
JB: Yes. Whatever you could come up with.
RM: Is that where you spent your evenings before you went to bed?
JB: Yes, and we played robbers and Indians and everything else outdoors in the dark and then we went to bed.
RM: You probably had kerosene lamps?
JB: Yes. There were no electric lights or anything else, and you couldn't play or anything after it got dark.
RM: Did each place have its own outhouse?
JB: Yes. That's what it was Ä it was made out of boards, and there was a hole dug in the ground and that was it.
RM: And what about the board tent house where you slept Ä what did that look like?
JB: If I remember right, it was a 14-by-16 tent with just bags in it. We hung our clothes on the wall and had a little dresser, but it wasn't anything.
RM: Was there just one for the whole family, or did you have 2, like one for the girls and one for the boys; how did that work?
JB: Well, there might have been one for my mother and the oldest sister. There probably were 2, but they weren't anything miraculous.
RM: Were they right next to the cook shack?
JB: Yes, this other building was right next to them.
RM: Did they have a stove in them?
JB: Yes, a wood heater.
RM: You burned wood, not coal?
JB: Right.
RM: Was it cold in the winter?
JB: At times it was. We always were camped along a little creek, and we always dug a little spring to get the water. Anytime you wanted a drink, you'd look in the water bucket and if there wasn't any water in it you'd grab it and run down to the spring and fill it up and come back.
RM: And they always moved where there was water?
JB: Yes.
RM: How many hours a day did your dad work in those days?
JB: Eight.
RM: Five days or 6?
JB: I'm sure it was 5.
RM: How many years did your family live in this community that moved from one tunnel to another?
JB: I'd say 7 or 8 years.
RM: Seven or 8 years; from what age to what age for you?
JB: Oh, gosh. How old was I, Ma?
RB: You were about 7 when they first went down to tunnel 4.

RM: Where did the family move then?
JB: Part of them moved up to Lavine, Utah, but the others stayed here. (I moved to Lavine, Utah.)
RM: Was your father still working for the railroad?
JB: He worked on and off during the war as a pumper on the railroad.
RM: A pumper does what, now?
JB: They would keep the water tanks full for the steam engines. At that time those engines were coal and later they got to be oil burners, but they had to have water for the steam to run the machine. And that was his job Ä to keep the tank full.
RM: Just at the one stop?
JB: Yes.
RM: How did that take all his time? Did he have to hand-pump it?
JB: No, they had a great big old one-cylinder hot head engine that ran a well.
RM: Those engines probably used quite a bit of water, didn't they?
JB: Yes. Lots.
RM: Were the tunnels done when your father quit?
JB: Yes. I think they finished tunnel 4 around '34, wasn't it, Ma?
RB: It was the year Joe was born Ä '32.
RM: So it took them about 4 years to do the tunnels?
JB: Well, it took them a lot longer than that. Really, they were going before my father went to work on them.
RM: Do you know when they started the tunnels?
JB: No, I don't. But if you leave me your address, I can find out. They've got it right in the concrete on each tunnel Ä from when a tunnel was first bored till it was completed; and they had the footage on each tunnel.
RM: This was when they were redoing them?
JB: Right.
RM: How long did your father work as a pumper?
JB: I really don't know how many years, but it was quite a few of them during the war. Then he retired from it.
RM: About when did he retire?
RB: He quit working there as a pumper when Rachel's ma passed away Ä in '52, I think.
RM: So he spent the rest of his career on the railroad as a pumper Ä was he at any one station?
JB: Yes, mostly at Elgin.

JB: In between about '58 and '63, I got a permit from the Lincoln County Commissioners to catch wild horses off the range. At that time the county commissioners could give you a permit to do that. You had to put up a $1000 property bond in the event that you hurt somebody else's horse in these traps. We caught several hundred of them from Pennsylvania, Riggs, Willow Creek and Bishop. We would sell the horses to Fost Parkinson over at Beaver, Utah, and to a guy over at Baker, Nevada Ä I can't remember his name. We would sell them for $20 apiece and the yearlings and colts for nothing Ä and many a time we would let a lead rope go with them. Today it costs the Bureau of Land Management $1600 to get a horse into an adoption camp where they can adopt it out. We did the same thing for $20.

RM: What kind of a trap did you use?

JB: We used finger traps.

RM: What's a finger trap?

JB: It's a trap made out of any kind of post with points on the end of it. They're very flexible Ä kind of on a spring Ä and a horse will force himself in it, but he can't come out against it, and the more you get in there, the more that'll go in there.

RM: OK. So you drive them into this thing . . .

JB: No. It's around a water hole and they go in themselves.

RM: Oh. So it's a fence, with this finger thing on it. What are the fingers made out of?

JB: Cedar post . . . there's nothing specific to make them out of except that they've got to be pointed on the end, so the animal can't come back against it.

RM: OK, because he has to squeeze through to get in.

JB: He can squeeze through because he's going with it. It's on a kind on a spring and that spring will give, and it'll open up to let him in but as soon as he gets in, it closes.

RM: It's a V-shaped affair (I'm trying to describe it for the tape) and these fingers are on a spring that give a little when he forces through it.

JB: We'd just use rubber inner tubes or anything that would give as a spring.

RM: And how many could you get in one of these traps?

JB: Well, we had different ones Ä we had one corral that could hold about 30 or 40 and then we had another outfit that we could only get about 20 in.

RM: And where were they located again?

JB: At Pennsylvania, Carson . . .

RM: Where's Pennsylvania?

JB: It's approximately 5 miles east and north of Elgin, Nevada. And Riggs is about 8 miles and Willow Creek would be about 12 miles from Elgin.
RM: And where were the other traps?
JB: We had one at Narrow Canyon, one at Riggs, one at Bishop and one at Pennsylvania.
RM: And how long did you do that?
JB: We did it 3 different times, 3 different years. In a year we'd get at least 150 total. We took an awful lot of horses out of this area.
RM: Did you put bait inside for them or anything?
JB: No, just the water.
RM: What about deer Ä can they get in and out?
JB: They'd get in and jump out.
RM: What did you do with the horses after you trapped them?
JB: We would truck them to the Conway ranch 2 or 3 miles west of town here, and the truckers would pick them up there. At the time we'd catch cattle in these traps, too. The cattle were 90 percent Conway's cattle and he was tickled to get them.
RM: Was it on his range?
JB: Part of it. The majority was on our range.
RM: Where was your range located?
JB: At that time we had Riggs, Pennsylvania, and Narrow Canyon Ä really we had an interest in the places where all of the 4 traps were.
RM: I see. How long did it take to fill a trap?
JB: It would all depend on the weather. We always tried to do it in the summertime when it was hot. We'd check the traps every day and we'd take out what was in them. Sometimes we'd have 5, sometimes we'd have 20.
RM: And you trucked them out of there right then?
JB: Yes.
RM: Are wild horses hard to handle when getting them into the truck and everything?
JB: Not that bad. We were set up real good; we had loading chutes on them. After a horse has been in a trap for even just a few hours, he won't hit the fence or anything.
RM: Is that right.
JB: No, you can get in there and chase him into your loading chute and load him up.
RM: And they won't kick you or attack you?
JB: No, I never heard of a horse attacking anybody anyway. In my experience you can choke them down; if you fool with them, a horse will strike you in self-defense, just because he's in trouble and he's trying to free himself.
RM: And then did they use the horses for dog food?

JB: I assume they did Ä the older ones and that Ä but there were a lot of kid horses up around the towns of Beaver, Utah, and Baker, Nevada, where we sold them.
RM: Were there a lot of mustangs here in those days?
JB: Yes.
RB: We caught 400 one year and 300 the second year.
RM: Why did you stop doing it? It seemed like a pretty good deal.
JB: Well, the BLM took over the management of the horses; and there are more horses today than there have ever been in this part of the state. At that time, we ranchers kept the number down to where the horses looked respectable. Now you can go out there and see these horses and they've inbred so much and there are so many of them that in many places they're starving themselves to death. And the rancher gets the blame for it.
RM: Right. Plus they're eating all the feed and everything.
JB: They're eating the feed that the cattle should eat; if this continues the horses will starve themselves out or get diseased and die, which always happens with anything. It used to be that you could catch these horses anytime. They would rope them . . .
RM: We used to chase them up in Reveille Valley.
JB: Yes, there were no restrictions then. And they had the National Mustang Association, and I used to take them out to chase horses on my permit. Sometimes they'd catch 4 or 5 . . . at one time there were 50 people a-horseback going up the hill west of this ranch down here.
RM: That must have been something to see.
JB: It was, it was just beautiful.
RM: Can you run a mustang down on horseback?
JB: Yes. Today's horses are a lot better blooded; they can run further and they can run faster.
RM: Is that right. Is that how you caught them when you were on horseback?
JB: Well, they'd gang up on them and lasso them. I had the permit and I got the first $2 out of a horse that was caught. Then they auctioned the horse off, and the horse would go from anywhere from $8 to Ä I think the highest one sold for $12.
RM: Is that right. And the horses are overrunning the range now, aren't they?
JB: Very much. They are overrunning the range and the cattle are getting the blame for the deterioration of it, which is wrong.
RM: How do you feel about this whole effort? Some people think they're trying to eliminate the cattlemen in Nevada.

JB: Well, I took them to court, fought them and they beat me, [even though] they admitted they lied, and I've tried to be nice with the BLM, and I've failed both ways.
RM: Do you think the day is coming when there won't be any range cattle in Nevada?
JB: No, I don't. These ranchers own the water Ä they have a deed for the water just like you have a deed for your house. The rancher has sole control of his water and that's the reason I don't think they can kick them off completely; but they are bringing in elk, which have never been here.
RM: They're bringing in elk?
JB: Yes. And they're bringing in antelope, which haven't been in this part of the county . . . and that all goes back to the private water these ranchers own.
RM: So these game are watering on the ranchers' water.
JB: Right.
RM: Tell me about how you took them to court?
JB: Well, they made a cut in AUMs Ä animal unit months. We went to court to fight the cut, and the BLM had made a range survey Ä a guy by the name of Brunner made it. He'd throw out a wheel 8 or 10 feet in diameter and then they would count the plants in that, and that's what their survey consisted of. Then we formed a chapter of the Nevada Cattleman's Association . . .
RM: Here in Lincoln County?
JB: Yes, Jim Tennille was the president of it, and he did a fine job. We went to court and fought it and they beat us because they had a range survey and we didn't.
RM: What year was that?
JB: Ma, do you remember what year that was?
RB: When we went to Vegas, you mean?
JB: Yes.
RB: I don't know. I had all that BLM papers together but . . .
JB: It's been 15 years ago.
RM: About '75 then?
JB: Yes, approximately.
RM: Did you take it to a higher court?
JB: We had an attorney in Pioche, and his name was Raymond Free Ä a real good attorney. And when they beat us down there, he said, "I'll appeal this to the United States Supreme Court, and we'll go to Washington, D.C." Henry Rice and I were involved in this.
RM: He was another Lincoln County rancher?
JB: No, he's out of Moapa. But he had range rights in the Kane Springs Valley Ä those were the allotments involved Ä and it's in Lincoln County. Ray told us he would fight this in Washington, and all we had to do was see that he and his

wife flew back there, stayed in a good reputable place, and they would use that as their vacation and fight this case, because we had a good case and he knew he could beat it. We were all set up to do it when we got a letter from him one day and he said he had cancer and the doctors only gave him a few months to die, so the case was never followed through. The man died even before the time they said that he was going to.

RB: They were going to send this Wild Horse Shorty up here to gather up these horses. He and Stewart Henry came up and gathered up a bunch and they cut the tips off of their ears. They'd pay them $2, but they had to produce the ears to show that they had eradicated the mustangs. They cut the ears off them and put them in a box car and shipped them to Los Angeles. When they got down there, the humane society got after them and fined them a whole bunch of money for cutting the ears off of them. The BLM did that Ä paid them the $2 Ä but they had to cut the ears off and the humane society got them for brutality.

RM: Isn't that something.

JB: And as I said, today it costs you $1600 to get a horse at an adoptive center.

RM: Well, I don't think they adopt that many of them either, do they?

RB: They can't afford it. They've got to guarantee to keep that horse in a barn, keep hay to it all the time, and take care of it like it was royal or something.

RM: Yes. How did you try being nice to them? How did that strategy work?

JB: It didn't work. I tried to go along with them on everything I could.

RM: What would they ask you to do?

JB: Oh, cut the numbers down 20 percent or so, which we would. We eventually got down to 200 head of cattle year around and then 40 head 5 months out of the year.

RM: You can't make a living on that.

JB: Absolutely; that's the reason I sold the place.

RM: How much range acreage did you have?

JB: There were many sections in all the allotments; I don't know for sure.

RM: And you got clear down to 40 head?

JB: For 5 months.

RM: And then you had to feed them the rest of the time?

JB: Right.

RM: Did you have hay fields, to get your hay?

JB: Yes. But not enough to hold that kind of numbers.

RM: So basically they put you out of business.

JB: Right.

RM: Has that happened to other ranchers in Lincoln County?

JB: Yes, but it's not as severe. And at one time the guy who was the district manager at that time admitted to the advisory board that he shouldn't have made that severe a cut, but he never said he was going to do anything about it. Then we got Resource Concept Ä it's an outfit out of Reno, Nevada, that makes these range surveys. That survey was so much different than theirs, and they've been a little better since then, but not much.

RM: It depends on where you throw the circle down, doesn't it?

JB: Right. If it happened to be where there was nothing, it showed it there on the paper. And then this turtle deal Ä there aren't any in the Kane Spring Valley that we've seen on the Boulder allotment, but the elevation is right for turtles.

RM: So now they're reducing your allotment because of the turtles?

JB: Yes.

RM: Oh, for God's sake. So you've got to reduce the number of cattle on the range for the turtles?

JB: Well, for a turtle that isn't there but might be.

RM: Wow. And this is a general problem that Lincoln County ranchers are facing now, isn't it?

JB: And these lower allotments, yes.

RM: And part of the reason for the lower allotments is that there are so many horses out there, aren't there?

JB: There are, many horses. When they made their horse count Ä I think it was in 1970 Ä these were allotments like the Boulder allotment that were horse-free allotments. I was talking to Hank Rice about a week ago and he said there were 35 head of horses in that allotment now. And a horse-free allotment is supposed to never have any horses on it.

RM: Oh. Is the horse-free allotment for the ranchers' benefit, or what is that?

JB: Yes, it means that there were no horses there at their count.

RM: So that just makes it that much worse for the rancher.

JB: Right. And they were to maintain the numbers of horses that were on those allotments at that time; and there have been very few horses moved from those allotments. Cars are running into these wild horses on the road between Panaca and Cedar City.

RM: Is that right? To back up a bit, when did you start with the railroad?

JB: Oh, I went into train service during the war as a brakeman.

RM: OK, you worked on the trains during World War II? Was that a way of doing service?

JB: No. I had a perforated eardrum, and they wouldn't take me in the service Ä I volunteered several times, but they wouldn't take me.
RM: So you worked as a brakeman for the railroad here?
JB: Yes, for the Union Pacific. I worked on the Caliente board and I worked out of Milford on a regular run as a brakeman. Then I married my wife and I worked on a section, and then I got to be section foreman and then they put me out on steel gangs.
RM: You said you worked on the board out of Caliente?
JB: Well, they call them trainmen's boards . . .
RM: That means you were on call, didn't it?
JB: Yes.
RM: And a brakeman works in switching, is that right?
JB: At switching and checking the trains when they stop. At that time they had brass bearings on them, so you'd check for hot box or any dragging equipment or anything that might affect the regular movement of this train.
RM: And you were just subject to call for a graveyard shift or a swing shift or anything they needed.
JB: Right, trains run 24 hours a day.
RM: How long did you do the brakeman job?
JB: Oh, about 7 or 8 years.
RM: And then what was your position?
JB: I went to work on section labor.
RM: Why did you go from brakeman to labor?
JB: I really couldn't stand the night life. It would make me sick; I couldn't sleep in the daytime.
RM: I know what you mean. So you would rather be doing labor than working that graveyard shift.
JB: Right. They might call you at 2:00 in the morning, they might call you at 2:00 in the afternoon Ä you're worse than a prisoner.
RM: That's the way you felt?
JB: Yes.
RM: And you were on a few hours' notice, weren't you?
JB: Well, they give you an hour; I'm sure it was an hour at that time. They had what we called "call girls." They'd come around with a book and tell you you were called for the 2:00 switch engine and you'd have to sign this book that you got the notice to go to work at 2:00 RM: Is that right. So you went to the track gang?
JB: Yes. Well, they call it maintenance of way.
RM: And how did that go?
JB: Real good. I liked it and I made good money at it.
RM: Was it hard work?
JB: Yes. When I first started you had to do everything by hand Ä lift the rail on the push cars by hand, push them in the

tunnels, change them in the tunnels by hand, put them back on the push cars, push them out of the tunnel on the push car Ä all that was done by hand.

RM: You had to dig those ties out of there and everything?

JB: Dig the ties out by hand and put them in, yes.

RM: That's hard work. But you liked it?

JB: Well, I can't say I liked it but it was a good way of life, and they paid better than they paid anywhere else around here.

RM: Were you doing better than as a switchman or a brakeman?

JB: Not really, but I didn't have any expense. The company furnished the house, the fuel and everything like that.

RM: Were you living out on the section?

JB: We lived at Elgin in one house for 25 years.

RM: Is that right Ä and it was a railroad house?

JB: Yes.

RM: Is the house still there?

JB: No. They tore it down about 4 or 5 years ago. It was a right nice house. It was a stucco house, and it had 2 bedrooms, a nice bath, kitchen and a living room, We had all the floors carpeted ourselves and in later years they put power in it; it was a right nice house.

RM: And you got that rent free as part of the job?

JB: Yes. Fringe benefits, they called it.

RM: And you were working up and down the tracks out of Elgin? How many hours a day did you work?

JB: Eight. And then in that canyon country, they have what they call slide fences Ä rock fences. They're set along the cliffs. The fence is set on springs, and any time a rock hits this fence it pulls the plug; there's a little electric circuit going through the fence that pulls the plug and throws all the signals to red Ä to stop. We got a lot of overtime on that, especially during stormy weather. We'd throw the rocks off the track and put the plug back in.

RM: Did the plug ever give a false alarm?

JB: No.

RM: It didn't Ä it had to come through the fence to pull the plug?

JB: Right.

RM: What do the crews do now? Where do they stay?

JB: They've got altogether different things and the railroad has cut out all the houses. They pay them so much a day Ä I really don't know how much.

RM: But they still have to maintain the track and everything.

JB: They've got all new trucks with high-rail wheels on them; they can put them on the tracks, get permission from the dispatcher, and go anywhere they want to go.

RM: I see. So they can work out of Vegas or anywhere.
JB: They can work anywhere they want to. All they have to do is communicate with the dispatcher and he tells them when to get on, when to get off.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Let's see, we were talking about . . .
JB: About me working for the railroad.
RM: Yes, as a section foreman.
RB: You were on the extra gang.
JB: Later, yes. I'd go out on extra gangs pretty every spring for 3 to 4 months.
RM: Why was that?
JB: Well, I'd worked in this canyon territory and they wanted me there to supervise. But I never could go with the gangs because I couldn't leave home on account of my ranch and family.
RM: Oh, sure. So you were working for the railroad and ranching on the side.
JB: Right.
RM: Basically, you couldn't make a living at the ranch, is that it?
JB: Right.
RM: Did it work out that the railroad was subsidizing the ranch? That is, did you lose money or make money on the ranch?
JB: At the time that we had all the cattle we were actually making money. But there towards the last . . . if they only let you run 40 head, you can't start to come out even.
RM: No, you can't. What is the routine for the ranch Ä when did you put them out on the range and when did you bring them back, and that kind of thing?
JB: For many years it was a year-round operation. You could turn them out the 1st of January, the 31st of December Ä I think that's the way they had it. They've made so many different changes now that they have different dates for this allotment and different dates for that one.
RM: Oh. So you've got to be pulling them out and moving them around and everything?
JB: Constantly.
RM: That's expensive and time consuming, isn't it?
JB: It certainly is.
RM: What year did you start with the railroad?
JB: I started in 1939, at Kelso, California, and we were making 65 cents an hour. If you were real careful, for a 15-day half (they paid you twice the month) you could get $31.
RM: Wow. Were you living in a section house down there in Kelso?
JB: No, they had bunk cars. That wasn't just at Kelso; they'd move them all up and down the railroad. But we started in Kelso and came to Las Vegas behind the steel gang.
RM: What does a steel gang do?

JB: It's the one that replaces the old steel Ä the rails Ä with new steel.
RM: How often do they have to replace those rails?
JB: It all depends. In the canyon territory it varies anywhere from 5 years on up to about 10. On these heavy curves it wears out much quicker than it does on a tangent track.
RM: Tangent track is straight track?
JB: Yes.
RM: Those rails are heavy, aren't they?
JB: They've got various weights, anywhere from 90, 131, 133 . . .
RM: Per foot?
JB: It isn't figured by foot, it's figured per yard.
RM: How long are the rails?
JB: They started out with 39-footers, and then they came to two 39s welded together Ä they called them 78-foot rails Ä and now they've got a rail they call CWR and it's a quarter of a mile long, all in one piece.
RM: That has to be handled with machinery, doesn't it?
JB: Yes.
RM: How did you handle those rails, even a 39-foot one, by hand?
JB: They had tie tongs. Six or 8 guys would get on one end Ä if there were enough of you, you could carry it all. If you couldn't, you'd take one end at a time.
RM: What are some of the tools that were used by the section gang, when you were doing that work by hand?
JB: Well, there were picks, and those little short-handled shovels that everybody hated.
RM: Why short-handled?
JB: It puts you closer to your work and they claimed you could do more work with a short-handled shovel than you could with a long handle.
RM: You really couldn't though, could you?
JB: Yes, you could. It was much harder on you but you could do much more with that little short-handled shovel than you could with a long handle.
RM: So it was a way of getting more work out of a man? [Chuckles]
JB: Well, you could put it that way. A person could move more stuff, say, with a short-handled shovel than he could with a long handle, yes.
RB: And they had what they called a claw bar. It was a big long bar and on one end there was a claw and on the other hand there was a kind of a thing for them to tamp with.
RM: It was heavy, I'll bet.
JB: Oh, yes.
RM: What other kinds of tools were there?

JB: They had spike mulls, picks, shovels . . .
RM: What was a spike mull for?
JB: That's what you drove the spikes that hold the rails down with.
RM: Was that basically a big sledge hammer?
JB: No. It's altogether a different guy than a sledge hammer. It's about an inch and a half in diameter and approximately 15 inches or a foot in length with a hole in the center of it Ä it would balance itself Ä a light balance Ä and you could use either end of it to drive spikes with. It varied in weight.
RM: Why was it better than just a plain old sledge hammer?
JB: Because it was long enough that you could spike over the rail with it; with a sledge hammer you'd hit the handle.
RM: What other tools do you recall?
JB: There were tie tongs to lift the rails.
RM: Did 2 men have to be on a tong?
JB: Yes.
RM: One man couldn't handle it, could he?
JB: No. It was an outfit that would come out like that, and then here in the middle, it had a rivet. And it opened up, and it would [grasp] the rail, and then 2 guys . . .
RM: I remember a few years back watching them take out ties with a machine, and it was awesome to watch it and to think that they could do something like that. When did the equipment start coming in to make less hand labor?
JB: Well, back in the '70s we started getting machines to handle this rail and they've been improving ever since. At one time they had what you call a ballast gang, where they put the new ballast in the rails.
RM: The ballast is the rock, right, the gravel?
JB: Yes. And then behind that ballast gang they had a dressing gang. It used to take 65 men working on these gangs, and they had to move this gravel from a spot where there was too much to a spot where there wasn't as much, on push cars with dump carts with dump boxes on them. Today they've got a machine that can tamp that rail and dress it . . .
RM: How does it dress it?
JB: It cleans the sides up real good and moves the ballast from a heavy place to a light place. That involves 3 or 4 men and it used to take 65.
RM: So those machines have put a lot of guys out of work?
JB: They've put a lot of guys out of work and they do just as good if not better.
RM: This machine I saw was cutting the ties in the middle, just pinching them in half and then pulling the spikes out.
JB: That's what they call a tie saw. It cuts the ties inside of the tie plate, and then it picks it up with the fingers

and they go ahead and the guy drops a hydraulic ramp and it pushes both ends out; that's what you saw. One man runs that.

RM: And it was pulling the spikes, too, wasn't it?

JB: Yes, it's got the regular spike-pulling machines.

RM: How did the railroaders look at all those machines coming in there? Were they glad to see them, or sorry they were losing their jobs,

or . . . ?

JB: I think really they were glad to see them; I know I was glad to see it improving, because before it was awful hard work.

RM: I know. I've dug my share of ditches, and a ditch digger is an awesome thing to watch to think that all that hard work is being done that easily; but when you think about it, the ditch digger's putting some men out of work.

[Tape is turned off for a while.]

JB: Sometimes we'd add a little humor to [this hard work]. On the Elgin section one August we were changing ties on the house track and there was an elderly man there by the name of Fred Worthing. We used to drink out of a 10-gallon wooden water keg that had ice in it. I was working for my wife's brother and this old man went to get a drink out of this water keg and had a heart attack and fell over backwards, dead. We went and got some sheets and stuff and covered him up, and the section foreman told us, "Come on, boys, it's time to go to work; you can't get no work out of a dead man."

RM: Boy, that's how tough it was?

JB: That's how tough it was. And that's the truth.

RM: So they were basically just slave drivers?

JB: Well, there were a lot more people than there was work.

RM: Yes. If you didn't want to do the work, there was another guy who would take your place.

JB: We had to carry the water in this can from the water tank down to the tool house, [a distance] of 150 yards. There was a guy there who said, "No, I ain't going to help carry this keg down there; you can back the motor car up to get it."

And the foreman told him, "You either carry it down there or the guy that takes your place will." And the guy refused to carry it down so he took him up and fired him.

RM: Basically, working on that track you didn't get a breather, did you.

JB: Only when trains went by. [Laughter]

RM: How does a man get used to doing that hard work, or do you?

JB: At that time we did.

RM: How do you deal with it in your mind Ä working at that long hard day every day?

JB: Really, in those days we didn't have any television or anything; we'd go to bed early and it wasn't unusual to see the men down around the tool house 30 minutes early. They didn't mind working. The railroad was good, they paid you twice a month, you didn't have to fight for your money, and they paid you top dollar.

RM: When did you retire?

JB: In '81.

RM: And when you retired you were section . . . ?

JB: I was section foremen in the yards here at Caliente.

RM: I see. And what is a section?

JB: They keep a-changing Ä it has been anywhere from 10 miles, 12, 14, 16 and now I think they're talking about 40 miles. They can do that because of all the equipment and everything.

RM: Yes. How do you look at the changes that have happened in railroading in your time? When you started they were steamer engines, weren't they?

JB: Yes.

RM: And then now they're on the big diesels. How do you see all those changes that have happened?

JB: Well, I think it's progress, and it's great.

RM: The changes, though, kind of knocked Caliente down in terms of population loss, didn't they?

JB: They certainly did.

RM: Are there any things you feel we should talk about in terms of Caliente history?

JB: Everybody knows everybody, it's small enough, and its a great little place to live.

RM: Were most of the section workers Mexican, through the years?

JB: Well, in the early years there were Mexicans and Greeks, but in later years a lot of Navajo Indians have moved in, and they've hired more white guys. In the early years of this railroad the white guys didn't want to work on the section.

RM: Was it too hard of work?

JB: Well, I have an idea, yes. And there were very few colored men. To my knowledge, there was only one Negro and he worked at Dry Lake. There were another 1 or 2 at Moapa, but on all the other sections up and down here there weren't any colored people.

RM: Why were there so many Mexicans?

JB: I think the conditions had a great deal to do with it.

RM: They were just kind of too rugged?

JB: Too rugged, yes.

RM: And then why did the Mexicans leave, do you think?
JB: There are still quite a lot of them left here. They just more or less quit hiring them and they were pensioned off or one thing or another.
RM: Are they Mexican-Americans or are they people from Mexico?
JB: Some of them are, but the biggest part of them are American-born.
RM: And then you said there were quite a few Greeks?
JB: In the early stages of the railroad there were, yes.
RM: And you say now there are a lot of Navajo Indians?
JB: Yes. I had 3 Navajos working for me on the railroad. They were very clean people, and real good workers.
RM: Was there a lot of job security working on the railroad?
JB: Well, they called it seniority; I never was in favor of seniority, because it had brought in security and it also brought in parasites.
RM: In what way?
JB: If you had 20 years you could do what you wanted to.
RM: Is that right. The railroad couldn't fire you?
JB: They'd come up with a little union and they wouldn't.
RM: So when a guy was on the railroad for quite a few years, then he kind of slacked off in his work?
JB: Well, he could, yes; he had this seniority behind him. Seniority's great, but it can be very harmful.
RM: And the younger fellows didn't have that security because they lacked the seniority?
JB: Yes.
RM: Were the railroaders here members of the union?
JB: Yes. On the California division, which at one time went from Caliente to Los Angeles, we were strongly union, but from Caliente to Salt Lake the Mormon communities weren't strong for the union.
RM: Was Caliente a strong union town?
JB: At one time it was. The union is still functioning here pretty well.
RM: What union is it?
JB: They call it the Maintenance of Way. It was AF of L.
Other Voice: The United Brotherhood of Railroad Maintenance of Way Workers.
RM: And was there an engineers' union and a brakemen's union, or how did that work?
JB: Yes, and they were much stronger than these other unions.
RM: What kind of things did the union do for a worker?
JB: If they figured you got fired unjustifiably, the union would represent you. And they were always fighting for a little more vacation time, rate increases and better working conditions.

RM: What kind of benefits did you get besides your pay? Did you get health insurance and vacation pay and that kind of thing?

JB: Yes. You had to pay for the insurance. We still have our insurance Ä it's one of the best insurances in the country.

RM: Do you think the workers suffered as a result, or were they better off with a strong union?

JB: Much better off. You wouldn't get pay raises unless you were organized. And the train service Ä the signal department and that Ä did fine up north; the Maintenance of Way didn't have the support of the people on the Utah division like those other unions do.

RM: Did they get lower pay up on the Utah end?

JB: No, everybody got the same. We did the fighting and they got the money.

RM: Did you ever have to go on strike?

JB: Yes.

RM: Very often?

JB: No.

RM: Do you remember any of your strikes?

JB: In 1980 the engineers went out on strike. I was section foreman in Elgin and I called up and told them that I wouldn't go to work that day and they wanted to know if there were any pickets out in front of my tool house. I told them no but the radio said they were out at Salt Lake and Milford and all these terminals. So the roadmaster told me I was fired and I told him that was fine, just to bring me down a letter stating so, because I had job insurance and I couldn't collect job insurance unless I stood investigation. So I told the Indians Ä the Navajos Ä that they could get their shovels and clear around the tool house till this was over with, but not to get on the track; that the train was out on strike and I was going out with them. The Indians said, "We're going to do everything the Mexican does," so they all went back to the reservation.

RM: [Chuckles] Were there any big strikes, like in the '40s or '50s, that you remember?

JB: They didn't last that long. The government interests stick a foot in it just the minute it gets started. They don't let it go for any length of time.