

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with
Lawrence V. Robinson

November 23, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Joan Leavitt

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Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project

Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor

Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators

Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology

Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

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[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 1.

Joan Leavitt: *Why don't we go ahead and start with your family background, your mother and father and their background, their names?*

L.V. Robinson: My daddy's name was Sam and he was born in Nebraska City, one of, oh, I guess there must've been ten or twelve in that family. But his mother died at an early age, and his dad was a bricklayer and done small contracting. In fact, some of the Peru State Teachers' College where I went, one of the buildings, my dad used to tell about Grandpa was the contractor on that when they built that.

Now you said this was Nebraska City?

That's where my daddy was born.

And where was it that he was working as a contractor?

Well, wherever the work was, you know. But that one building was part of the campus there. Of course, I just went one semester there. I didn't like it.

Was this the University of Milwaukee?

No, no, this was Peru State Teachers' College in Peru, Nebraska.

Peru. How do you spell that?

P-E-R-U. I can still remember the old college song.

OK. And you only went there for a semester, then.

Yes.

And you didn't like it.

Well, think about citizenship and politics, how interesting that would be—and late in the fall, right after lunch, I had my tummy full—and in the basement of the library we had this class.

Well, as prose as it was, I went to sleep. And I was sitting right behind one of the posts in the basement there, but I didn't know it till after that class was over. We was walking across the campus to another class and one guy come and looked and kind of grinned and I said, what's the matter with you?

And he said, Did you hear what that doctor said a while ago?

And I said, Oh, what'd he say?

And he said, He asked you a question but you didn't answer him. And pretty soon he said, Well, I guess Mr. Robinson isn't interested in our conversation. Does anyone else care to answer?

Oh, so you hadn't even known he talked to you.

I slept right through it. Well, I kept telling Dad, I don't like that. I don't like that at all. It was Dad's idea. It was a pre-dental. He wanted me to be a dentist. Well, I'm anything but dental material, you know, but anyway finally he got so disgusted with me, he said, All right, you can quit, but you're going to have to go to work. And so I did. His friend was a depot agent and they had an extra gang come into town—and so Monday morning, and here I'm just an, oh, ninety-eight-pound weakling, almost—

And how old were you at this time?

Oh, I would've been seventeen, probably.

So was a teachers' college, was that something that you did after eighth grade?

After high school. I went through high school in Stella, but then I went to Peru.

Was that a two-year college?

It was a four-year.

It was a four-year.

But you could get your bachelor's there. So anyway, they put me running a jackhammer on the railroad. So I guess they thought maybe a few hard work, I'd be anxious to go back to school, but I wasn't.

Had you ever done that kind of hard work before? Was that the first time?

No, I grew up on a farm. Most of that's hard work. So anyway, I knew how to drive the mules and stuff. Anyway, let's see, oh, I did a little job of truck driving, whatever, the contractor come through town. Well, finally I read about this school in Milwaukee. The more I looked at it, so I wrote to them. So everything looked like it's what I wanted. So my dad was pretty aggravated with me for quitting.

He wanted you to be a professional.

[00:05:00] Yes. But I had this to do. I said, Dad, do you suppose Grandpa would loan me money to go to school? I can see that scowl come over his face: I don't know. You might ask him. Well, they were quite well off, so [I said], All right, I'll do it. So I go, and Grandma, she was the book one, you know. So I had to sign a note and when you make some money, when you want to pay on that, she'd get that note out. And so anyway, I knew how to pay my bills, too. At that time, back in the thirties, nobody had any money and so the school, they had it arranged you could work two hours a day for two meals as a busboy in these restaurants around Milwaukee. And breakfast was just talked about. We didn't have any breakfast. We didn't have money enough to buy it. But I just had two meals a day for two hours of work as a busboy, and I carried those trays back to the kitchen with my chin in the coffee cup to keep it from tipping over. So it wasn't easy.

So how much money did you end up borrowing from your grandparents?

Oh, golly, I don't know. It was several hundred dollars.

I know my father's tuition was fifty dollars, and that was in Utah, so I was just curious if you remembered.

Well, it was more than that. It was several hundred but I don't remember.

But you had to busboy your way through to earn the meals.

I paid them all back. And then of course then Dad, he said, well, now, you'll never amount to a thing. You'll be just like your old uncle. He was a bricklayer and he was just all over. You'll be just like your uncle. He was Dad's oldest brother. Of course, he didn't take care of his money, you know. So you'll be just like your uncle. Well, it wasn't the fault of the trade. It was just my uncle. He just didn't know how to take care of his money.

Some people can really spend it. They spend everything they make.

Yes. So he had me pegged like that, so I kind of fooled him.

You did well. Well, and with your wife being a bookkeeper-accountant, she probably did a good job of keeping track of things, too.

Yes, well, I just let her do it.

It's nice to have someone in the family who does.

If she wants to do it and she feels a little superior that way, that she can do it better than I can, well, that's just all right. Just go ahead and do it.

Well, you were telling me that you actually got your degree as an engineer, that you were a welding engineer, but that—go ahead and tell me—a little bit that—but welding engineer jobs were difficult to find?

They just practically was nonexistent up until the war [World War II] come along. And then by that time, why, then you could get a job as that, but by that time I had gotten in this other rut, so to speak, you know, and I—

You'd taken welding jobs since they—

Yes, I just decided to call myself a welder. And then, of course, out here at the [Nevada] test site, I don't want to put down that I'm a welding engineer because that was advancing like a lot of other things were and now—

Oh, so you felt like the welding technology, you had fallen behind by that time?

Well, yes, I felt behind.

Oh, that's why.

So I would just write—now if they wanted me to do something, well, I can't do that, I don't know. Well, I thought according to your application, you're a welding engineer. Yes. So I'm not going to get caught—

So you just didn't go there.

I'm not going to get caught in the corner, you know.

You just didn't put down welding engineer. You just said welder.

No. You could check my record out there right now.

Well, during World War II, then, did you go into the military or did you do the home front work?

No, by that time bad luck started for me then. I was working in a tank shop in Omaha. Built a back section for these gas transports on the road and they had to put a jack up in there [00:10:00] to put that false head in there before you put the back part on. And young and foolish and not paying attention, why, the jack slipped out and I was sitting in there and it come down and mashed me and broke my back. So the fourth and fifth vertebrae, they don't look good on X-ray

right now. So anyway, and when the war come along, I think my number was 92. I was just one of the first ones called. But when I go for a physical [they said], No, we don't use you. I got a 1-B that time. Well, let's see, I was in Indiana by that time on a job, and then the next time I come up again, I was in Memphis, Tennessee and that time I got a 4-F. So the guy said that time, You just go back to whatever you're doing because the war's going on and you might not be able to keep up, so you just forget about it. But I thought they had me this time, and I already had a friend that was over in North Africa and the Marines was wanting welders over there, building those aquisystems, they called it; so I thought well, I'd rather be over there a long ways from home than picking up cigarette butts for twenty-one dollars a month. So I didn't feel too bad about it. But anyway, I worked all these government things all over the United States.

You mean different government contracts, is that what you're saying?

Yes.

What are some of the different contracts you worked?

Well, now, one time, my one good job I had, I was in Houston, Texas and I got a telegram to come up in Alabama, up to what is now known as the Redstone Arsenal. At that time, it was a factory to build incendiary bombs in there. And of course, there wasn't such a thing as a Q-clearance in those days. If you was warm and knew what you was doing, you'd do. In fact of the matter, after they'd get one section a-going, why, they wanted some changeover made. I got to get in where they was filling those bombs, you know. And now you'd have to have the greatest of security to get in there. Not at that time. But it was interesting that I got to see all that stuff.

Now is that during the forties that you were doing this?

Yes.

So you got to actually get really close to the bombs, then, and—did you do welding on them at all?

Well, no, this was the incendiary bombs. And they were all about that high and about that big around [indicating size] and they were on a conveyor, and then they'd come down. And where they fill those, there was a little swimming hole right there so if that—oh, what's that stuff when air hits it, it makes a fire—and it goes around there and there's an operator here and one here [indicating positions]. They take every other one and they fill that under water, fill those under water, and then when it gets overfull, why, that comes up and then it makes a fire. And then if these operators get any on them, all they got to do is turn over and dive in there and that puts—so they don't get burned.

So they have to try to keep it from getting exposed to the air, is that what you're saying?

Yes. So I got to see all that, you know. It was interesting.

Yes, that was home front work, then, wasn't it?

And [as] luck would have it, after I got up there, well, there was two contractors. One was a piping contractor and the other one was process piping.

Well, the process piping man, I said, well, here I am.

He said, well, I'm bound by law to put you to work but, he says, I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I don't have any equipment.

Well, we was riding in the back of a truck from where we hired in, in the head office, and I see all these guys here and knew them all.

And I said, well, what about those guys there?

So that's when he told me they was a different contract.

[00:15:00] And I said, well, I'll just get you off the hook. I'll go back up there and make them put me to work.

And he said, Boy, that'd sure help if you can do that.

Switch companies, then.

[And I said], I can do that.

So I knew that one boss. He was from Frankfort, Kentucky. So when I come in there, why, boy, we started talking to each other:

Where have you been all this time? I've been looking all over for you.

And I said, You son-of-a-gun, you haven't thought about me since the last time.

And that's the way we got along, you see.

So he said, Come on here, get busy.

Well, I had to go back up to the office and quit that one and hire in on this other one. The main superintendent, I didn't know him, he was from Memphis. And so later we got acquainted and more acquainted. So finally, I don't know, we'd been there maybe six months, this guy, he got a job as the welding superintendent on a job in Millington, Tennessee, which is about fifteen miles north of Memphis, on a naval base, and he wanted to pawn that superintendent's job off onto me. I said, I don't want it. I'm not that hungry for a job like that. You're just the goat, you know. If anything goes wrong, it's your responsibility.

Yes, it sound like you prefer to have a job that you get to focus on and finish, rather than having to worry about the—

Yes, I just want one to worry about, and that's me.

OK. Don't want to be a supervisor.

I don't like that because when I have those kind of jobs, I watch this guy doing something. Well, if it's not too bad, you're supposed to keep still and then go on. I look at it, and if I was doing it, I'd do it a different way. So I just don't like a bossing job. Like my son says, anybody can be a

boss. But anyway, I followed this one guy up to Memphis and I was the number-two boy hired for that job. And my union card was out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. So I was a gypsy.

You did travel all over the place, didn't you? So did you meet your wife in Las Vegas or—?

Yes.

So what finally brought you to Las Vegas, then?

Well, I left Alabama and went to Los Angeles. I had a twenty-five-foot trailer, and it took me about a week to get there, in January, because I would take the southern route so I'd miss those snow banks. Well, I got out there and I worked and I got married. Well, I didn't feel good out there, that dampness or something, I didn't like it. I had gotten married and then this one son come along and he had the same problem I had. So I thought well, if I can get him out of there, get in the high, dry country, why, with me, I felt better.

Was it asthma? Was it lungs?

Yes.

The sea air did that to you, then?

Yes. So I read in the paper where some guy had some land he wanted to sell up in Utah. So I went up there and I bought some out there in the Escalante Desert, thirteen miles north of Enterprise. By that time, I had my second boy. He was—well, they were all born in Long Beach, but my girl, I think she was three months old when we moved out on the desert. So she had two brothers, you know, and she grew up just like a boy.

Did you have a ranch out there?

Yes.

You did? Did you raise some cattle?

Yes. Well, I'd go to L.A. and buy these week-old calves and doggie them, doggie-raised, on a bottle; then when they get up springing heavy, send them back down there and make good milk cows. So that's what I did that way.

Oh, you raised milk cows, then. You raised them up to be milk cows and then you sold them to somebody else?

I sold them back to the dairies down there.

The dairies in California or—?

Yes.

[00:20:00] *Yes, because I know there were dairies down in southern Utah, too.*

Oh, yes.

Oh, OK. So now when you lived in Escalante, did you—?

Not the town of Escalante. This is the Escalante Desert. Beryl [Utah] was our address.

The desert. OK. And was that your home base even when you worked out at the test site?

Yes. I'd go home on weekends.

So you commuted, then. How far of a commute was that?

Well, if you could go west through Modina and Panaca and down through Caliente and come in the back way, it wasn't too far. Oh, I don't know. It was over a hundred miles.

And you would do that once a week?

Yes.

So you lived at the test site for a week and then would come home on the weekends?

Yes.

So how did you get hired at the test site, then?

I had a cousin, he was a crane operator and worked these foreign jobs all over the world. He was several years older than me. Well—

Now what year was this that you came to the test site?

About 1955—[I had a cousin] that was a crane operator—so what happened, I'd got a job, I had my own truck and welding machine, I got a job, I wasn't working at the test site at the time.

Anyway, it sent me up to, oh, it's a place with a lot of Mexican [people]—anyway, it was about quitting time and here's a guy come by with a backhoe. I looked up and it was my cousin Dick, Dick Robinson. Dick. So he didn't remember me. He was my first cousin. And he right away went from there, he went to the test site.

And I said, Do you know anybody there?

And he said, Yes.

And I said, Well, can you get me on there?

It'd be closer to home, you see. So I did, and he was the one that knew the superintendent there, Oakey Spears [sp] . You probably have heard of Oakey. Well anyway, he got me on there, and I was working swing shift in the welding shop there in Mercury. Well, [as] soon as that test was over, why, of course, I got laid off. But that was the starter—

That's how you got started. Were you working for Reynolds Electric[al] and Engineering Company] at the time, then?

Yes.

OK. So they laid you off, but then they brought you back on, then, for the next test?

Well, no, no, I guess from the union, they called me. They needed some hands out there at the test site. But, you know, it was a strange thing. This you're not supposed to have, but I had it. I

had two union cards. I had one with the Operating Engineers and one with the Steam Fitters.

Well, this one job, I got a welding job [to] go out in Jackass welding stainless pipe. Well—

Now you said Jackass. Is this Jackass Flats or—?

Yes.

At Jackass Flats, that's where the job was?

Yes, that's another part of the test site. Well, it was an unusual kind of a weld, but we had to bell-hole it, in other words, weld it in position. Well, we run out of that good welding rod, so they had some old sloppy cheap rod they got out. So I'm doing that and this ain't right. I don't like this. I tried to reset my machine, see if that'd improve it; it didn't. There were two

[00:25:00] more guys that could make the test out there and I go to see them: How you coming along with that old poor rod? Well, not very good. I said, Well, I'm just not going to put anymore of it on there because it's not a good job. So the superintendent, I told him, I said, I'm not going to do that. He said, Well, I'm going into town tonight and I'll call L.A. and have them send it out and I'll pick it up in the morning, the good rod, and I'll bring it out. OK. So in the morning, why, these other two guys, they went ahead and was welding away, and me milling around there doing nothing. Well, that boss, he was just as nervous as he could be because I wasn't doing anything. Well, as soon as the superintendent come in, late because I thought he was just waiting for the bus to come in and bring that welding rod. So as soon as the superintendent drove up, why, this boss got over there as quick as he could to tell him that I wasn't doing anything.

So I just wasn't too far behind him and I said, Did you get that rod?

And he said, No, I didn't get any.

And I said, Well, you just as well haul me to the barn, then, because I'm not going to weld that poor old stuff.

So I quit. And if you look at my record, reason for leaving, poor welding rod. So the next spring, I'm out there as a CAT mechanic, working there right in Mercury, and was eating breakfast there in the mess hall and I looked over and I see some of those from the Pipe Union guys. I finished eating breakfast and I went over there and I go, What are you guys doing out here? And he said, Well, we're working out in Jackass Flats. We're grinding out some stainless welds, poor welds, and getting it redone. See, your stainless, you can't cut it with a torch. You got to grind it out. I said, I know exactly where you're working.

Oh, so they had to redo that work?

Sure, they did. Sure, they did. But they didn't have many of mine was bad. I had about two or three of them and I just give up. You can't make a good weld with that kind of rod.

That was really quite a stand for you to make, to say I am not going to do poor quality workmanship.

Well, that's just what happened. I don't know. I'd rather leave with a good reputation than get fired because I done a poor job.

That's really something. So then you worked more as a mechanic after that, is that right?

Well, finally, yes, because I finally got in as a tunnel mechanic.

Tell me what a tunnel mechanic does.

Well, just repairs anything that the—the miners, they can tear up anything, you know, and they do. Of course, that's part of the job. It isn't because they're just trying to tear something up. It just happens that way.

Is it their machinery that you—?

Yes.

OK, some of those—

Yes, jackhammers and the machines, for instance, from the old jumbo in there, they've got three or four guys sitting there drilling up in the heading. Well, if a slab comes down and breaks a fitting, then they got a telephone in there and they'll call out and what shift you're on, you go in there and fix it. Well, then you get paid hazard pay by working underground, which was an incentive to want to be underground. And then a lot of the machinery, we had a shop outside the portal there and a lot of things you could fix out there, right there in the shop.

So it sounds like when underground tunneling really went into production, is that when you became a tunnel mechanic, then?

Well, that's what you hire in as. Of course, my first job—this is something else that I didn't like out there—you worked two weeks' days, two weeks' graveyard, two weeks' swing. I don't like [00:30:00] that and I keep telling them, I says, As accident-conscious as you people are out here, that's the worst thing you can do because for about a week your head don't know what your feet's going to do.

Yes, it takes a while for the body to adjust to a new cycle.

That's right. So it just wasn't working. In fact, they would pay you if you had an idea that they could use and they figured over a year's time basis, they'd pay you for that. Well, like I jokingly say, well, as lazy as I am, I want to make it the easiest way I can.

That's right. Did you ever submit that idea?

Yes, and I got paid for, I guess, three different jobs.

Really? Wow, that's good.

But there was one guy there that—we got to deduct for taxes and then another for—by the time you get through all the deductions, why, there wasn't much left, so I didn't—but at least it made work easier for me.

Yes. Well, if they didn't change the shifts all the time, you know, it improved.

And that was another thing that I turned in. Old Bill Flangas, was the head over the tunnels. Well, he wasn't the kind that you liked to visit with, so what did I do? Oh, I had some stock in something and they had a meeting one night down here in town and Bill was there and I thought, oh boy, you're on my level now.

I said, Bill, you know, I turned in an idea for everybody, with a few exceptions, everybody can work on the same shift that they prefer and they won't have to adjust every two weeks.

He says, Yeah, and I suppose everybody wants to work on days, too.

I said, No, they don't.

I don't like to work nights, but a lot of people do.

So I said, With a few exceptions, you could put every man where they want.

But they didn't buy that idea because miners had done that generations ago, that's the way it's going to be now. They didn't have any reasonable reason—

So miners didn't do it, but you're saying the mechanics did do it?

Miners did, too. And every Monday morning, we had to listen to a safety meeting, and that's what I told them. I said, All this safety, why don't you practice it? Because working like this is just an accident waiting to happen. But it fell on deaf ears.

I'm still kind of confused because I thought they implemented it sometime. They never implemented it?

Never did. No. No.

That's too bad. That would've made your job a little more enjoyable.

Well, in fact, the time I left, I quit. I said, Either put me on the work shift there is and leave me there.

But the graveyard, put me on there and just—[they said], Well, you know, we don't do things like that around here.

I said, All right, then, run me off. Well, they ain't going to do that. So well, I'm going to quit, then, and so I did.

So when did you quit, then?

Oh, I think it was about '71, maybe. I think I could give you a pretty good idea.

OK.

[Pause as Mr. Robinson leaves the room and then returns.]

This is an old notebook that I had when I was in Milwaukee. But I've got a lot of things in there.

But I've also got—

Oh, look at that. Is it like a journal or something, or is it just a record?

Well, there's a lot of—let's see, here we are.

Now is this from when you were a student?

[00:35:00] No, and I don't know why I did this, but in 1934 I've got a job here at Condon Grading, and then 1935, Western Asphalt, I was a CAT skinner on that. Eaton Metal in Omaha, 1936, and it comes right on down—

You kept track of all of your different jobs. Oh, how interesting.

Yes, and it's helped me out. Now if it was jobs that I didn't like and I only stayed for a few days, I don't have that, but this is the old original. Now here's M.W. Kellogg, that's in Baytown, Texas, that's where I was there. So Pacific Pipe Plant, that's when I come to California in 1944. Utah Construction, that's work in the iron mine west of Cedar City.

What a wonderful, concise work history. This is really incredible.

It's helped me and I don't know why I was smart enough to log all this employment up, because when I went out to the test site, there's a dozen guys there [that said], Hum, let's see, I can't remember when I was here or that. I don't have no problem. I take my little blue book along. It didn't take me thirty minutes to have my application filled out.

Wonderful. Oh, my goodness.

See, there's Wells Cargo here in town.

In 1958.

Here's Reynolds Electric in '61. It's REECo now.

In 1968.

There's one in '71. REECo, '71. That finished me up with the test site, in '71. You know I told you I thought it was about '71. But then here is Jesco [sp], I worked down at Bullhead [City, Arizona]. Acme Boiler here in town. Dunes Hotel, I was with my Operating Engineer's card, I was a welder there at the Dunes from 1974 to '82. And then—

Boy, that was a long job for you, then, wasn't it? It was eight years.

Yes, it was so easy, and I'm right at home. That test site, you put in fourteen hours trying to get in eight, but this was just an old man's lazy, easy job. I was old enough, I guess I was sixty-five, maybe, so I just quit out there. But that ended my career.

Well, that's a great, concise, all together—what's interesting, it's all in your own handwriting during those years.

Yeah, that's what I did. You see up here, I worked up in California and changing the gas distri—in Ventura.

Gosh, I'm not even familiar with California.

That's when they was putting in the freeways, the one to Ventura. They was going to move the gas distribution system over and underground, so I go up there and work on that. The way they found me, why, I was in Boise, Idaho up there with a cousin. I had went up there because they was gassing the city, so I thought well maybe I can get [00:40:00] a job up there. When I did, why, of course my wife knew where I was at, and they called me from California, if I'd come down there, because I'd already tested out for them. So I went down there and I stayed there all summer, moving the gas. So yes, I was kind of a gypsy.

Well, you've really seen the West build up in construction and roads and you've really participated in its development.

Yes. You can see how this was kind of well tattered and torn.

But you've kept that all these years.

Yes. That old notebook, you know, it's just frazzled.

Served you well especially when making out your employment applications.

Yes. Oh, I could just think, that was the first time that I ever give it much thought, but when I see those guys just scratching their head, now, I don't know, but I didn't have any problem. You know Sandie [Medina, of Southern Nevada Building and Constructions Trades Council, NTS Medical Surveillance Project] with the test site? You know her?

No.

Oh, you're with the university. Well, I had to go down and fill out a thing with her. I took this thing along, filled it out. This is for health, maybe. Of course, I've got the emphysema. But that's what they're—they're checking up on different things, that and beryllium and stuff or what you got. Well, I've got everything in the world inside here that don't belong there. But anyway, I'm eighty-seven years old and it ain't killed me yet.

Oh, that's good. That's good. So when did you move to Las Vegas, then?

Well, I came down here from Beryl. Well, let's see, I guess about 1960 I come down here and I been here ever since.

Been a long time. Yes, that's a long time. Well, did you ever get to see any of the atmospheric tests?

Yes. I wasn't supposed to, but I did.

Did you?

Well, different times when I was working swing shift, they had a light out there in the yard, a red light if it's called off because of wind or something. If it's a green light, then the shot's going to go. There was one of the mechanics there in Mercury, he knew the guy in, oh, the motor pool, and we'd get a car and we'd drive out to CP [control point]. And of course you don't watch that initial blast but—

Yes, you have to have some kind of glasses, I think.

Yes, they've got them, but we were just looking, it would just light up like this. Well, right after that, we could turn and watch it and we could see that old mushroom cloud building up from the ground, coming up like that. So it was interesting to see but—

Was it awe-inspiring? Did you have any thoughts about how powerful that was?

No. Not at the time, no, I didn't.

What do you think about it now?

Oh, it was something to see. Yes.

Yes. Well, there's fewer and fewer people all the time that have actually seen one of those.

Yes. Well, like I was telling Troy [Wade], he had to be inside the building there and no doubt he watched them through glasses. I wasn't even supposed to be there but I—

Yes. Do you remember what shot it was?

I don't remember.

Well, I was just wondering if during the time you were there or if any of the shots were particularly memorable to you, for any reason.

No. I remember one of them. This one was an atmospheric—well, an airplane flew over. I guess it dropped a bomb and of course by the time it went off, he was way out of the way. [00:45:00]

And I don't know if they had any more of them or not but, oh, there was two or three of those that I got to go see.

Well, how did the city of Las Vegas feel about—do you remember how they felt about the test site in the fifties and the sixties?

Well, they didn't think much about it. It was just a job.

Well, it was a big employer, though, for Las Vegas. Very major.

It was. It was a big help to them.

Yes, because we had the hotels and then we had the test site and we had Nellis [Air Force Base] and that was pretty much—and then the smaller businesses grew up to support that. So did you see the attitude change towards the test site through the years?

Well, from a workman's standpoint, not especially. It was just another job. And like myself, they did a talk about, we don't want that stuff coming in here. Well, I don't know, you know, it's like with a gun. My wife's afraid of a gun. I grew up with a gun.

You said you go hunting.

Yes. Well, if you don't know about them, you're not familiar with them, you naturally are afraid of them. And that's like this. Now I'll bet you Troy, he knows that stuff, because I remember when you first started to learn about it. So I know it ain't bothering him any, so why should it

bother me? That's something I don't know anything about. I don't know if you get that in a teacup or a barrel. So to me, out there, it's just another job.

Well, tell me how, maybe through the fifties, you viewed the Soviet Union. Maybe you can just tell us about a little bit of the attitude, of the fifties.

Well, let's see. I never give it much of a thought.

You didn't give much a thought?

No, huh uh.

All right. Did you have any feelings about Communism in general?

Well, I'd rather not put it on here.

That's fine.

But yes, I had a problem getting my Q-clearance because they found out my ex-daddy-in-law had one time been a Communist.

Oh, really? Well, at one time, it wasn't considered all that bad.

Well, but I always heard how bad they were, And up at the test site, why, the first thing, I get a red badge; but then the higher-ups had turned me in for a Q-clearance, it'd never go through. Never go through. Well, I had a good friend, Chan Griffin [sp] was in Security, and he was a barbershopper, too. I said, Chan, it's just more of a challenge than anything else. I'd like to get a Q-clearance but, I said, every time it gets about so far, I'm kicked out. They don't want me. And I said, The only thing I can think of, my old ex-daddy-in-law at one time, I guess, was a Communist. And I said, That's the only thing I can think of why I can't get it. He said, why don't you go talk to them? Talk to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. So all right.

Well, I get home on a weekend and I guess it would've been on a Sunday morning, maybe, well,

just for the fun of it, I'll call that office. And by gosh, there was a guy to answer the phone. I said, I'd like to come up and talk to somebody. And I said, I've wanted to get my Q-clearance and this is the only thing I can think [00:50:00] of. I want to know why I haven't gotten it. Well, it wound up that was it. That was it. They didn't. So anyway, one day, I guess maybe a couple of weeks later, I was out there at the tunnel and they said, They want to see you in Las Vegas tomorrow morning. Ah ha, I think something's about to happen. And that was it. And the one guy in there, he just grilled me for about two hours but he asked me the same thing over in different ways, you know, to try to trip me up. So finally he said, Well, I'm not the final word but, he said, I can pretty much assure you you'll get your Q-clearance. And I said, Well, great, I hope so. And that was what it was about.

Did you finally get your Q-clearance, then?

Yes.

Well, at least you were able to figure it out and confront it. If you can't speak up for yourself, how can you clear things?

Well, I had never got in bad with anything. I couldn't see why I hadn't gotten it. And I guess Chan was the one that said, Well, just go talk to them. So that was a kind of a stepping-stone and got it.

Well, that's good.

Yes, but it never made any difference as far as my work was concerned. It was just a challenge that I wanted.

Well, I'm glad that turned out well, that it didn't hold you back or didn't interfere with your progress at least out there.

Well, I've thought a lot of times, of course both of my boys have been in the Navy and I wondered if that was going to affect them but it didn't seem to.

Probably too far back. It's just not that close. I know there had been some concern about the Soviets trying to get nuclear secrets, so I know they were really—that story is very, very interesting, because it shows how you were personally affected by that kind of feeling and that kind of attitude.

When I was working there at the test site then, there was a guy, he had the tank wagon from the oil company and he had to maintain a pump out in Modena.

And he said, I hate to take the stuff out there because they won't sell ten gallons in a month, and I lived right along the road.

I said, I'll tell you what, you go out there, and he belonged to the same [Masonic] lodge I did.

I said, The next time you go out there, take your load out, and I've got a five-hundred-gallon tank there at home.

I said, What you can't sell to them, why, just dump it in my tank.

He said, Boy, that would surely help me.

Make his trip worth it, then. Make his trip out there worthwhile.

Yeah. So anyway, one day when I was in to Cedar City, I went down to see him about—I was wanting something. And he said, I had a guy come by here the other day asking about you. And he said, I guess it was the FBI. That's what it was. That was one of the references that I had given. So he said, Well, according to his record, it don't look like he's very responsible because he's here, there, and somewhere else all the time. And so this guy said, Well, he works construction, so you can't

expect him to be there all together. But anyway, that was kind of part of my getting my Q-clearance.

Well, evidently the Department of Energy [DOE] or AEC [Atomic Energy Commission], I guess it was at that time, did work closely with intelligence people, and they eventually got their own intelligence people, so that is an untold story, so to speak, of the test site. Well, tell me

[00:55:00] *about your music because that seems to be a real. Did you do this while you were working or did you do this more after you retired or—?*

No. I had taken piano lessons from the time I was four years old till I was a senior in high school. But when I was eight, Dad got me a trumpet. Well, I played that. Even when I was in college, I was in the pep band, and in fact I was playing for dances when I was sixteen years old. So I knew all those old songs.

Oh, the old-time dance songs? Well, dancing was a very enjoyable pastime. Everybody did that. There were lots of bands around.

Oh, yes. So I'd make maybe three or four dollars, that's about all I'd ever get. But then when I was in Milwaukee, we didn't have anything like that at all; and for years I never struck a note on a keyboard, played my horn, or anything. And I give all my mutes away to kids that was just coming up, you know, *Here, take this, that'll make your horn sound different.*

This is your kids as they're getting older and going into music, too?

My kids didn't take to music. They couldn't carry a tune. But other kids that was interested in it.

Yes, that you shared your interest with as you talked with them, I guess. How nice.

Well, then I got into barbershop; later on I got to thinking—I was just wondering when I started, because Troy and I met the same night, we joined the same night.

Oh, that's really interesting.

So there was a quartet came up from Phoenix and one of those guys got to be pretty much from the far western district, the main man. Lloyd Steinkamp [sp] was his name.

And I guess we was at an international contest someplace and I saw Lloyd and I said, Lloyd, tell me something. Do you remember when you guys came up to Vegas, a quartet?

And he said, Yeah.

[And I said], I was wondering, what year was that?

He said, Well, the best I can remember, I think it was about 1964.

I said, Well, that's closer. I don't even have an educated guess.

And that's about when you started in barbershop quartet, then.

Yes. And I stayed on that till about, oh, two or three years ago. And my knees is bad. I could get up on risers but I couldn't get down unless I had some help. So I thought, well, oh boy, I think it's time to check it to them. So I quit.

But that was a great—you really enjoyed that, didn't you?

Yes.

And now you do organ playing.

Yes. Well, you know, I joined them, my main part of the lodge started back in Nebraska, but then I joined the Scottish Rite in Memphis, Tennessee, that and the Shrine both. Well, then I came here and I guess it was quite a while before I made any move at all, but what do you call, Blue Lodge, that's the first starter of the three degrees, why, I visited there and they [pause] ain't my kind of people. I'm used to people like from Alabama, you know, friendly. So I stayed away for years, and finally one guy I met, he said, Well, there's going to be something special going on. Why don't you come in to see them? So I [said], Well, I will. So I went in, and that got me started. And they had a guy playing the organ and I'll tell you, he

made so many mistakes, oh, you had to guess twice to figure out what the name of the song was he was trying to play. So I went up and told him, I said, You know, I'm not a very good [01:00:00] player but, I said, sometime you want to go somewhere, don't want to be here for lodge, why, I'll spell you off. He said, Well, get up here and play me a little bit. I'll try you out. OK, so I got up there. Well, I was just going kind of slow on it and I was hitting those chords right. He said, That's far enough. Your timing is terrible. I said, Yes, I know. And so I thought well, there's no need of arguing with him. So I just let it go. Well, then something, I guess the old boy finally got sick and died, so another one [that] was there that saw me that time, and he used to have a dance band back in Kansas City, so he heard me, so he said, Larry, get up there and play a song. Well, OK, so I did, and so then I've played that for years. And so finally I said, I just don't want that job. And then I thought, I was always looking for—try to get a raise. Well, one guy, I was in the minibike units, riding little motorcycles in parades, and this guy, he was coming up, he was going to be the Master, he said, Larry, would you play the organ for me?

I said, Well, I'm not really interested in it.

I said, You're not going anywhere. You're not advancing at all.

I said, You don't even get your lunch.

[And he said], We'll give you your lunch.

And that's what I was building up to. So I've got my lunch ever since.

Oh, that's cute.

[01:01:54] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 2.

[Recording resumes mid-sentence] —how I must be sounding on that. And it just creeps up on you. My family doctor, he's originally from Texas. Now, I hadn't seen him for quite a while, and I come in there and I shook hands with him and I said, well, how's things down ya'll's country?

I had that Alabama accent.

And it's coming back on me, you know. I try to don't do that but it comes out anyhow.

That's all right. When you're thinking, your memory taps into a certain time of life. That's natural.

Yes. And I said, How's things down in ya'll's country?

Well, I'm really interested. I would be interested in you explaining more about the Masons, because I don't know anything about them, and it sounds like you were connected with them in Alabama and you were connected with them here. I mean, what are they about?

Well, of course, you're probably Mormon.

I am.

Yes. Well, I never knew a Leavitt that wasn't. But you know, I've got some just good a friends that's Mormons. In fact, I've probably got some cookies back there. About across the street and two houses up there, they're real good Mormons, and we got a lot in common because her daddy was, I guess, in the service, but anyway I was talking about being in Huntsville, Alabama. She said, My daddy bought a house in Huntsville. So she knows that country, too, so we had something to talk about right away.

Well, as far as the lodge, now, I had joined the lodge in my hometown. My daddy was a past Master there.

Now it's not a religious organization but it's kind of a moral organization?

No. The background is on the Bible and in fact anybody, if he just answers the right questions, can join. They talk about it being a secret organization. Well, they got a few things that they just don't tell everybody, but actually we've got a Catholic, and that was supposed to be—and I guess they're not supposed to have any secrets from the Pope or whoever it is. But anyway, he was an old clarinet player with the Crosby band. He's still alive now, so I don't see him very often, but he's a Mason. So you see, it don't make any difference who you are. And I've got Mormon friends that Masons. So whoever you are, you'll do.

Well, that's good to know it's open.

Well, anyway, the superintendent there in Huntsville belonged to a Scottish Rite in Memphis.

Now is that a branch of Masons?

No, that's just higher up. See, the Blue Lodge, that's three degrees. Well, I got that at my home lodge at home. Well, the Scottish Rite takes you through the thirty-second. So I told him different times, I said, I'd like to get in that, maybe. And he said, well, if I was up on home base, I could help you, but, he said, I can't here. So then when he was going to leave and go back to Memphis because he had a job up there and he was going to pawn that off onto me, well, probably wouldn't have tried to get it for me if I hadn't been a Mason. I said, I don't want it. I want to follow you up to Memphis so you can help get me in the Scottish Rite. [And he said], well, all right. So that's the way I got in.

Now is it just men who are part of it?

Yes, just men.

It's a male organization.

And the women's part is called the Eastern Star. That's the women's part.

And you said it's based on the Bible?

Yes. We've always got a Bible right out there on the altar, right out there, and there's [00:05:00] always a prayer when you start and there's a prayer when you finish.

And is the music like hymns, because organ usually is hymn music.

Well, no, see, when they present the flag, [singing] "You're a grand old flag, you're a high-flying flag," I play that.

Oh, OK, a patriotic one.

While one guy carries it out there and holds it up there. So there ain't nothing there that would scare anybody. But anyway, I got my thirty-second there and I've had that for many years. Now there, it's a thirty-third.

Oh, you have a ring.

There's not too many of them.

Oh, really? Now this other ring, is that also a Mason ring?

Yes. That's a double eagle. That's Scottish Rite. And this one's the Blue Lodge. That's just three degrees.

Now does that mean that you have some kind of official position in it, too?

Well, it's just like going to school. You went through the eighth grade or you went through high school or you went through college.

OK. So it's getting a certain level of knowledge, then?

Yes.

Is it knowledge of the Bible or is it knowledge of other things or—?

Well, a lot of it's knowledge of the Bible.

Oh, is it?

Yes. So that's what spooks a lot of people. Well, we don't want to get into something like that.

Well, it ain't going to bite you.

Well, I was reading Leo Tolstoy and he talks about the Masons in there and I didn't know if it was accurate, but it was very, very interesting to me.

Who?

This is a Russian author named Leo Tolstoy. He wrote War and Peace. In War and Peace he talks about going to a Mason meeting, and he talks about it being a brotherhood and a peer of equals, it's a kind of a brotherhood concept of equality, which was a little different from outside of the lodge where they had all of these class systems. So it was secular and apart from a church organization, but it had some rather noble values. Is that accurate, then, the way he portrayed that?

Well, pretty much so. Well, here's another thing. Look around at people that belongs. If it was a bad one, they wouldn't—George Washington was a Mason.

Was he? I didn't know that. That's interesting.

Yes. And there's a lot of our presidents have been a Mason. Yes, so it's just one of those things.

And I enjoy—but I got just burned out from playing that organ so many years.

Yes. Well, did you also have a Baptist background, or was this pretty much your moral code or whatever?

Well, I joined the Christian Church. In fact, now there's a little old Baptist church up the road here about a mile. I go in there. I haven't joined them but I thought, well, there ain't ten cents' worth of difference in any of them anyhow. But anyway, so that's the way I view it. I like to go and I kick in a few bucks in the kitty when they pass it around. And this one, he come around. He's been out here two or three times, and he's feeling me out, so I just show him everything. I

said, I ain't got nothing to hide, and so if you don't want me, now's a good time to tell me just to get lost. [And he said], Oh, we ain't going to do that. *Well, do you think your knowledge of the Bible is just as good, then, as the Baptist preacher, then?*

Sure. Sure.

That's good. Well, now you got me curious, because I was tutored in the Bible, too, and I wondered if I could answer your questions.

[00:10:00] Well, you've got fanatics in all of them. Some of them [say], well, if you don't belong to mine, you ain't nothing. Well, everywhere you go, you've got people like that. The best friend I ever had, he's a Catholic. He's in a rest home back there in Falls City, Nebraska right now. And you know, one time him and I, when we was boys, we was hitchhiking. We went into Omaha, and I don't know what we was doing, but where Sixteenth and Twenty-Fourth come together there, and then there's a highway on south, we were down there waiting, trying to catch a ride coming home. It was late in the afternoon. An old priest come along. He just went right on. He said, All right, go on, you old stiff-collared son-of-a-gun. I said, well, I kind of thought so, too, but I didn't want to say.

You didn't want to say that. That's for him to say, not you.

So that's how we get along.

Well, I understand the lodge does a lot of good things for the community. They're very, very community-minded.

They do. Yes, they've got for little kids that can't talk. Once a year there's some lady here in town, she's kind of the head of that, and she'll have a television out, a big screen, and shows this one how he was to start with and how they got him to where he can talk.

That's wonderful.

Yes. And in the Shrine, they work on kids that can't walk, you know.

Now there's one that has a burn clinic, too, burn unit.

Yes, that's with the Shrine. So they really ain't very bad or I wouldn't be there.

I'm sure. It's been really interesting to hear you describe that. It seemed to come up and it looked like it was an important part of your life, just like the music kind of came up, and it was just kind of nice to go into that a little bit.

Well, of course, I've got a lot of my music. I've got some old jazz songs that I play, and I can play a prayer, if they want it. And I've played for funerals. I've played for weddings.

Well, it seems like your music could have been used with the Music Union, because in those days they were hiring a lot of musicians on the Strip.

Well, I never got to doing that, you know. I'd been out of the music business, being good. I just wasn't good anymore.

For a lot of other organizations that still need music and want it in there, you can do it for enjoyment.

Yes. Well, like I say, the only reason you ain't fired me is because you can't find anything better.

Oh, that's neat. Well, you've gone over your—your mother passed away when you were young. A lot of your education after high school. Looking back on your life now, what do you consider to be the most difficult time of your life?

Well, it's been a little bit difficult most of my life. It hasn't been good. My mother died when I guess I was twelve. Well, before that, when I was about ten, my appendix busted. Well, we was living out on the farm and, oh, my belly's hurting. My mother thought I was just wanting to play hooky, I didn't want to go to school. But I stayed in bed there. Well then, along the middle of the morning, I began to feel better, so she called. We even had a phone. We was better than a lot of

people. We had a phone out there. She called the doctor and he said, *Take his temperature.* My temperature had already started to raise. Well, it was already broken by that time, you see.

[00:15:00] *This was 1927. Oh my.*

So anyway [he said], *You better do something quick.* So they loaded me up and took me into Omaha, into the hospital, and operated on me. And that was what saved me that time. Well, then the next time, let's see, [pause] I guess after my mother died then—

Did your father remarry?

Yes, after, oh, I don't know, two or three or four years, because in the meantime we stayed with my mother's folks, my grandfolks. Well, Dad thought that was too much work for them out there on the farm, so we moved to town—

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I only had one sister, and she's back in Grand Island, Nebraska right now, and she's not doing— she ain't very good either. But anyway, then he bought the tank wagon, where you take fuel out to the country; then the guy that had the gas station, why, he got rid of that, so Dad got that. So he had the tank wagon and that other. Well, I guess he always found a job for me working on that or out on the farm. He was going to keep me busy at something, you know. So anyway, he was on the school board and on the town board. Well, then they still had the old country school. I went to the country school. It was the same school where my mother and my grandmother went.

Oh, it had been there a long time, then.

And the old bell. I had got the bell when they done away with it, and Dad bought that at an auction, and I had that bell here, and I give it to one of the kids. But anyway, what was I going to say? Oh, they would've liked to have a school bus but they didn't have money enough to get one. Well, Dad had just got a new car, so he took that new car and traded that off for a new truck.

Then my stepmother's dad was a carpenter, and he built a bus around it. So that made another job for me, driving that bus. So that was the beginning of consolidated schools, you see. But now all these towns that's got a consolidated school, they've got a bus. But my old school was so poor that they couldn't afford one themselves. So they had that.

You have filled in some details of your growing-up there, then.

Yes, it wasn't good. Anyway, then in Omaha, that was when I got my back busted. So I wore a brace from around here, steel come up here, and straps coming around here and buckled up [demonstrating]. It was just a straitjacket. And trying to weld. I got a job as a welder. In the summertime, that'd just gall, that would get so hot, but I was so poor, I had to just keep at it. And then when the war come along, it wouldn't help me any, and I finally got to where I could get along without that brace.

Took quite a while for that to heal, then, it sounds like.

Well, it's just never been right since. In fact, here, was it last year or two years ago, there's a doctor here. They pour cement in there where the broken vertebraes are, they poured that in there. But my wife, she says it's helped, but I don't think it did. But anyway, my family doctor, then one time, they've got an X-[00:20:00] ray machine up there and they X-rayed my back. So he said, Larry, what's the matter here? Your back, there's something don't look right here. And I said, well, that's that cement they poured in there.

They tried to fix it. Did he think it looked fixed?

Yes, he said, I could see it. It's not normal.

It looks normal for you, right?

Yes.

Well, good. Let's look at what do you consider to be the best time of your life?

Well, I had a period there that the guy from Memphis, he was an old bachelor, but he'd worked for Lindy Air for twenty-three years before the war come along. And Lindy was great on pipe fabrication. So when I found out that he knew all this stuff, every time he'd come around on a job where I was at [I'd say], Hey, Al. How do you lay out for something? Well, he'd grin and he just seemed like he was interested in showing somebody that wanted to learn. He said, Get out the square and I'll show you. So he would, and I'd write that down.

Well, I don't know [consulting notebook. Sound of pages turning].

Now, that's another part of your book there, isn't it?

Yes, that's some of my metallurgy stuff here that I had. See, this is a diff—what your steel comes at different—quenches at different—

Oh, temperatures? You've got temperature and what percent of carbon that it needed to be. So this is for your welding, then.

Yes, I had all that in Milwaukee. And there, that's making the offsets on a forty-five offset in pipe.

Well, that's a handy book, isn't it? You've just, really concisely what you refer to.

Yes, centers on a forty-five, length of a cord and the poly.

Oh, keeps you from having to remember it.

Yes. Now that's making a three-piece, ninety pipe. Angles from a square. Volume of a sphere.

What do people do who don't have this? Do they just try to keep it in their head?

They just depend on a few people that does know how.

Oh, I see.

Here's something I'll show you, around here, I guess. Oh, here it is right here. "Any place on a circle where lines intersect will always be 90 degrees." Now I had a piece of paper out there and

I'd draw the circle and mark down there. But now you could start this, run a line up to here, and from there up to there, it's 90 degrees [demonstrating]. So if you're ever out—see, now, like there. See where that—wherever you might come from there on up, it's always 90 degrees.

[Sound of pages rustling] Now this is some of my—in Milwaukee, how big a weld in a corner like that to hold so much stress. So that's some of my lessons from my old school in Milwaukee. *If all of us could have our own little book of knowledge like this. Our manuals to refer to for all our work.*

Yes, they laugh at me with this old notebook, it's so tattered and torn.

Yes, but some knowledge is just timeless.

A lot of goodies in there. Kind of brings back old memories. See, there's your square root and—

[00:25:00] *Now you were talking about your friend and that he answered a lot of questions for you, and you said that that was a good time of your life. I think that's what you were leading to.*

Oh, oh, yeah. Al. He'd tell me how to make something and there'd always be a piece of wallboard or something around there and I'd make note of that, and I'd come home at night and I'd put it in this notebook. So I don't care what it was, in pipe, I was working pipe work. The only reason I worked pipe, it paid more money than it did other kind. It was kind of monotonous but I stayed with it for quite a while. And then when I come to the West Coast, now this is another little shady deal that I did. This was during the war. I bought my first trailer in Indiana, a little nineteen-footer. Well, then my buddy, poor guy, I always had to just take him to raise because his wife kept him broke all the time and I wasn't married, we were down in someplace in Alabama. Anyway, I was going to make a down payment for him buying a trailer. Anniston. Anniston, Alabama. We was working there in a steel mill. So it was on a Sunday. So, well, he'd look at it and he'd look at it and look at it.

And I said, Well, boy, what do you think? You going to buy it or ain't you?

[And he said], No, that's a lot of money.

[And I said], Well, I'll make the payment.

Finally, the sun's getting down. We had to go back up over the hump back into Huntsville.

So I said, Are you going to take it or ain't you?

[And he said], No, I can't.

I said, All right, I'm going to deal with him.

Maybe I can trade mine off for the same kind of a trailer that I had, but I'd like to have a bigger one. So in no time at all, I traded with him. So he was going to bring it up there and take the stuff. I was going to leave the door unlocked. Of course, nobody bothered anything. You didn't even need to lock the door. And I wanted the wheels, the same kind of hubs on there as my spare tire on my car, so if I have a spare, I have a blowout, I can put that either on my car or on the trailer. It's five-or-six-lug wheel. So then I guess—oh, then I heard they was paying twenty-five cents an hour more out on the West Coast. Well, I'd worked on a dam in western Nebraska, and in fact I got a big picture, there's twenty-four welders there and I was one of them. But this one, he was kind of fat and lazy, the job was about done, they laid him off. He came to Los Angeles. Well, it wasn't very much longer than that that I went from there to Texas, so for several years I didn't see him. We was carrying iron workers' cards at that time. So I thought well—and you had to have gas stamps, you know, and all. So I—

Now was this during World War II?

Yes.

So during the rationing, then.

Yes. So I wrote a letter to him in care of the iron workers' hall in Los Angeles: If you get this, you send me a fictitious telegram that you need me out here immediately and I can go to the Ration Board and get gasoline stamps and come out. I didn't have no idea he'd ever get it or not. About a week, here come a telegram. He got it. I go to the Ration Board and get the stamps and boy, I took me about a week coming across the country, and I got to Los Angeles. But that was one of the mistakes I made. I'd ought to have stayed in Alabama because it cost that two bits [00:30:00] more to live out there than it did back in the South.

So anyway, this one job I got on at Shell Chemical—are you familiar in L.A. much?

It's been a long time since I've been there. I've never lived there.

Down on 195th and Figueroa, Shell Chemical was building a big plant there, and I got a job there.

Oh, I'll have to back up and get my story straight. Why, this friend, he was working there as an iron worker, and of course I got a pipe card then. And he said, Come down to the job at quitting time and I'll introduce you to the superintendent. Because the pipe union there, they didn't want no outsiders. Well, I would've been what you would call a traveler.

And they wouldn't have wanted you?

No, they wouldn't have wanted me. So I went in there and he introduced me to the superintendent, M.W. Kellogg. You might've noticed, M.W. Kellogg was a job that was going on.

Yes, several times it was written in your book.

Yes. So I said, I see this is a Kellogg job.

And he said, Yeah.

I said, I just left a Kellogg job in Baytown, Texas not very long ago.

He said, Good. He said, I'll call up the union and tell them one of our key men is being sent out in the South. Please give him a work order to come out.

And that's the way I got around that one.

Well, you were no longer a traveler, then.

No, I got it cleared in.

Yes, you really had to have connections, didn't you, in order to get some jobs?

Yes, you sure did.

Well, it sounds like when you were younger, that your father, sounded like he had a car, sounded like he was reasonably well off, and—

Well, my dad wasn't. My grandfolks were.

Oh, your grandparents were. OK.

Of course, when Dad died, he was well off. He'd had a couple of farms that he'd bought and paid for. Bought one during the Depression, paid fifty dollars an acre for it, 160 acres. Of course, he had to make it in payments. Now that's worth several hundred dollars an acre now.

Would you like to talk about your family, how you met your wife, or your kids?

Well, my first wife, I married her out there in California. Well, her brother, she had two brothers. One was a welder and the other one, he was just a helper. Oh, and I was working there and we was making stanchions out of old bent drill pipe, that high-carbon stuff, and it's all right for like overhead lines. And another guy was there by himself until I come along. Well, after I'd been there about a week, the fab [fabrication] boss came out. They had a big fab shop with twelve booths in there.

He said, How do you like it here by now?

And I said, Oh, it's all right, I guess. I don't especially like that old drill pipe but, I said, I'm getting by.

[And he said], How would you like a job in our main fab shop?

He said, We just fired a welder yesterday, so I got a good booth open.

I said, I'd like that.

So I got that booth. So I'd go to the office and get a print to make, and they had a helper that stayed with me all the time. I never had to pick up a pencil, hardly. But he'd say, Well, what do you need? And I'd say, Well, get me about so much pipe, a certain size. And he'd round up the laborers and they'd bring it in, put it on my fab table. I'd make up these fabrications.

All you have to do is just concentrate on working it, then.

And I'd just tack that stuff together, and then they'd move it out on what they call the skids. It was railroad rails about that far apart and about that high [indicating distance] [00:35:00] so you could get underneath to do the welding. And I didn't even—oh, that's all the welding I had to do, was just those. And I remember one time, most of the stuff was taken up from the fabricationists and then they had a crane that would take them out into the field and they'd put them in there and then the field welders would weld it together. Well, this one time, they was going to—I'll never forget it. It was an eccentric swedge. Of course, it didn't have any factory-made fittings. You had to make them. *I knew how.* So the fab boss brought this guy up to my booth. He said, Can you show this guy how to make an eccentric swedge? And I said, Sure. What size do you want? He told me. So I had a cleaned-off place on the table. I had it about six foot long and about four foot wide, one-inch plate. So I started in and I told him how to lay this thing out. And I look up. Here's that fab boss had his book out. He was writing it down himself.

Nice to know somebody around knows how to do it.

Well, I had her made then. Well, I stayed in that booth for eleven months. Well, then I decided to go out on my own, so I got my own truck and welding machine and I went out for Union Oil out in Santa Fe Springs. I'd go out there every morning. They might send me to out rig up a well, they might send me out someplace out to a compressor. Never knew where I was going to be. But they didn't pay too much. Anyway, I stayed with that for quite a while. Well, then I finally decided I can do better than that, so I left them and went out for other contractors on pipelines. And I don't like pipelining, but that's the only place you could use a rig. So I stayed with it, but I'd just keep working around.

Well, how'd you meet your wife?

Oh, well, this one helper, this one brother, one day I'd went out to the scrap yard. I wanted to make something out of a piece of—and he came out there, followed me out there. And he had practice in welding. He showed me what he'd welded.

He said, How does that look to you?

I looked at it and I said, It looks all right to me. I said, Why?

[And he said], Well, they won't put me to work as a welder.

I said, Is this the only job there is in the country?

[And he said], Well, I don't know.

I said, Well, how are you going to know if you don't find out?

So that got him started as a welder. So then he invited me to come over to where his folks lived. He was still at home. And there was a good-looking sister. So that was the idea there.

He brought you home for dinner. And you guys got together, then.

Yes.

Well, did she pass away or—?

No, in fact she's in a rest home right over here now.

So how'd you meet your present wife?

Well, I went to the University Club. You had to have some university background to get in there. So we'd have parties and dance and go different places. So then, what was it? I haven't been in there for a year or two, I don't know, maybe longer. Anyway, then you've got a screening committee. I wound up the head of the screening committee, so I had first choice.

Oh. Oh, and so she was a member of that club, then, is that right?

Well, later on she would become [a member]. So anyway, we was going to go someplace, I think we was going up to Zion Park.

That's beautiful.

Yes. But she was interested in going in the club. [And someone said], Well, couldn't you take her? And I said, Yeah, I can get her. So I went by her house and picked her up, took her on. And one thing led to another, so anyway that's the way that all happened.

Well, how long have you been married?

Oh, I don't know, twenty-five, thirty years. But she's just got—now we had another one of Petty's—Lavell Petty was a train engineer. Well, he was retired. Yes, and he'd been here for years. Well, my wife and his wife, they got to be real good friends. Well, we went on three different cruises together. We went to Alaska one time, and one time we went down through the [Panama] Canal and back up, and another time we went to Australia.

Oh, how nice. Oh, you did some traveling.

So we just did all right. Well, then his wife died. Well, then we had the Nomads, we called it, they were Shriners with RVs [recreational vehicles]. So we camped different places and in fact that's where I get that.

Oh, your note—Nomads. Oh, OK. And that was just a group of campers who would camp together.

[00:45:00] Yes. But then after she died, why then Lavell, he'd come and go along, but he was getting to where he wasn't doing too good. So you know, he wound up in a hospital, down here in Valley, and over about the parking lot they got a place there you can use for the old cripples, that blue card you can hang up in your—

Handicapped parking sticker?

Yes. Well, I got in such a big hurry to get up there to see him, I forgot to get my card out. When I come back, I got a ticket. And I told him, I said, I'd better hurry up and get out of here because it's about time for a shift change and that traffic'll be a booger. Don't you know, I had to go right down in the thick of things down there at the City office and pay off my ticket. So then after he got out, he found a place, I don't know where it was at, I never did get there. Some lady was going to come in and cook for him and then, I don't know, keep house for him, but she wasn't going to stay there. Well, it wasn't no time at all till he died. Well, he's buried up there in Deseret right now. And my wife, she kind of visited with the other but she didn't take up with them like she did with Lavell's wife. So then after that, she just [said], Well, I don't feel like going. And every day there was something else he'd get out of us that I'd have to do, and I have to do all the cooking now, and so it just hasn't been good for quite a long time. And she's back in there right now and she says, I don't want anybody to see me, because she hasn't had her hair done for a long time and she's about that wide, you know [indicating size], sits there and eats popcorn and potato chips and candy bars. And if you

say something about a diet, that's the wrong thing to say. So I just, well, I just tolerate it. So life ain't good.

Well, you seem to have a cheerfulness about you, though, that you look for the best that—I think your music probably helps you with that, doesn't it? Kind of helps lift your spirits.

Yes, every Monday I go to lodge, well, because this guy that I pawned that job off onto, said, Well, I've got to go. I can't always be there. I said, I'll spell you off when you got to go. I always go with a list of songs in my pocket, because if I sit down there, I just clam up. I can't think of nothing. So I always have a list of them in my pocket.

Can you play them from memory?

Well, I've got a bunch of them I can play from memory.

Oh, that's good. I've never been able to do that. I still have to use music. I play the piano, too. I enjoy it.

Yes, that's good. But you know, it's a lot different, your bass notes, and this way I've got my foot pedals. You can see my organ in there now. We got a Lowry organ. But then I know all those, and this was something I never knew, I always played music by note, well, but I never knew the chords.

So did you learn the chords, then?

Yes.

Oh, very good.

All I need is a melody line with a chord up above it.

Oh, that's wonderful. So did you teach yourself that?

Yes.

That's great.

On this organ—well, not this one, the one I had, the first one, I was still by myself, it had an addition on there with different chords. Well, I'd look and like a G7, well—

And so you just looked at your chord list and figured it out, then, huh?

I played it and I'd finally get where it sounded like it—

It looked.

That's the way I learned them.

[00:50:00] *Oh, very good. Just plain working at it, practicing it. Well, that's neat. Well, here's your last question here. What do you think is the most important thing a young person should learn from you?*

A young person? Still in school? Two things. Learn Spanish.

Oh, learn Spanish. Oh really? Is that because there's so many Spanish people moving in?

Yes. And public speaking.

Learn how to express yourself.

Yes. I used to have trouble getting up and [speaking]—in fact, I was the president of the class in my high school. But of course at that time, I didn't have what it takes. But you know, you're trying to arrange for something and you couldn't get them to say, well, we're going to have caps and gowns. Well, they don't know if dads are going to be able to afford caps and gowns, so they just sit there and here I am up there trying to get an answer out of them. Oh, it was an aggravation. It wasn't a pleasant situation at all. And then, now going through the lodge, I went to all four of the different bodies there, but luckily it was stuff that I had to memorize. It wasn't that I could talk extemporaneously. But anyway, if I'd had public speaking, it would've been a lot better.

Now, the Spanish. Is there any other reason that you say, learn Spanish?

Well, because even back during the war, I could've had good foreign jobs as a superintendent if I knew how to—[speak] Spanish. And I had two years of Latin in high school, which was just a waste of time, unless you want to be a doctor, so it—

Or you're a scientist, because there's a lot of Latin roots in things.

Well, occasionally now I know as much of it as I've forgotten. One time there's a word, well, that kind of sounds like a Latin derivative and I kind of figure out what it means, but that's about the extent of my Latin, but that was, to me, I could've got along without it.

Well, maybe in the welding area, it wasn't as useful as it might've been in another one.

Yes, that's right. That's the reason. And then coming in the Southwest where there's some of these wetbacks coming in here, why, they can be talking about you and you don't know whether—

There is a lot of Spanish, I know, even in signs, wherever you go, you have lots of Spanish businesses. That's probably good advice. Well, is there anything else you would like to add? You have answered all of my questions.

Well, if you can understand my poor English—

Oh, it's been wonderful. You are very well-spoken.

Thank you, but I don't think so because I didn't major in that.

That's all right.

[00:53:47] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[End of interview]