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

Interview with Jerry Claborn

July 30, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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Jerry Claborn: My name is Jerry D. Claborn. I was born in a little town, in Mansfield, Arkansas in 1939. My folks moved from Arkansas during the war to a little place called San Pedro, California. That was during the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and my dad went to work for an oil company there—I think it was Standard Oil Company—and what they had done [was] they had confiscated all of these ships and boats, tugboats; they took the screens, and they shut all the harbors off with these screens so the submarines couldn't come into the harbor.

And so after that, the war was over. Then my dad moved up with a company to a little place called Santa Maria, California. That's where I went to high school—went to grammar school and high school in Santa Maria, California. And I graduated from Santa Maria High School June 15, 1957 and June the 17, I ended up here in Las Vegas, Nevada and I've been here ever since.

I spent a little time in Bakersfield, California in a different type of job for some water tunneling. But primarily I raised my children here. As a matter of fact, my son went to Eldorado High School, my two granddaughters graduated from Eldorado High School, and one graduated from UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas], and my other one is going to UNLV; my other granddaughter, and my grandson will be a senior at Eldorado High School, so it's kind of neat that my son went to Eldorado High School and my grandkids graduated from there. It's kind of ironic because when I moved to Las Vegas in 1957, there were only three high schools, and the

third high school had just been built in 1958. It only had one class prior to that, and the class was actually—I don't think anybody graduated out of that high school the first time.

Shannon Applegate: *Oh, really? Why?*

Because they had just started a high school and I think they started out with freshmen. So [the] high school today, the name is Rancho High School, which is the third, and now we have over something like twenty-nine high schools in the Las Vegas area.

And growing.

It's unbelievable. But anyway, getting back to how I come to Las Vegas and whatever, I had a buddy that came with me, and for some reason we had already made our minds up in high school that when we get out of here, we're headed for Las Vegas and make our fortune. His name is Billy Boone [sp]. He was a crane operator. He worked out at the Nevada Test Site, started out in 1957 as well, and now he lives in [Rancho] Cucamonga, California. Actually he lives right out of Cucamonga. And I just seen him the other day, as a matter of fact, and we was reminiscing about the Nevada Test Site and the people that we knew and whatever, you know, and the ones that we worked with when we was younger that became dignitaries. I mean it was really amazing how this thing really progressed.

But anyway, what happened is we was walking down the street and I asked a gentleman, I said, `Sir, can you tell me where a man could get a job?`

Well, the fellow looked at me and says, `Well, you don't look like a man to me. You look like a kid.`

And I said, `Sir, let me tell you something.` I stuck my finger right up in front of his face and I said, `I been doing man's work since I was fourteen years old.`

And he said, Well, *excuse* me, you know, like give me kind of that sarcastic, you know. And he said, If you're really serious, he said, why don't you go down here on Main Street and Charleston. There's an outfit called REECo Engineering.

And I said, REECo? What do you mean?

He says, Reynolds Electric and Engineering.

I said, Oh, OK.

And we did. We walked down there and sure enough, we went in there and they were hiring. They sent us to the Nevada Test Site the next day, as a matter of fact.

Actually, the first thing they asked me, Do you guys know how to play baseball?

And we said, Well, sure. Certainly. We was big stars in Little League, Middle League, and all that.

And he said, Well, you're hired.

So anyway, what they did, they hired us as what they called a classification as "flunkies." And what flunkies did was anything that the kitchen cooks and everything wanted you to do out at the Nevada Test Site. They sent us to work out in the cafeteria, which was really, really unique and it was wonderful, really. We met some wonderful people back in those days. They were really true people, true friends. They're friends today. Forty-seven years, forty-eight years later **[00:05:00]** we're still friends and stuff.

And what was really unique about it is the wage scale was something—I think we started out about two—no, it wasn't even two dollars. It was a dollar-thirty-or-forty, fifty cents, but we got room and board. They took us out there and took us back or whatever. And we worked just about all the hours we wanted, and then we played softball on the weekends. And they had different types of leagues and they had different ball games or whatever. And back in those days, it was fast pitch, not slow pitch, you know, what they have today. It was fast pitch, just as fast as

you could throw the ball underhand. And anyway, I can remember, that was the biggest thing back in ’58, ’59, and the sixties. When we would have ball games here in town and play against Las Vegas, we’d have five, six thousand people at those ball games and softball games. That was the only game in town besides gaming.

So anyway, it was really wonderful. And we had a guy by the name of Bill Durkee, which was our athletic director and handled all of that out there. I think he’s still alive, too, and he’s a great man. Great guy. God, what a wonderful man. But anyway, he was the one that was instrumental in putting all this stuff together, and we had leagues for quite a few years. I can remember one of the miners that was my boss after I went into mining….

But anyway, we played that one season and the season was over, and I decided to come to town one night and got in some trouble with another gentleman messing with my girlfriend. But anyway, he hit me in the back with a chair and injured my back, so I went home to Santa Maria to recup[erate]. So after about two or three months, I couldn’t wait to get back to Las Vegas. So I did recup and came back. And when I come back this time, the first thing they wanted to do was—REECo was putting me back—hire me, and putting me back on playing ball and so on and *et cetera*, and I said, Sure.

What position did you play?

I played third base. I played hot corner. But anyway, when I came back, we finished that season, which is about three or four months of playing softball there.

Then one of the guys said, I’d like to have you come to work for Longyear Drilling. I see you’re a hard worker, and I see you play ball and all that. We could use you.

And I said, Oh, I’d love to. What do you pay?

They said, Well, the scale is about two bucks.

And I said, Oh man, that's about seventy or eighty cents for you. Yeah, I'd love that.

So anyway, it came to pass. About a couple months later, I got a call to come to Las Vegas and be interviewed with one of our operating engineers' business representative, and sure enough, they hired me and sent me back out as an operating engineer. They didn't have an apprenticeship program at the time, so I went back out as a helper. And what they was doing then was drilling what they call line-of-sight holes. Like in these tunnels, there was only E-Tunnel and B-Tunnel, they were driving these tunnels so they knew that the atmospheric test ban was coming, so they said, Well, you know, what we're going to have to do is we're going to have to shoot everything underground, because they had already talked about that. So they were driving these tunnels, making these tunnels in there, because we knew eventually we was going to do that. But they were trying to find out how in the world can we shoot underground with a shot and see what it contains? Like, you know, when you shoot a shot out on the flats, I've seen quite a few of those shots that they shot, that they'd build these towers on and they would put a device on it and explode it. Well, they all had a mushroom cloud. And they would put these ones underground a little bit, and they would drop them from aircraft, and they would put them in balloons and put them up so high and ignite them, and an explosion and so on. And I seen all of this. And anyway, they knew the test ban treaty was coming. And so what they said, Well, how are we going to do that? So really, if you would drill a hole, a straight hole, say a half-a-mile back in the mountain, and what would happen, that explosion is so powerful, it would probably just blow everything out like the barrel of a gun. So what they decided to do was, Let's go in at different angles. And we would drill at one angle and another angle, another angle, and they would put mirrors so when they looked through this line-of-sight, this mirror here [demonstrating technique], they would turn it just right so actually what

they did after they'd made all of these different zigzags, they had a straight shot to that, and it would never blow up because it had—

Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, nobody's really talked about that.

Yeah, it was really ingenious. So our main objective for doing that was to try to drill those so **[00:10:00]** straight that, so big of a hole, a twelve-inch hole or whatever, that it would get back a half-a-mile, that you would be able to see completely through that. You know, like if you lost a quarter of an inch off of this one every thirty feet, well then you would never get the full circumference of that hole.

And we went out there and we was testing and that's what I was doing. I was helping them. We went in there with these drill machines, and they had a driller and I was the helper, and what we did was we put all these instruments together and tools together, drill the holes, and then they would pull the instrument out. It had a target on it, with crosshairs in there, and our object was to make sure that the crosshairs would line up so when we got to the end of that mile-and-a-half, whatever was in there, that after we made thirty different holes from different positions, it would all be a full circumference. And it took a long time, but we learned how to master that and we did it.

And so I can remember, once we had mastered that, the outfit that did the drilling there was called Longyear Drilling--I can remember my boss to this day, the last I heard he was still alive and that was years ago, his name was Percy Whickle [sp].

That's a great name.

Can you believe that? Yeah, a great name, right? Percy Whickle? And so I never forgot that, and that was, oh, 1958, so that's quite a few many years ago. So anyway, what took place after that—and he turned out to be one of my best friends and you might even know him. Right now, he's

with the Nevada State Ethics Commission. His name is Bill Flangas. You happen to know the name?

No, I don't.

Well, he was the one instrumental in taking over all the mining and all that. He was really a hard working man and an intelligent person. And it was kind of ironic, because I didn't really think he liked me at all or whatever. Well, I was just a young kid and I was wild as a March hare.

So anyway, I was in there in the tunnel one day and I was working and he came by and he said, You're going to go to work for me.

And I said, Well, who are you?

He said, Well, I'm the superintendent of this tunnel.

And I said, Oh, well, I'm sorry.

And he said, I've been watching you, and he said, I really like the way you work and you're going to come to work for me.

And I said, No, I'm not. I've got a good job right here.

And he said, That's what you think. You're going to go to work for me.

And I thought he was kidding and whatever and I said, Who is that guy?

And they said, Well, that's Bill Flangas. He's the superintendent of all of this drilling. He's the head guy around here. Don't give him any trouble.

I said, I'm not giving him any trouble. He just says that I'm going to go to work for him.

And my boss said, Well, you're not going to go to work for him. You're going to stay working for me.

I said, Well, that's what *I* told him.

Well, about three weeks later, I'd seen him [and] every time he would see me, he says, You're going to go to work for me. And so I said, No, I'm not.

So anyway, about three weeks later my boss come up to me and he said, Well, Jerry, we're going to have to let you go.

As a matter of fact, nobody called me Jerry, even in high school. Everybody calls me Bobo to this day. It's my nickname I've had all my life.

Where'd you get it?

Well, that's another story. You want to hear that one?

Yeah.

OK, that story then, and we'll continue with the one about—let me finish the one about Bill Flangas first. Well anyway, Bill Flangas.

My boss told me we were going to have to lay you off.

And I said, Lay me off? You're *hiring* people. Why are you going to lay me off? What did I *do*?

And he says, Don't worry about it. You're not going to get out the gate. They're going to pick you up.

I said, Pick me up? What are you talking about?

He said, You're going to go to work for somebody else.

And I said, Another company?

He said, Oh, yeah.

I said, What company? What are you talking about?

He said, You're going to work for Reynolds Electric and Engineering, and guess who's going to be your boss?

And I said, Who?

He said, `Bill Flangas.`

And you know what? He did. I went to work for Bill Flangas. I'd just seen him here not too long ago, and you know what? I respect him more than any man that I can ever really—all the values and everything. He's a real man's man. And we've been friends. I always thought he hated me, but he nurtured my career up until this day. I saw him and he's a little bit older than I am, and this was just six months ago or whatever, and I couldn't wait to tell him how much I respected him. If it wasn't for him, I would never [have] had a career that I have today and I would never [have] had the family or anything. I owe everything to him. And I was so happy that I had a chance to tell him that before we get any older. So anyway, I thought he appreciated it, and what a great guy, and he's got a great wife, too. He's a nice man.

Now why did you think he didn't like you?

[00:15:00] Well, I don't know. I really don't know. Because he was really rough. He wasn't that big of a guy but he wouldn't—I don't think he would ever if—he wasn't the type of guy to say thank you, he—

Real stoic.

Yes, he was just tough. I mean he was just mean, ornery, whatever. He was just a tough man. He had a tough life and trying to put up with the bunch of us people. Miners are the greatest people in the world, but they all have a mind of their own. They're *wonderful* people. Wonderful families, too.

But anyway, let's get back to the story of how I got my nickname. OK.

My mother said, `I named you.`

And my father said, `Oh, no, I named you Bobo.`

I have two other brothers, and the oldest one is Joe and the other, my second brother, the second oldest one, his name is Bob. And his nickname is Zeke.

And anyway, but my mother said, No, I named you and here's how it happened.

And I said, Well, how? How did it happen? How did I ever get that doggone name?

And I can't ever remember anybody calling me Jerry. It was Bobo. Everybody, even when I was in high school. I can tell you some stories. My wife that I'm married to today, after we was going together for about three months, she said, What's your real name? I mean that's how bad it was, or is, or whatever.

But anyway, my mother said, No, no, no, no. Here's how you got named. She said, When you was a little toddler, we lived in Arkansas. And those homes we had in Arkansas, they have a veranda that goes all the way around the house that [was] screened—to keep all of the mosquitoes and stuff out. So my mother was looking for me one early morning and she couldn't find me. And so finally she went out the door and out the screen door and here I was, she says I'm down here talking to these, you know, and all I could say was, Bo. Bo. Bo. Bo. So anyway, I was talking, Bo. Bo, to all these guys that was putting a city water line in. So my mother retrieved me and put me back in the house and let me out on the screen porch and she said, You couldn't believe it, what they're doing. All you were doing is sticking your little head out there, watching those guys work on that construction project.

So finally at lunchtime, they come up and got me out of my screen deal and they was sitting down and they were feeding me candy and cookies from their lunch, and my mother was looking for me again, and they said, Oh, we've got Bobo right here.

And she said, What?

They said, We got Bobo right here.

Because all I could say was, Bo. Bo. Bo. So it went on like that for about a week. Every time that they would come up and work on the water line, they would bring me a little something to eat or, some cookies and things.

How neat?

Oh, yeah. And then they would come up to the door and knock on the door and ask my mother, Where's Bobo?

And she said, That's how you got your name.

And my dad says, No, no, no, that's not the way you got your name. The way you got your name was when I played semipro ball in Mansfield, Arkansas, my favorite catcher, he said, his name was Bo Hamby, and I was the greatest pitcher we ever had.

I said, Yeah, that's right.

And he said, But anyway, that was my favorite catcher's name, was Bo Hamby, and when you was born, you looked so much like Bo Hamby, with no hair and all that stuff, I named you Bo.

And Mother said, No, that's not right.

But anyway, it stuck with me and my brothers and that's all. And even when I went to high school, I only had one—even [in] grammar school, high school, nobody had ever called me Jerry—but *one* guy, and I remember his name, and his name is Gary Bookless, and he's the *only* one that called me Jerry in all of high school. In our high school we had, oh my God, we had about four thousand students in Santa Maria High School. Our graduating class was 280-something that graduated, so we had a real big school.

But anyway, I've had it all my life, and when I was dating my wife, about three months later she says, What is your real name?

I said, Jerry.

She said, Jerry? That doesn't even go.

That's great. I like your mom's story better. That's a good story.

Yeah, well, that's the way it is. But I've been trying to keep that. When I ran for [first] office, you notice you don't see any Bobo in here. It's all Jerry and, I didn't want that out. Most of all my people, my friends up there in the legislature now, they don't call me Bobo—well, some of them do, on the floor.

Oh, do they really?

Oh, absolutely, you know, and I answer to it. I act like I don't hear them, but I mean—most of them up there now call me Jerry, but I've got all my friends that are Democrats and so on, and my Republican friends call me Bobo, as well. And I *never* have enticed them to do that. I had never had to say, No, wait a minute. My name's not Bobo. It's Jerry. But I can **[00:20:00]** remember when I used to walk down the street, if somebody would say, Hey, Jerry, I wouldn't even turn around and look. I don't know what they're talking about. So it's amazing.

Now, you said all *the miners had nicknames.*

Oh, absolutely. Just 99 percent of the miners had nicknames. Let me go through some of these names. Some of these guys that—well, I can remember one time we was working on a compressor and this guy came out, they'd just hired him, and his first name was Bob. And when he came up, he was asking us, Where do we see the superintendent? And, Where do I do this? And where do I do that? And somebody looked in the back of his pickup truck

and there were two saddles in it. You know what they named him? Two Saddles. His real name was Bob Nichols [sp] and he lived in a little town up here in Beatty, but *today*, if you see him, you call him Two Saddles and he answers to it. `Hey, Two Saddles.` And oh my gosh, it's just everybody. Like Sandwich Tom and Water Hose Hank and, oh, Ava. We named Don Owen Ava. He was always—

Oh, really? I've met Don.

Do you know Don Owen? Yeah, his nickname is Ava because he used to act like a girl, like Ava Gardner? Just playing around and whatever, but we named him Ava. But everyone—we named one of the young kids [who] came out, he was really young and just looked like a little boy, and one of the guys said, `Look at that little guy. He looks like a little rosebud.` So young and clean and all that, and guess what his nickname is? Rosebud. And he didn't like it at all, but he answers to Rosebud. Now when he calls and he says, `This is Rosebud.` His name is Walter Davis. But I mean there's *hundreds* of these. I could go on and go on. But just about everybody had a nickname of some sort.

And you said that made it difficult to track some of these people now.

Yeah, and when we got into the situation where we was doing the Nevada Test Site medical survey, that we had the grant, that they came in with Dr. Lewis Pepper and his crew that came in on a grant for this medical research. Then myself, John Campbell, and a few of these people that were business representatives—which I was at the time with the operating engineers—they put us on this committee as expert—it wasn't witnesses—expert testimonial people; that [they] *knew* had been working at the test site so many years and could answer questions that they didn't figure anybody else could answer. They said, `You guys are experts at this, so we're going to set a panel up and we want you, you, you, and you,` and so on, so we did.

And so we set this panel, and when it came to try to find out what was going on with those guys, we had such a hard time. At the beginning of this medical research, we couldn't get anything from the federal government. We couldn't get anybody's name who worked at the test site. No, they wouldn't give us anything.

What year was this?

This was 19—it had to be in '97, '98, or somewhere in there. And finally, of course, the operating engineers, I couldn't give them the operating engineers because it's against the law or whatever to give out the names from union members. And so on. So I *knew* all of those guys but I couldn't give them to—. Finally after a couple lawsuits and court suits and whatever that the government was helping us try to *do* some of this stuff—because they had already put up so many million dollars for a grant to do this—then they *did*. They made some kind of a concession that the people that worked at the Nevada Test Site, yes, we can go in there and we can find out through the computers who they worked for. *Then* at the time, the people that worked for Reynolds Electric and Engineering back then, we didn't have computers *then*. We had *Rolodex* cards and so on. So what a mess *that* was. It would have been *great* if we'd had computers back in '51. But that's what we did when we *did* put the computers together with John Campbell. And John Campbell, myself, and all the ones that *knew* the people, we would try to put together different categories, like electrician, pipe fitter, operating engineer, carpenter, bull ganger, laborer, whatever it would be. A Teamster. Then we associated those in categories. Once we put them in *categories*, then what we tried to do, is to find out their *names*. So anyway, the biggest problem we had was—well let's say, `Let's start out with the miners. OK. We're going to concentrate only on the mining today. What was Water Hose Hankin's name?`

[00:25:00] [And they would say] `Well, I don't know. Was it Bill Hankin?`

Nobody knows. We didn't have any—so someone would say, Well, you try to find that out. What is his name?

And *all* of these guys, it was such a problem because all we knew them was Sandwich Tom or Water Well or Oil Can Harry. We knew a guy named Oil Can Harry. His name was Harry Griffith . And I knew some of these. He lived in Beatty, as well. So I said, I know him. His name is Harry Griffin. [And they would say] Oh, OK. Then we could get his name and go put that together with the stuff that we had finally got from REECo; some of the names and stuff, to associate these together, and then we'd put them in the computer. Built a database and all that stuff. And once we could *do* that, after we got them in the database the best we could do, we started trailing them to find out if they were alive. First of all, get their social security number and so on, and then we could contact their wives, their sons, or whatever and ask if they were alive, when they died, and so on, *et cetera*, and we all put it in the database. And what we was really trying to find out, after about two or three years, after we got—I think we had eleven hundred names in there. Then they busted these down into categories that I was telling you, which was miners, laborers, carpenters, iron workers, bull gangers, and Teamsters. Then after we did that, we find out how many was alive, how many worked there, how many died. And then we had the percentage of how long they lived after working in those hazardous conditions that we have up there. How many wear hearing aids. All of us wear hearing aids that worked under there, underground, because of the whining, and so on. And then REECo's made restitution to us. They was really a great company. They was a wonderful company.

I talked to Frankie Lou Mayer, who worked in workmen's comp. and she talked about the hearing aids.

Oh, is that right?

And she talked about how that was—she thought REECo was really great with trying to compensate—

Well, let me tell you something about REECo. Reynolds Electric and Engineering was one of the best companies. It got many, many awards for the safety of their employees, and I'll tell you what, there was none better. As a business representative for, well, almost twenty-five years, I handled hundreds and hundreds of different contractors here in the State of Nevada. And *none* of them had a safety program like they had at Reynolds Electric and Engineering. They were wonderful to their employees. The only problem we had with their employees is sometimes it's seasonal, and that came about because our seasonals runs from October to October because that's our *fiscal* year. You're well aware of that. But most of the people wouldn't, so what they'd do, if they had any excess money left over, then from November to December, January, and February, we would work six, seven days a week because they would use the money up, but that's what it was for. They would kind of hold back. But then there would be a layoff for a month or two because there wasn't any money in the budget. So once they was rebudgeted again, then *[they'd] hire* on again. Some of us were lucky enough, they never got laid off out there.

Were you ever laid off?

Yes, I got laid off one time when they was hiring people.

Oh, that was the time when you were—?

No, no, that was a different time. It was very funny, too, because, I don't know, I was a job steward and so on up there and whatever, and one day one of the walking bosses come up to me and says, `Jerry,` he says, `I'm going to have to let you go.`

And I said, `Let me go? What are you talking about?`

He says, `Well, I'm going to have to lay you off.`

I said, Well, OK, whatever.

And I was a one-man layoff. You know, I never questioned anybody. I *never did* question anybody. I think they figured that I would probably raise all holy terror about why I was laid off and, Why didn't you lay him off? I've been here twenty years.

You got laid off after—?

Well, I was there in 1977 [1957]. This was '76. So it'd been nineteen years or whatever and I got laid off, which was fine. I come to town and went to work, as well. And about three months later I get a strange phone call from one of the superintendents out at the Nevada Test Site.

And he said, Bobo.

And I said, Yeah?

He said, This is Gaylan.

Gaylan?

Gaylan Adair.

A nice man. He got killed riding a bicycle. Some guy ran over him. He was one of the bicycle enthusiasts. A great man.

Anyway, he said, How would you like to come back to work for Reynolds Electric and go to engineering?

I said, Doing what?

He said, Running a mucking machine. What you were doing when you got laid off.

I said, Well, sure, yeah.

And it was the middle of July, August. It was hotter than blazes here in town. So I said, Yeah, I'd be more than happy to come back.

And he said, Well, you got to give Bill Flangas a call.

I said, OK.

[00:30:00] I picked the phone up and I called Bill and I said, What's going on, Bill?

He said, Have you learnt your lesson yet?

And I said, Beg your pardon?

He said, Have you learnt your lesson yet?

And I said, Yes, sir.

And he said, You be down at the union hall tomorrow. I'm going to put an order in for you.

I said, OK.

And that was history. After I did that, I went down and picked my dispatch up and I never got laid off again. As a matter of fact, and when I—they asked me to become their business representative, the operating engineer, in June of 1977, and I was dealing with Bill Flangas on a one-to-one basis because I was a representative of all employees that were union for the operating engineers. And we had a great relationship. But we had our ins and outs and whatever.

So did you ever figure out why you got laid off or what lesson—?

Never did question. No, I never did.

You don't know what lesson you were supposed to learn?

No. To this day, I would love to ask him, What did you mean by, *Did you learn your lesson?* But I was smart enough to know that he had something that he was going to show me, he was the boss. I must've said something and it got back to him or something. I have no idea. And you know I'm thinking, Well, hey, if I got a chance to go back out there–I *loved* it out there. It was a *wonderful* place to work.

How was the driving?

Well, that's another thing. Driving was the worst part about it. As a matter of fact, I spent more time with a friend of mine, his name is Wayne Grimes, I don't know if you've heard the name or what, but he worked with me on just about every job. When they would transfer us, or new job or new tunnel, him and I was always together. He would run the motor and I ran the mucking machine, the one that did all the work all the time. He'd run the little train. Have you been out in the tunnels before?

I haven't been to the tunnel, but I've been to the test site.

OK, you haven't seen the little trains and stuff they run in there. Like Yucca Mountain and so on?

No, I haven't seen that.

Well anyway, we used to ride back and forth in vans before the buses were ever—in fact, I was one of the ones that helped negotiate, when I was the business representative, to get the buses instead of individual vans. And they used to pay us so much money, I think, I can't remember now, three-and-a-half a day, or maybe six-and-a-half dollars a day subsistence. Then we would pay for a ride back and forth by the week. And one of the guys, they have a van and eight or ten people would ride back and forth. But this one particular guy, his name was Wayne Grimes, and he had three or four of these vans and he's kind of making a little on the side. But anyway, we was really good friends. I was friends with his brother, as well. His name was Buzz Grimes, and he's still alive, both of them are alive, and one of them lives right up next to me right now, Wayne Grimes.

But anyway, this particular guy, him and I rode together for *years*. We had probably six or seven hundred thousand *miles* that we rode together. And the thing of it was, I spent more time with this fellow than I ever did with my family. Because what happens when you work out

at the Nevada Test Site, it's a twelve-hour day. So when you come home and you get up in the morning, you get up in the morning at four o'clock to make sure you get the *van*, you get out to the test site and you go right to work at seven-thirty, and you get home at night about six-thirty, quarter to seven, you eat, and *go to bed*. Because you got to get up four o'clock in the *morning* again. And so everything was more intimate with him. He knew everything that I was doing, I knew everything that he was doing, and we spent more time together than we did with our families. And you know what? What's really unique about that, I think that put a bond between all of us that worked out there. There's something that the people that worked at the test site have a bonding that no other jobs have. They don't have a bonding like *we* have, you know what I mean? It's really something because *all* of us are still friends. I mean it was a wonderful place to work.

Now, was the strain on your family, on your relationship with your—?

Well, you know, our families would have to get used to it all. What we was trying to do is make a living. And of course my wife didn't want me working all those hours and says, `You're going to have to get some rest.` And I said, `I got to feed the family first. You know, we're a work horse here,` and I said, `This old horse dies, you can get you another one.` But I mean it's the same thing. It was every day, it was steady, and it was a steady paycheck, and I think that's why *I* liked it so well. It was really a great job. It was steady and no layoffs, very seldom ever laid off, and every Friday the paycheck was there and the paychecks never bounced. It was wonderful. And you could plan something. We bought homes and stuff like that and whatever. But it was really demanding on you, you know what I mean, but it was a wonderful place to work.

Now, I had heard that at times there were some labor issues with REECo? Do you have a perspective on that or—?

[00:35:00] You mean about some of the strikes that we had out there? Yeah, well, we did. I can remember a 101-day strike. We struck for wages, and we're only talking—I can't remember exactly, fifteen or twenty cents, a quarter, an hour. And we actually, after 101 days, we went back to work for a nickel *less* than what we went out on strike for. But it was a situation there, it was money that was budgeted and they claimed they didn't have the money. And so how can we give you it if we don't have it? And I found out later, as a business representative, that some of these companies that we negotiated with says, Listen, I can't afford that. I can *not*. And they says, Take my books and if you can find me somewhere where I can afford this, I'll do it. But if you force this on me, you're going to break my company. Well, you know, we only was trying to make restitution. If you break a company, my members are not *working*. So the unions *always* have tried to get along. And you know what's happened here, though? If you look what's happening in the State of Nevada, what's happened here, you know, the reason I went into construction when I was a young man, because we made about six times more money than the city, county, and the state. But that's just the reverse now. The city and the county and the state makes about six times more money than a construction worker. And a construction worker, the reason they was paid so high and such a good wage, because it's *seasonal*. You know, and the work, like an operating engineer in Southern California, their average hours is only sixteen hundred hours a year. We average more than that here in Las Vegas because we don't have the weather that they have and the rainy seasons and so on and *et cetera* in California. Once it rains in California three or four days, that old mud there, you don't work for three or four days back in Cucamonga and up and through Temecula. Temecula's not bad because it's sandy, pretty much, in Temecula. But up in through

there, and that's the reason the construction work—but you know what? Our construction workers are not overpaid; they're underpaid. And some of these CEOs and some of these companies—I don't know if I should be getting into this or not, but some of this is way out of hand, and something will be done about it one of these days. I don't know. But anyway, I don't think that's what we need, to get into about that.

Well, the other thing I was going to ask you was when you were talking about the database and how you brought all this together. What were some of your findings?

OK, well, I'll have to get back to there. John Campbell was the one that actually should take credit for all that. He's the one that put this thing together. And he's a great guy; he's a nice fellow. And anyway, we helped him as best we could. And some of these categories that we put together—and their ages, to see if they was still alive or whatever—it was amazing that some of them lived longer than the other ones. When we got down to where people had handled the radiation—let me give you an example of that—like if they would go in there two or three miles back and they would set an atomic device back in what they call the alcove. Well, then what they would do, they would put this device in there, and they would call it "stemming." So they might put five billion marbles around it and then they might put—

Marbles?

Marbles, just regular marbles kids play. *Tons* of them. *Billions* of them.

Why?

Well, they were trying to find out what would happen when it ignited, or I don't know what—those were scientific instruments and stuff and they had all kind of instruments in there and we'd go back and retrieve them. That was the whole deal. See, when we would go in there and drive a tunnel there for a device, we had so many different what they call *users*. They was all

technicians. They didn't even *talk* to us. They was *scientists*, you know. And we would go in there and drive this tunnel, and if they had something special, we would drive all these little what they call alcoves and drifts for them to go in there and put their special devices in—whether it be the tremors of the ground or see what it would melt. And that's what they needed to do to find out about if—for space wars [Star Wars—SDI] or whatever, if we would shoot a missile up in space, they would shoot, Russia or whoever would, would it melt our missile head before it got their missile head? That was [what] all the testing was all about. And most of the testing that I understand was—and we never questioned any of that because it wasn't none of our business. That's amazing how everything was kept *secret* up there. Oh, it's amazing. And we didn't care. All we wanted to do was do what they wanted us to do and we was helping the United States of America by keeping our mouths shut and doing our job, and we did a real good **[00:40:00]** job of that. We really did. It's unbelievable.

But anyway, their object was to put these devices in these different positions, whether it be to see if it would melt this or if it would not melt this or if the heat would stand it and so on and *et cetera*, maybe we needed a different kind of a steel or a plastic or whatever in case they shot some nuclear stuff at us and we had the wrong kind of aircraft, if that wouldn't work, I don't know. It was just *millions* of different kind of—and some of that was for Plowshare, which was for medicines and so on that they did. They did a lot of research out there, not only for just atomic blasts and whatever, but they did a lot of research out there for human consumptions and just everything. Wonderful deal. Really. And Plowshare and so on.

So anyway, what they would do, once they'd get the device in there and put all of their instruments—I'm talking about rolls of cable, I mean big as this room here, and they would come clean all the way out to these trailers and stuff on top of the mesa. *Miles* of it. So when

they would shoot these devices, then they would find out what would happen with all these gauges. But we would have to go back in there and try to find them and retrieve them. But before we did that, though, once they had them in place, then we went in there and we called it "stemming it." Like we might put marbles in this one, we might put lead brick to shield all of these instruments. And a lot of times we went in there and stemmed it with hay, millions of bales of hay, all kind of—BB shot, *millions* of those bags of twenty-five pound BB shot they use for shotguns. And it was to try to contain the radiation and make sure that it didn't blow out, like when you had the tunnel. And we had gas-sealed doors which would not let the gas—it would *contain* it in there. Because if the gas ever got in the atmosphere, then we broke the treaty. And we have done that before. If anything blew out of that tunnel, if we couldn't contain it inside the tunnel and it opened up and erupted, which Sedan crater—did they take you out there and show you that one?

I saw Sedan.

I was there when that happened. I was there—oh, yeah, I was at the 16-tunnel when I seen that thing go up. Scared me to *death*. Oh my God, yeah. But anyway, that's what we was trying to do, was contain it. And you know what? I actually worked down in the very *bottom* of that Sedan crater on a drill rig, helping them drill core drills down to the ground zero, or if they could find any ground zero. It was a horrible place to work because it was just *sand*, and the wind would come up. Oh my gosh, it was a horrible place to work. But we got it done, and it was something.

So did you actually see it cave in?

Yeah. What happened is the device blew out. I mean they didn't *contain* it, see? So they didn't stim it properly or whatever.

So that's why it's so big?

Yeah. Now, that one there, they went in with a drill rig and they drilled a big circumference hole, maybe eight foot in diameter, and they put everything in that, and they went down there and they put pipe in that. And then when they put the device down, they lowered it down with the crane, the device, and then they stemmed that. They put maybe concrete or tons of dirt, whatever, but some way it didn't contain it and it blew out the bottom and the sides, and that's how you got that crater.

But getting back to Plowshare, now, what they wanted to do with that to make like new canals and stuff, like the Panama Canal, they was going to go in there and drill holes and deals and whatever and put small devices. But the main objective for that whole thing was a lot of that stuff, other than those scientific instruments and so on that they was doing—we'd had no idea what those were anyway—was to clean that bomb up. Like if we would go overseas and whatever and shoot another one, like they did in Japan and all the fallout killed so many people, and radiation. And that's what they was trying to do was see if they could get rid of the radiation, and they did, a lot of it.

We used to wear dosimeters on our lapels to make sure that we didn't get so many rads. I wore one of those for many, many years.

But all in all, it was very, very good. They really tried to take good care of us, because nobody really knew what we was *doing* out there in regards to gamma rays and whatever. Everybody had their *notions* and their *intentions*, but I don't even know if they know *today*. It sure is not *good* for you to breathe all that stuff, that's for sure.

Well, you were talking about some of the findings from the database of some of the different workers.

[00:45:00] Well, I was going to tell you that. I don't really know how long some of them lived and so on.

Well, were there any anomalies within the different groups? Like did some groups live longer—?

Oh, absolutely, yeah. The fact of the matter, and like I say, John Campbell can support this better than I can because I'm giving you hearsay, but John Campbell has all the data. What we were telling people—the electricians and the operating engineers—they lived a lot longer than the ones that handled…. Once that blast was blast and contained, then when we would go in there. The first thing we would try to do is drill a hole to go back where that thing for the bomb or device was ignited, and drill in there and bring out the core drills and see what was—

What happened.

Yeah, if it was glass or what it was, and what's melted, and so on. But you know, when they would pour those cores out of there, they looked just like a piece of dirt or rock; they would wrap them in cheesecloth, and would kind of paint them with wax so they would hold their content of moisture. So anyway, what really happened is [that] those guys that did all of that, and the drillers, and the core wrappers, there's not very many of them left alive. And they was the ones that was most susceptible to—they was making direct contact with the radiation and stuff that come out of them tunnels. That come out of the bomb blast. I don't know if it's right to call it a bomb or not, but I mean, it was the *device* that was ignited. And so that's all a nuclear device does anyway is create *heat*. It doesn't have an explosion; it just creates *heat*. That's all. It makes a fusion. So I don't know, you know, so it doesn't—and how they do that, they *contain* it, and that's where it gets explosive.

Now, did you find that they all died from cancer or just from other—?

Well, all different kind of—well, you know, we don't know. We just know they're not alive. But we tried to find out about that. A lot of them had lung cancer. Most of them died with bone cancer. Thyroid cancer. I mean it was all kinds of stuff.

Now, did you ever have to go work on that? Did you ever have to bring in the device—?

Oh, absolutely. Sure.

Oh, did you really? So you were exposed to that, too.

Yeah.

Did you have protective gear when you—?

Oh, sure. In fact, what would happen [on] my end—now these drillers would go in there and drill, and once they had got their findings or whatever they could do and find out where it moved to the ground zero—we would go in there with these mucking machines, the railroad tracks, these little dinky motors and stuff you're talking about. And we would try to see how far we could get to that bomb blast and see if we could retrieve any of these instruments that they had set there. Now, they might move thirty or forty feet. The whole ground shifted. I mean we used to find hundreds of them. That was our job, to go back. It was called "reentry." And we would wear complete face masks and oxygen and double coveralls and booties and tape. And where we worked in there, it was hotter than blazes in there, too. Oh, absolutely. And everything—you can't believe that these we call "steel sets," these steel deals that's shaped like a horseshoe to make the tunnel. Well, we'd go in there, oh, I don't know, three or four miles or whatever, some of them, and when we would go back in there for reentry, those were just melted. There wasn't nothing left. There wasn't any wood left. The wood was all gone. And it was just the stinkingest mess you ever seen, all these cables, but we fought our way through all that just trying to get to

ground zero. That was our object, of retrieving those instruments that they had imbedded in them deals. But I'm sure we found out a lot of good stuff.

Now, when Bill picked you up to work for him, what did you do for him, then? When you got laid off that one time and then Bill Flangas—?

Well, what had happened there, when they started driving these tunnels, I was working for the Longyear Drilling. That's when they decided, We're going to have to put all of these underground shots *underground*. We're not going to be able to shoot them in the atmosphere anymore. So they changed their whole system of not building any towers, not preparing to drop any devices from the air, because they would be in the atmosphere. So they said, Well, we got to start driving these tunnels. So they had these two smaller mucking machines that went in there after they would go in there and drill these holes, put dynamite and powder, and blow it up into the shape of a tunnel. Then these machines would go in there and they would gather up the rock and the dirt, and then they would continue to go in, **[00:50:00]** and they were called mucking machines. So anyway, they had these two little ones that were side-by-side, one left-handed and one right-handed. Well, they come to find out it was so slow, they needed a bigger machine. So they bought another machine called an Eimco-40. It's called an Eimco-40 mucker, and it had a big bucket on it, and it was so much bigger, they would take those two out of there and just put the *one* in there. But the one called for two guys; one guy couldn't run it. You had to have *one* guy run it and the other guy, which was *me*—Bill Flangas in his mind all the time was putting me back there—helping the operating engineer run the mucking machine. And I am going to take care of the other part.

Well, OK, now, walk me through how you run a mucking machine. I mean what's the skill involved?

Quite a bit of skill. It's like running a piece of equipment. You know what a Caterpillar is? Cranes or anything? That was an operating [engineer]. Yeah, it [is] a piece of machinery that ran on a railroad track, and it had a big bucket on it. Once they would shoot that and blast, well, you'd go in there and this bucket would come just like this [demonstrating technique], right over there, and dump into a conveyor belt; then we'd go right back into a little train that had a compartment in it, and once you would fill that car up, the train would take the car and go back and dump it into a what they call an alcove;, get another car that was empty, and come back in there, and you'd just keep doing that till you got back to the face, well, we'd say like that, when you got back to the end where they had already blasted. Then they continued to do the same thing over and over. They'd drill holes again, blast it, bring the mucking machine in, and that was how you penetrate, keep going right on through, the tunnel and making headway.

Right. So now what did you do? Because if the—

I ran the mucking machine, but very first, when Flangas put me to work, I made sure that all the cars were hooked up, and I handled the hose that ran this. It ran under air. They didn't have any gas engines or diesel engines. So they ran by air. And it had a big two-inch bull hose, is what they called it, and I made sure that when he came back, he didn't run over the hose. I made sure that he had a car, and that he didn't empty anything on the railroad track. And I made sure that all the cars were—it was part of my job, and so once they brought another one in, then they put me on it. They broke me in on the mucking machine. After they had this machine, after we did rototillers or so, then they was going to start another tunnel and another shift. Then they put me on the machine.

Oh. Did you like it or—?

Oh, I loved it.

Was it boring or was it—?

Oh, no. Never. *Never*. Because there was always something new every day.

Oh, really?

Oh, absolutely. The men was just *fabulous*. I mean we used to play so many jokes and games. Oh, it was wonderful. It was really something. Those were the best times of my life. I was in my teens, you know, and twenties and whatever, and they was wonderful people. They were hard workers. Oh, it was really amazing. And REECo was trying to take care of us so good, safety-wise and so on. We really respected them, too. It was wonderful. What a great place to work.

So how long did you do the mucking machine?

I did that almost—actually till 1977. And then that's when I become a business representative because I was so vocal. Anyway, so then I became—I come here in town and negotiated contracts and so on. And it was a learning position for a little while, and then next thing you know, I'm the assistant district representative of Southern Nevada. So I negotiate a lot of contracts with the hotels and everything here, as well. And plus, when we brought the mold out there for Yucca Mountain, I've got a picture of me standing right in front of the mold. I was in negotiations with Peter Kiewit and M&K when we negotiated a contract for Yucca Mountain. And all of us that negotiated the contract have the same picture in front of the mold out there. I was going to bring some of those. I couldn't *find* them. In fact, I give some of those to the last interview that I had. I went down and had some duplicates made and I give them to her. And I looked for them last night—I got company in from Idaho—and I couldn't find them. But I have a lot of them underground with that little mucking machine you were talking about.

Oh, that would be great. Well, if you come across them, give us a call.

Well, you know, I need to come across them because they're mine and I make duplicates to give them. So I have the originals, and I'll be more than happy to get some for you. Really.

That would be great. Now, when you negotiated contracts, were you still working for REECo or were you an independent?

No, when I was negotiating contracts, I was working for the Operating Engineers Local Number **[00:55:00]** 12 out of Los Angeles, California. You're probably familiar with all the work in California, that yellow equipment, the Caterpillars and all that?

Yes. My dad's always worked retail, so I'm more familiar with the grocery store unions and things like that, you know.

I understand that, yeah. But now, you know the ones that's moving all that mountains with that yellow equipment? That's what we're talking about, operating engineer. Yeah, like when you go down here and they're building these hotels? The crane operators and all? Those are the guys that *I* take care of. They got any problems, they come to me, and I took care of their health and welfare, I took care of their pension and all of that stuff, and I negotiated contracts for them.

Now, was it tough to leave REECo?

Well, I did. No, not really, because it was a better job. I mean REECo was fine and wonderful, but I mean it was an advancement for me. I didn't really want the job. The only reason I took the job was because this buddy that I came here with in 1957, this Billy Boone that lives in Cucamonga, he became a business representative and he recommended me to our business manager, Bill Waggoner [sp], that lives in Los Angeles.

And so Bill Waggoner says, `I'd like to hire you.`

And I says, `Well, I don't think so.`

And he says, `Well, your buddy Billy Boone's going to come over there.`

And I said, What's it got to do with me?

He said, He wants you to work for him over there. And he said, He's not going to take the job unless you take it.

And I said, Well, what do you mean?

And he said, Well, he will not take the job to come to Las Vegas unless I hire you. What's it going to take for me to hire you?

And I said, How much money you paying?

And we came down to an agreement and he was really fair. And I did. And my buddy called me, of course, and he says, Why are you doing that? Why are you turning that down? I need you. We're buddies and I need somebody that I can trust and somebody who won't be sticking a knife in my back.

And I said, I don't want to do that.

And he said, Do it for two years for me. We're buddies.

Twenty-three-and-a-half years later, I said, I've had enough of this.

But anyway, it's been a wonderful career.

So now, you didn't have any experience going into it as far as how to negotiate a contract. You just had—

Well, not really. What I had was as a steward. I was a steward and I had to take care of my people with their grievances and stuff before I'd ever call a business agent. That's what a steward does. Why, if you have a grievance, you take it to your steward, and if he thinks it's legitimate, or if you have a frivolous grievance, he'll say, No, that's not in the contract. Show me. Before we get a hold of the business agent, you know. Well, there were twenty-three hundred and there's only three of us, so I couldn't be everywhere at the same time, so we rely on our stewards to tell our other members that have been through our training and all that, that you

have a legitimate gripe or you don't. And so some of those grievances are legitimate, but 90 percent of them are not. Somebody's feelings has been hurt and so on. But I mean when they break the contract or whatever, then, that was my job, to determine whether they were wrong or they violated the contract or they didn't. And I was always man enough to say, Well, listen, they didn't break the contract. *You* did. And when we did that, I had my training because we had so many arbitrations and so on. It was just a training process. We had so many contracts come up all the time, like three or four different contractors a year, and it didn't take very long to get orientated on how to negotiate contracts. We already had our officers of the local and they would always have somebody on a one-on-one teaching basis; they were always really strict in making sure that we knew what we was doing when we negotiated. And they would always send an officer from Los Angeles with us so we wouldn't make any mistakes. So it was a training process. I just didn't jump up there, and I was one of the—on the committee. And there's a lot of contracts that I negotiated myself, just like you and I are one-on-one, but they were already in place and stuff like that. When we negotiated Reynolds Electric and Engineering, there was probably six or seven of us operating engineers and six or seven people from REECo. It was wonderful.

Now, how long would it take to negotiate a typical contract, and what was involved with doing that?

You mean with REECo?

Just a typical contract.

Well, it all depends. See, if you have a contract in place, like our master labor agreement, it's already spelled out. So what we do, we go to our contractors that we have signed with our associations, like the Associated General Contractors of America, AGC. Well, we would

negotiate with them, and we had three or four other associations, like Homebuilders Association **[01:00:00]** and so on. We would make sure that we had a contract unless negotiating with AGC. There we have more work; we have more employees working for AGC, we have more contractors, so we would sit down with them and we would kind of come up with a mutual contract that they could live with. If they said, We can live with this, then we would take that as a template and take it to the Homebuilders Association and say, This is what they offered us. Can you live with that? And most of them would say, Yeah. Whatever AGC… or, No, we can't live with that. Then we would have to find some other way. So before we would sign a contract with AGC, we would have to come back and say, Hey, that association can't live with that. Or our members. And we would know what it takes to run our union, our health and welfare. If we needed another quarter to make—well, anything, when you buy insurance or—it costs money, and we got it broke down to the cent. If we wanted another contract or, say, you need a better insurance policy, that instead of 80 percent, we're going to cover 90 percent, well, that would take another thirteen cents. So when we went in there, we'd say, We need thirteen cents for our health and welfare, we know that, for each employee, and we need another quarter an hour for their raises. We need another for their vacation pay, ten cents. We got to have eighty cents an hour. They says, Oh, no, we can only afford forty. And we got to have eighty. And a lot of times—that's when we negotiate. We say, Well, listen, let's spread this out. Let's take fifteen cents now and six months later, give us another ten. I mean that's how it was. But we couldn't—we never would go backwards. We'd never go backwards. But it was always mutually agreed. With the test site, it was a lot easier because it was all federal money and they would know—they were mandated how much they were going to get. We knew what they was getting.

So it was easier to negotiate with REECo?

Oh, yeah, but they was out there always breaking conditions down and so on. Because we would like to get the same thing as town got; but they hired a bunch of smart attorneys. But in the long run, they had to have what they had and do what they did.

So you think they were fair?

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Oh, sure.

Can you recall a particular[ly] difficult contract that you had to negotiate and what the circumstances were around that? Throughout your career.

Oh, gosh, there's many of them.

Is there anything that stands out?

Well, there were so many. Rock, Sand, and Gravel is another interest we have. And what had happened here, like construction, they make a little bit more money because Rock, Sand, and Gravel is more like REECo. It's a twenty-four-hour-a-day job and it's seven days a week and they make this aggregate and so on. But they're different because one, you have competitiveness for aggregate and sand. Some of these other contractors that are not paying insurance and not paying legitimate, livable wages, well, they want to sell like, say, a ton of sand for ten dollars. Well, a ton of sand that REECo or another contractor, the union contractor, would have to sell it for fifteen dollars because they had to have so many and so much money to pay for the health and welfare for employees. And that's what we ran into with our Rock, Sand, and Gravel over the last fifteen years, because they could buy all of this material cheaper than we could make it for union contractors. But you know, we had to kind to cushion ourself to work not receiving—or trying to do a better job than I say the contractors that wasn't paying those livable standard wages. So it got to the point where we was going to lose all of our union contractors because

they didn't want to pay insurance, they didn't want to pay this—they're losing all their sand and their gravel and stuff to the non-union because we couldn't organize them; for the simple fact that there's too many people that would work for that less pay. So it's one of those deals, and you probably have that in retail and in the grocery business, as well.

That just happened in California. My dad was talking about that.

Well, I know. I'm well aware of that.

And even I'm familiar—

Yes, at Albertson's.

I did a lot of studying, too, of the César Chávez and the fruit pickers down in—

It's the same thing, yeah. When you get people who can exploit these people, see, and I didn't think we'd want to get into that.

With the test site workers, did you ever call a strike? Or would you initiate that, or would somebody else initiate?

Well, you know what? There were strikes out there. Back in the old days, there was quite a few strikes. But after we had that 101-day strike, we had what they call a no-strike clause. We agreed that we would not strike if they wanted to arbitrate it, and if they would arbitrate it, then it would **[01:05:00]** be a binding arbitration. If they would agree to that, we would agree to sign a non-strike clause in your agreement. And you know what? That ended all of that. Because if we didn't come to an agreement, we still continued to work, and if it went into binding arbitration, then REECo, if the arbitrator says, `You have to pay that or you lose. Union, you lose. You don't`–actually that is what has been over the period of years with this Rock, Sand, and Gravel. The same type of thing. We want binding arbitration. That was the thing that we used to have as what they call your hole card or something, was to pull your people off the job

and a company couldn't—they didn't have qualified people to do the job. And the old government facility and whatever, they was trying to get people in there to work for cheaper wages. And we really didn't like that because it was federal government money anyway. But that's the same thing you have when you're exploiting people, and that's one thing that the unions *hate,* is people being *exploited* and they get the people that'll work for less amount of money. Then they have less amount of conditions and so on. Money's not everything; conditions is, whatever. You know, like your health and welfare, and your pension plans and so on. That's what you're really working for, is when you're working, you have to look ahead thirty, forty years when you're retired, and I did that. I was one of the guys, when I was growing up—I didn't have a whole lot of money when I was a kid—but I did realize this: that when I get older, I'm *definitely* going to have me a rocking chair where I can rock back, and I did. I went into the Operating Engineers and we got a wonderful pension plan. The twenty-four years that I had with the Operating Engineers International, I got another pension from them, as well. So I mean that's wonderful.

I would think that the miners and the workers at the test site would have *a lot of power because of all the security clearance involved and the specialized work that they were doing. Did you all feel empowered like that, or did you—? I mean I wouldn't think it would be so easy to replace one of you guys because you had to be cleared, you know.*

Well, that's true. That's true. And it was easy to clear me because in 1957 I was only eighteen years old, so they didn't have to go too far to clear me. And as a matter of fact, I probably, when I retired in 2000, I had a security clearance, as well, then.

Oh, you did? Did you have a Q clearance?

Oh, absolutely. I had a Q clearance back in 1958. And then I had a Q clearance all the time, when I was a business representative, as well.

Oh, really?

Oh, absolutely. I went to all of the [Area] 51 and sites and all this stuff to take care of our people. Now, there's stuff that they wouldn't let me *see* that's in there, but these special deals—

That's interesting. So you would go to the different areas.

Oh, I went to Tonopah, and then they would take me all over Tonopah and into the facilities, but [what] they didn't want me to *see*, they didn't take me *into*. And we all was aware of that, and a lot of times I had people *working* in there, in these special deals. That's where all our smart bombs and all that stuff at Tonopah, that's where they put all these together and that's where it was *invented*. You know, the smart bombs that follow them laser bombs and stuff that we dropped them on Moammar Khadafi and the rest of them over there. But I mean that's where they were invented, all of that stuff there, and there's a lot of that stuff that they wouldn't let me see, but of course I didn't know what 99 percent of the stuff was anyway. I didn't care.

And they would bring the people that was working in these compounds, and they would say, `Well, Jerry, you can't get in here.`

I said, `I know that. Can you bring my people out so I can talk to them?`

[And they would say], `Absolutely. How about one at a time or all of them?`

And I said, `Whatever you can get away with, but I need to see my guys, if they got questions and so on, or for their health and welfare or *anything*, and if they have a grievance that you guys didn't pay them properly, I need to know.`

So most of—they was real good about that. Even the Air Force was, and the Army. Even the security guards, the Air Force, whoever they was, because they got so many different people

out there. They don't only have the Air Force there; they got all *kinds* of people out there. And we would never question anything. If you remember, how in the world did they ever keep the F-117 quiet for all those years? It was something like eleven years before it ever cracked up. And the people that was, oh, hundreds of people that were in Tonopah that worked on that project, and they seen those aircrafts from day one. Until the one that cracked up near Bakersfield, California on a night [July 11, 1986], and they seen it the next morning, and that's when it all—the joke is up or the secret's out, if you remember. You might be too young for that. But the secret's out, F-117s, **[01:10:00]**, they were made out of all this different metallic materials and so on. But we'd seen them. We'd seen them, and we didn't know what they were or whatever.

Yeah. Well, I think I'm going to change CDs.

OK.

[01:10:16] End Track 2, Disc 1.

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

There we go. We're back on.

Well, it's amazing to me how everything is kept secret. It really was. Because all the stuff that's out there, like you were talking about, Area 51? They haven't had a 51 out there for years but they got other places out there and whatever, but you know what? We're all really tightlipped about all that stuff, even though it's probably not [an issue of] security anymore. I don't know. In fact, a couple years ago, I flew up there in one of our legislative conferences that we have, and the Air Force picked us up in helicopters and flew us up, and had lunch at Tonopah Test Range with some of the Air Force generals and so on. And it was really wonderful. And they play games up there every day, twenty-four hours a day, for protection for like the United States, to see if they can penetrate all of our radar systems and so on that we have in place up there.

And I can remember when the helicopter pilot says, `You see those strobe lights down there?`

Well, I knew we was getting close to Site C and all of that stuff, and I said, `Yeah.`

You know, we had headsets on. And he said, `We're all dead.` He said, `They've seen us.`

They play games there twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and that's what their training—it's all computerized. But every day. And they bus them out there every day. And that's for the security of our nation. And you know, some of these people that—*that's* what it's all about. That stuff needs to be—and you know they always talk about Yucca Mountain this, Yucca Mountain that, but let me ask you something. When they built the Nevada Test Site out there, *they* didn't ask me or anybody else if they could *do* that out there. They own the property. So, I mean, what if today was today and we need to have all of this testing and everything for our security? What would we do? We probably wouldn't get it done. I don't know. It's a mess. It's a *mess.*

It's a different generation. You know, it's interesting how after Vietnam, the whole—I mean do you think that there's different views now within generations because of Vietnam, or do you see it as a different—?

Oh, there's no doubt about it. I think everything is—well, for example, everybody thinks that Saddam [Hussein] and over there fighting in Iraq and all this stuff in regards to the Twin Towers, it had nothing to do with that. It was Afghanistan, whatever. It's Bin Laden and that bunch. I mean people has forgot already who did that. And they think Saddam, that he's the culprit. But you know and I know it's not true. Everything has lost its perspective. But I don't really know. I don't understand people, and the way this country's going, I don't know. I don't know.

Now, when you were working on the test site, you were working with all the different miners and your co-workers. Were there things that you just couldn't talk about with each other? Like were there groups where you just didn't ask questions because of the whole secrecy issue?

Well, you know, not necessarily. We just knew. We was orientated all the time.

Oh, really?

Oh, yeah. We'd have safety meetings and so on. But, if we seen something—if they would bring it in, if I would bring it in, or in my case, say, I was running the little trains? If they would bring anything, it would be covered and there'd be a couple of guards around it and so on. But even if they un*did* it and took the cover off of it, I wouldn't know what it was anyway. So I mean, they're not going to tell you, `Well, you know what that thing'll do?` No. And we never questioned that because that wasn't our job. Our job was to shut our mouth and do our job and protect the United States and the citizens of the United States of America, and that's what we did. I *never* heard anybody out there trying to find out, `Well, what will that do?` And, `What's that going to do?` No, we didn't *do* that. *We* was out there to make a living and we was out there to protect the United States. We *knew* what we were doing, and that's why I think that we have such a camaraderie with all of our people and the bonding that we have out there with all of our test site workers. And like I was telling you earlier, it's still a bonding process, and wonderful people. They really are. In fact, the second Wednesday of every month we have our miners' breakfast.

I've been to one of those.

Have you?

Yeah. I really had a great time when I went there, too.

Yeah. Oh, sure. And we have those and those are great. And I worked with all of those guys. I know every *one* of them. And it's really great. And we've lost a lot of people to death and so on. One of these days, there won't be any of us around, but I'll tell you what: Just like we're doing right now, our tapes will be around, maybe.

Right. Oh, they will be now.

[00:05:00] I'm sure. But it was really wonderful, and to this day, I think the REECo employees out there and when we was working either for AGC, the Atomic Energy Commission, we did them a bang-up job. We did a wonderful job. And you know, we was part of securing the whole United States of America, and we're kind of proud of that, too.

Yeah. Now, in the early days, you said that you saw some of the atmospheric tests?

Yes, I seen quite a few of them.

What was your impression of those?

Scary. Oh my gosh, those things. I can remember this one particular shot. In fact, the one that was the most scary that I can remember, I was in Indian Springs. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and I had been working night shift, and we knew they was going to set this bomb off. It was in the atmosphere, but I can't remember if it was a tower shot or if it was a balloon shot, because a lot of times they would put them on these balloons and fill them up with helium and, you know, like—

Like a weather balloon, kind of.

Yeah, like a weather balloon, and send them up there and shoot them up so high in the air. But the thing of it was, *this* was the first time that I ever *heard* one, and it was *devastating*. What it was, when I was in Indian Springs there, you could see the big flash and the mushroom, and in the background you could hear *boom! boom! boom! boom!* You could hear it bouncing off the

mountain, is what they tell me. And my gosh, when that hit over us, when it went *boom!*, it just shook your insides. I'm telling you what, I started running down the road.

Really?

Oh, yeah, I thought I'd been had. It was so *devastating*. My *gosh*, that was so *loud*! And you know, it was really amazing. It just scared the *tar* out of me. Really.

Did it feel hot or did you feel the wind or—?

No, no, it was just the sound. Yeah, I'm looking at the mushroom cloud, maybe fifteen, twenty miles away, but the boom, boom, boom. It just kept getting louder and louder, and when it finally—it's just like, you ever have thunder bust over your head? It was fifty times louder than thunder. And oh, it just got in your bones. I mean, oh man, it just scared you to death. But you know what? Out of all the shots that I'd seen, that was the *only* one that I *really* heard. You know, I've seen them shoot them, but you never heard them go *boom!* And you know what happened, I think, on this particular shot, that they would always shoot them when the wind was blowing to the east—no, it wasn't to the east. It would be to the north. Anyway, to Utah. I shouldn't laugh because it's not a laughing matter. But they would never shoot it when the wind was going to blow the fallout and everything to Vegas or whatever, and they was always shooting the shot when the wind was blowing—that thing is turned around. I think it was the east back. I don't know. But anyway.

Now, did you work on any of those tests? Did you help construct any of the towers or—?

No, I didn't on any of those, no. In fact, though, some of those ones you see out there was—you know the ones that you see where the military gets up out of the trenches and goes through there? I don't know exactly when that was but you know, I worked out there one time running the trenching machine, in between the tunnel jobs and so on, and I found a plastic liner and a helmet.

Oh, really?

Yeah, and this guy's name was in it, and it was one of those Army guys. And you [know] what we did? We boxed that up, we cleaned it all up. But you know, the metal in that helmet—it was in the dirt, been covered up—that thing looked brand new. It had this guy's name inside it. And we boxed it up and sent it to him. We never heard anything about it. So I wished I'd have got his name and all that. I don't know if he ever received that or not. So it was quite a deal.

But anyway, when I first came there at what they call CP, the control point, is where they wouldn't let anybody go past the control point, they had all of these benches and everything, and you still see them in the movies. They were there for years. And I watched them give them briefings right there, and I'm sitting up there watching them give the Air Force and these people briefings in '57. It was amazing.

So is that where you mostly saw the tests from?

Yeah, most of those, I seen right there at what they call the control point. And then I got the opportunity one time to go out there in the control point when they shot a big shot underground, and I got to go in and watch all the seismographics. Yeah, they invited myself and another guy. It was really wonderful, because we'd worked on this particular shot as—I can't **[00:10:00]** remember. It was Dining Car, I think. But everybody that was on Dining Car, they invited them to come into the control point, and I was one of the lucky ones. And the one that handled for the federal, for safety, was a gentleman by the name of Darryl McPherson . Do you happen to know him?

No.

No? And he got me cleared and all that in there, and he was quite a guy. It was really something, because I was right in there with all the scientists. Oh, they was whooping and hollering, Oh,

wonderful, great! And I didn't know what they was talking about. They was watching all of their machines. Yeah, that was quite a deal. And they had a little celebration in there.

Did you work on Ledoux?

I don't know.

I think that's when the cave fell in.

Oh, the Sedan crater, you mean?

No, when the mine fell in and killed the miner? Did you work on that test? [Interviewer error in identifying this test as Ledoux]

Well, there's a bunch of them. You're talking about which one? Gary Hansen, you mean?

Yes, I think it was Gary Hansen.

Yes, I certainly did. As a matter of fact, we was reentering in that. We were going over some LOS pipe.

Now, what test was that?

I don't know.

That was in the tunnel. This guy, I knew him real well. In fact, I had been mucking with this mucking machine underneath where Gary was, when he was trying to cross this pipe, and the big rock and all that stuff was hanging there, and that was it. I wouldn't work under there.

Really?

No. So what they did, they was going to crib it all up and stuff and all like that, and we had to wear double coveralls and all that stuff, and that night, that was—I worked during the day, and that night, I think it was on swing shift—when that rock fell out of there and killed him. Yes, I worked on that, as a matter of fact.

Now, was there anything sketchy about that?

No, not really. I wished we all have shot that thing down. But it was dangerous and, you know, I didn't want no part of it, because I was watching it and I can tell you who was the shifter, the bosses, and all that when we was there.

Yeah. Were there any other significant mine accidents that you can think of?

Oh, sure, we had quite a few people. We had one other guy got killed in our 15 shaft. You ever heard of that?

No.

That's a shaft in Area 15 that is strictly a straight-down, and when they got twenty-three hundred feet down there, then they would drift out this way here [demonstrating]. And when I mean "drift out," they'd make more tunnels this way here, and they would shoot devices off down in there. But this particular one, his name was Joe Peluaga. Nice Basque fellow. Anyway, I think it was a rock or whatever fell all the way from the top, twenty-three hundred feet, and hit him right on the helmet. Killed him, yes. And then we had another guy when we were going back to Baseball, yeah, and this guy's name was Dick Lougher. Real good friend, a surveyor. And they had a whole crew out there and they was about halfway down in one of these big shafts, and for some reason they was on a platform that lowered down. The platform tilted and they just fell off, like that. Killed Dick Lougher.

Oh. How far did they fall?

Oh, I think they fell three or four or five hundred feet. And we had quite a few people killed out there, but I mean we had a lot of people *working* out there, and that's dangerous-type work. I mean it was *dangerous*-type or whatever. And they was *great* about everything. Accidents do happen. But I can remember one of my real good friends, his name—what had happened to him could happen to anybody, but he killed himself actually by just being ornery. He was working on

what they call a bucket drill. They would go out there to drill a hole for what we call a hole, it was a drilling hole two thousand, eight thousand, whatever feet deep. Then they would go out there with this bucket rig, would go out there and drill about a hundred feet down and they'd put surface casing in there and concrete it all, so then they would have a pilot hole, so to speak. So anyway, this guy's name was Tom McGarry [sp]. What a wonderful man. And there's another story there, too, I'll tell you. Anyway, he had come back to the yard, and they had finished working, and he tilted the machine back up and it hit a sixteen thousand-some-odd volt cable, and it kicked the **[00:15:00]** power off, the breakers kicked. He was *mad*, got *mad*, and he knew he was caught up in that and he didn't know what to do. And he got so mad, he got out of the truck, and fine, if he would've just did nothing, he would be alive today. He got so mad, he's, S.O.B., or whatever, and he run over there and he kicked the tire, and when he did, the power come back on and killed him right there. Killed him instantly.

Through kicking the tire?

Yeah, because what it did, it made contact, yeah.

Even though that was rubber?

Well, he might've kicked the rim, but it was sixteen thousand volts, whatever. It melted rubber and everything. It wouldn't take very long to melt the rubber. Now, if it was just a little bit of power, but we're talking cables that big around [demonstrating size]. I mean we're talking big, *big* power. Oh, yeah, it fried him. Poor guy. He was a nice guy. But then his wife, a couple of years before that—we were riding back and forth together, like we was almost *family*, and he said, Guess what? My wife's got a kidney problem and she's going to have to have a kidney operation. He said, Would you guys do me a favor and come down and give us some blood for her? And you know, blood is about fifty bucks a pint *then*, in

the old days. And we said, Yeah. There was about twenty of us went down and we gave blood for her, in case she needed it or whatever. And it was amazing.

About a week later, she had had this operation, and he brought—he had a big brown paper sack, and in this paper sack, we asked him, Well, what do you got in there, Tom?

He said, You're not going to believe it.

Well, what he did, he pulled out a quart jar and it was full of, it looked like—they were kidney stones, is what they were. It looked like coral, you know. And then he pulled out *another* quart and it was full of coral. And he pulled out a little pint and it was about a half of that in there.

And we was saying, What *is* that?

And he said, That's what we got out of my wife.

And I said, You got that out of your wife? Her kidney had to be as big as a basketball. It had to be *enormous*.

And you know what? He said, You know what they did? They went in there and they operated on her, and when they got to her kidney, they just sliced it like a watermelon and took all this coral out, or actually what it was, stones, sewed it up, and he says, I don't know what's going to happen, but she didn't lose a kidney.

And you know what? After Tom had got killed, a couple of years later or whatever, I seen her maybe, oh, eight or ten years later after that, and I was talking to her and we was reminiscing about Tom and so on and how much I loved Tom and what a great guy.

But anyway, I asked her, I said, You know what, I been wanting to ask you this for a million years. How's your kidney doing?

She said, Oh, wonderful!

I said, You mean you never lost that kidney?

She said, You're not going to believe this. They sewed that thing up and it's been perfect ever since.

Can you believe that? It's amazing. It was *amazing*!

Wow! So you guys really pulled together for each other like a family.

Oh, yeah, sure, it was a big family out there, sure. When you spend more time with people you're working with than you do with your family, it's all family, because these men have to talk to somebody. If they can't talk to their wives, they'll talk to their best buddies or whatever, and we're all the same way. It was great.

Now, was there a significant turnover, or when somebody got a job there, they stayed?

No, most of them that came out there, between the layoffs would stay. And many, many people didn't like it out there because they didn't like the drive or whatever, but you know, I loved it out there for the simple fact, I knew how hot it was in town, how hard it was to work, and how nice it was out there, how they treated you and whatever. They treated you with respect and everything. It was a wonderful place to work, and I had been places where they don't treat you that well. And so a lot of them say that they hated the test site and I said, Well, what are you doing out here? There's plenty of jobs in town. I'm one of the guys that you're looking at that *never,* ever swore or cussed the test site. It made us a *wonderful* living and it was a wonderful place to work. It was the most safety-conscious people I ever worked for. And they was wonderful. They really were. And I can tell you, when you interview some of these other people, you'll probably find out we all feel the same way about each other, and the camaraderie and all that, and I think that's basically the bonding that we all—we all did a good job and we kept our secrets and I really think we all did, and we helped the United States of America get to where we are today in our security and so on.

Now, did anybody have heat exhaustion? I mean was it hard, sitting on that mucking machine in the 111 degree heat, or having to gear up and do a reentry? I mean how would you guys handle the heat? Suffered through it?

[00:20:00] Well, you just handled it, that's just the way it was. It was awful hot in there, but you wouldn't work eight or ten hours straight anyway. Oh, you couldn't do that anyway because of your air. We had air, oxygen, and so on. Maybe an hour-and-a-half, two hours. But then you'd go back and then you would take a little rest and go back in there. Then there was always stuff that you'd have—somebody would be in there cutting and whatever, then you'd leave, and then when they would get their job done—there was always somebody. We never did in that hot—it was just too hot. We couldn't do it. So anyway, when it was just too hot, well, we just *coped* with it, that's all they are. I mean if we could do it, we would. But it was a mess. It really was. But we coped with it. I mean that was what we was paid for.

Now, when you entered into the job, did you have any position on nuclear weapons or nuclear testing or—?

You mean when I was eighteen years old? I didn't even know what a nuclear weapon *was*. All I was looking for was a job and I didn't care what it was.

And was it a better wage than what everybody else was hiring at?

As a matter of fact, yeah; it was really funny, because when we had our—we didn't have a place to *live*. We just come over here. So when we got out there, we had what we called three hots and a cot; we had three meals a day and we had a bed. And we stayed at a little old place called Camp Desert Rock. That's this side of Mercury. And Mercury had all of the good stuff. Because Camp Desert Rock was *tents* and outside coolers and so on. So when you got up to the barracks inside the test site there, where they were just building these brand new ones, they had air

conditioning in them. Wonderful. We wanted to graduate up to that. And we stayed at Camp Desert Rock and soon, in four or five months, they did. The first time I stayed at Camp Desert Rock, then the next time I came back, they had shipped us all to Mercury. We had *dorms*. You had your own room, like something we're sitting in here now, and it had the bed in it and it had a little desk and, all of that stuff. And it was wonderful. You could have your radio. I mean it was just your home, just a little cubicle. And some of the rooms had two to a deal, but a lot of them didn't. What we would do, one of the guys that went back and forth, he would rent the room and we'd rent it from him so we'd have a room by ourself. And of course, I wouldn't be renting. I was single. What was really good about it is when my payday came, I didn't have to buy any food. I had three meals a day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, they gave to us. And when my paycheck come, it was all mine. I was making eighty or ninety dollars a week take-home, and my buddies in town were making about thirty. Oh, they were making $1.10 an hour or something, but what they would do, they would take their income tax and stuff out of it. So when I come to town, I was rolling in dough, because I hadn't spent any of mine on food or whatever. I didn't have to spend any money. And as a matter of fact, I was taking an $18.75 bond out of that check a week, and I built those things up to, I don't know, fifty or sixty of those bonds. And you know, somebody broke into my apartment one time and stole them all. And I never have got them back, to this day. But I have a bunch of the numbers. And it's been quite a deal. So I don't know. That's another thing.

Now, do you have a position on Yucca Mountain?

Well, you know, Yucca Mountain, that's a hard decision to make. I really wanted to come in there and, well, I wanted to work when the people came in there. But you know, if it's safe, that's a different story, but *is* it safe? I mean who's telling the truth anymore. It's *so* ungodly. I

can't believe anybody anymore. I don't really particularly *want* it here but well, I don't know. My position is we really screwed up to begin with if we was wanting to get anything *out* of this. For the simple fact [that] four, five, six, maybe ten years ago, if we'd negotiated something with them, we could've got them to maybe support our school systems or maybe **[00:25:00]** some kind of our programs in regards to medical for people that need medical, some kind of trauma centers or anything, whatever, that would help the city or the county or the state out. But we don't have any what we call "hammer" anymore. We don't have any hole card because they say, Well, hey, it's coming anyway, so why should I give *you* anything? And so I think our bargaining chip is all gone. But you know I really believe—I don't think they'll ever put any out there.

Oh, you don't? Why?

Well, I think it's going to be too costly, for one thing. I don't understand this, too. The property belongs to the federal government, right? Now, you know where Caliente is?

Yes.

You know where they're going to transport that on the railroad?

Right.

Have you ever seen the route where it's going to go? Clean back to around Coyote Springs and back around by Beatty and all the way, two hundred and forty or fifty miles, sixty miles? You know what? It's only about sixty miles in a straight shot from there to Yucca Mountain. Why are they *doing* all of that if they own the property? What's going *on*? What *is* all that? What's it *for*? If it's mine and we're going to save money, why do they—? And you know what? Thirty miles of that, and once you get off to the thirty miles from Caliente, you're on your own property. You're *never* going to be on their own property here until you get five miles from Yucca

Mountain. I don't understand that. So if it was a straight shot through there, save millions of dollars. *Millions* of dollars worth of railroad tracks. So I don't know. I don't know if they cut deals with what. I don't have any idea. But I used to sit on some of those panels or whatever with CAB [Community Advisory Board] and all that stuff, but I had so many irons in the fires when I became a business representative. We do that all the time. We have Yucca Mountain. And my position on Yucca Mountain, I really don't want it here. But if it's safe or whatever, that's another story, but nobody has proven to me it's safe. Well, I don't think it's safe. In fact, in this morning's paper, as a matter of fact, they say the canister that they say was going to last so long, they say it won't do that. So I mean is the jig up? Who's telling who what? I don't know.

Now, throughout all your years at the test site, did you ever encounter any protesters?

Many protesters. Martin Sheen, all the time, you see—

Oh, Martin Sheen. I didn't know that.

Oh, well, he used to come up here all the time. Oh, absolutely. Sure, Martin Sheen was one of our biggest "allies," you know what I mean? Yes. Oh, Greenpeace and all those people. I mean we didn't care.

Oh, yeah? So would they just block the buses or block the entrance?

Oh, they tried to do some of that and whatever, but we wouldn't get any—we didn't care. We was going to go to work anyway. We knew they couldn't stop the buses or whatever.

Did that ever make you question what you were doing?

No, I knew what we were doing. We were trying to protect the United States of America. I know what we were doing. If we stopped the testing, and you know what? We shouldn't stop testing right now. Let me tell you what, all these missile heads that we have stored, does anybody know if they're safe or not? When's the last time we tested *them*? Who's to say that—you know what?

We got missiles, nuclear heads, right here in less than fifteen miles from you right now, did you know that? We got nuke warheads right here. You know where Nellis Air Force Base is? Right up to the Navy base, there are nuclear warheads right in there. I don't know, they say they got twenty-eight or twenty-nine or whatever. But yeah, they're stored right there. You don't hear none of that. Well, they're nuclear warheads. If a war busted out, they want them, they'd come and get them.

So now, as a Democratic politician, how would you talk to another Democrat that would say, I am just antinuclear. I don't like *what happened at the test site. I think that that was all* bad*. How would you talk to that type of Democrat?*

You mean, say, you're asking me that question, that whatever we did at the Nevada Test Site was bad?

Yeah, like how Democrats now are just so anti-nuke, that nuclear energy—do you ever come across those type of Democrats, where you have to justify what you did for a living?

Well, you know, I don't care if they're Democrat, Independent, Republican, or whatever. What we did, we did for the United States of America, and if they don't like it, get *out*! That's what we did. We made it safer for you and your family, your grandchildren, and the children that's going to come forever. *We're* the ones that went out there and tested those A-bombs, H-bombs, and whatever to keep Russia and anybody else that had those bombs or whatever from invading your country. If we didn't have a deterrent, they would've been here **[00:30:00]** tomorrow. They'd have been here yesterday. The day before. I mean it's just like anything. You think Red China, if we didn't have any guns, if we didn't have any bombs, you think they would let us live in peace? Give me a break. I mean, people—they don't—when they start talking to me like that, you got to be kidding.

Do you get any of that? Do you get any of that from some people?

No, because when they very first start on me, and they say, Jerry, we think– I said, I don't care what you think. We did this for the United States of America. We didn't do it for your political party. We didn't do it because you're from Alabama. We didn't do it because you're from California. We did it for the United States of America, for everybody, for the protection of all of us. You know, the federal government was the one that *did* that out there, and the federal government's trying to protect all of us. Maybe you don't like the way they spend the money or whatever, and I don't either, but I mean you know what? We have to protect the United States of America before we do *anything*. I don't like all the money they spend in going into space or whatever, but you know, good things have come out of that. They've had a lot of medicines, research, that has came out of that and so on. But you know, I just don't—no, and you know I said, That property belongs to the United States of America and they can do what they want to do with it. They don't have to ask me what they want to do with it. So now they're asking everybody what they want to do with Yucca Mountain? Well, did they ask anybody what they wanted to do when they put a nuclear device test site out there? Well, they did it. But now they're nice enough to come and ask you. They don't have to tell you nothing. They really don't. It's their property, so really I—the Republicans or whatever, I don't have any problem with the Republicans. I worked with a lot of them. You know, 30 percent of the unions, these workers, are Republicans. Oh, absolutely. But I don't fight over that. I don't fight over that and I don't fight over abortions either. I get all kind of calls about abortions.

Really?

Sure, and I said, Are you crazy? I never had an abortion. Why don't you ask me something that I know something about?

[And they said], Well, we want to know your views.

I said, What for? That's federal. I'm a state official. I'm not a federal official. And I'm not going to vote in Congress whether you can have an abortion or not. I think a woman ought to be able to take care of her own body.

[And they said], Well, then, you're pro.

I said, No. I'm not anti either.

[And they said], You're pro choice?

I said, Well, yeah, maybe.

You know, I don't know where I am. Incest and whatever, you know, I said, Yes, I think a woman should have an abortion. But don't hold me to that. What do I know? I said, What are you trying to drive at? What are we trying to do? Why don't you give all the men vasectomies and then we won't have to worry about it. We won't *have* any of this problem. We won't *have* any abortions. What are you trying to tell me? And they get enough of me right quick.

They know where you're going.

Well, sure. Well, that's something that I just don't—I don't let them *push* me about that.

Well, that's a hot item.

Well, it shouldn't be for men.

Right, but if men are the ones making the decisions in government about it—

Well, I don't make the decisions. I'm not going to make the decisions for that. I'm not going to do it. It's not my decision to *make*, and I'm not going to let anybody push me into a corner that, What are you going to do about it? I'm not going to do nothing about it. You're not going to press me into making me vote for something I'm not even going to vote for. I mean that's not a hot issue. What about stem cell? Is that a hot issue to you or anybody else or what?

Well, I think it's a hot issue, depending upon if you've had that in your family. If you have somebody suffering from Alzheimer's or if somebody's had a spinal cord injury, you know, I think that that is a huge, hot issue.

And they're all for that, correct?

Right, because it directly affects them.

What about if they don't?

But that's where you have to find a middle ground.

That's where the rubber meets the road.

Exactly.

But see, myself, I'm *state*, I'm not—and you know I have all of these people all the time telling me, Jerry, these people want to know what your views are. I said, Let me tell you something. What are you talking about? My constituents? My constituents live in District 19. I said, You know what? My constituents know Jerry Claborn. I send out seven mailers every time that I run for office. I have a website. I have four telephones. I got three offices. I have a fax. And I said, Every number is on my mailers. And I says, What more do they want to know about me? If they want to call me, right here it says *I'm sorry I missed you. Please call* **[00:35:00]** *me if you want to talk to me.* Call me. I don't get very many calls. If I do, I'll answer them. So I said, Why should I go over here and talk about stuff that has nothing to do with me? I'm not going to talk about it. And I get with the newspapers. They call me all the time and say, Jerry, we want to know about this. I say, You're beating up the wrong bush. I'm not talking to you. I'll talk to somebody from District 19. I'm not running for everything here. I have to satisfy my constituents in District 19. That's the ones that's voting for me.

I said, Why should I give you my issues? Well, let me tell you what, I've did that a few times and what they did, they take my issues and build them up and give them to my enemy, and my enemy is my other competitor running against me. And they've *used* that on me before.

I can remember a particular instance, one of the newspapers, I had an interview with them in 1999, and they was asking me, Jerry, what do you think? What's going on?

Well, I said, You know, Larry, I think Las Vegas is in pretty good shape. That was in 1999. And I said, The north is really in bad shape, though. We don't have any mining anymore. We don't have any industry at *all* up there. And I said, I'm kind of worried about the north.

And there was two or three of them and they said, Well, what do you mean?

I said, Well, we lost all the Mom-and-Pops grocery stores and all the little hunting outfits and the little grocery stores and the little gun shops, and so they don't exist anymore, and the simple fact that they don't, for whatever reason, there's no deer to hunt anymore, there's no fishing, there's no mining, there's no industry, no cattle industry, no sheep industry. We don't have any—what is people [going to do]—there's nothing. There's no work. There's no work to do up there. But mining is the only thing left and what I think we should do is we should do some more exploration for mining and put more people to work.

And you know what? About a week before—and I hadn't told *anybody* this, *nobody*, these three people, two guys and a woman—and six days before the election, which would've been November the sixth or seventh, my guy that was running against me, my challenger, he sent out a mailer to everybody and says—it was just card, about the size of this one back there, maybe a little smaller than that, and it said, Jerry, why are you worried about the north? District 19 and your constituents, that's who you should be worried about.

And I got *so angry*. I said, My *God*, where did he get this? I was just speaking out of context and he's *using* that against me to turn everybody in my district, that I don't care about them, I care about the north. And I was just about to get over my madness and about a day before, here come another card. This one was fluorescent orange: Jerry, I told you, you should not be worried about the north. Of course, I skunked him. I got 79 percent of the votes anyway. But it taught me a lesson there when you go in there and you talk to those—I won't talk to the reporters. No.

Yeah. It's too dangerous.

Well, no, I mean it's not that. I mean why would you give my information to my competitor? They asked me—you know what they said? Would you like to know what your opposition says about you? And I said, Absolutely not. I don't care what he says. He only has one vote, and my wife's going to kill his. I don't care what he says. I said, My wife loves me. She's going to vote for me and I'm going to vote for myself, so he's done. And I don't argue about those, and you know what? When I was a business representative, I would never let the newspapers negotiate my contracts.

When my newspapers come around and says, Are you guys going to go on strike? Are you going to do this?

I said, Well, why don't you just wait and see?

[And they would ask], Well, what are you asking for?

I said, Why don't you just wait and see? I would not talk to them. I said, I'm not going to negotiate my contract in the *Review-Journal* for *you* or nobody else. I do my negotiations with the contractor in our offices, and you're not invited. So we'll let you know when we come to a conclusion.

So you wouldn't leak stuff out to try and get a rise out of—

Oh, absolutely no, and in fact, I'm going to use this. He called me yesterday, one of the *Review-Journal* guys, and he told me what his name was. I didn't know him, as a matter of fact.

But he says, I'd like to talk to you. Have you got five minutes?

And I said, No, I'm leaving right now. I'm leaving and I've got some company and I'm just walking out the door.

He said, Well, I'll call you tomorrow about this time.

And I said, Well, what can I do for you?

And he said, Well, I'd like to talk to you about—aren't you running for office?

And I said, Yeah, I certainly am.

He said, Aren't you running against Bradley Smith?

And I said, Yeah.

[00:40:00] And he says something else.

And I said, Well, Bradley Smith?

He said, Well, he's another Democrat.

I said, I know that.

And he says, Well, we want to get this here before the primaries come out.

And I said, Well, I don't have no primary.

No, primary? He said, What do you mean? He's running against you.

I found out right quick there how much *he* knows about politics.

I said, You know what's going to happen? We're going right into the general. We don't have no primary.

He said, You don't have a primary? You're going to be on the ballot, aren't you?

And I said, No. We will not be on the primary ballot when it comes out. We'll be on the general in November when *it* comes out, but we will not.

And he said, Are you sure?

I says, Why don't you check it out?

But anyway. And he said, Well, this Bradley Smith, do you know him?

I said, Yeah, he got 208 votes against me last time.

He said, Well, you don't need an interview.

And that's what he did, he got 208 votes against me last time. But you know, I would've had a white ballot or whatever if he hadn't of jumped in there, but I mean that's fine. I mean he's got a right to do what he wants to do, and I respect him for that. But some of them, they was saying that, Well, I've got more hair than Jerry. If they'd ask him, Well, why do you think that you should be District 19's representative [rather] than Jerry Claborn? And oh, I had four or five run against me last time, and one of them says, Well, I got more hair than he does. And the other one says, I'm younger than him. And another one says, I'm better looking than he is. And another one says, I'm taller than he is.

And when I got to talk to the guy that was telling me all this, I said, Well, yeah, but they forgot one thing, didn't they?

And he said, Well, what's that?

And I said, I got more votes than all of them put together.

They forgot all about that.

And I said, That's what it takes to be the winner, the one that gets the most votes. Like in football. Doesn't care what you did. It counts at the last who—look up

there and see the score. Well, I mean yeah. I'm not a young man or whatever, but isn't that something to say?

That's funny. Yeah.

You know, and I don't get involved in that petty stuff. I don't *want* to know what they say about me. I don't care. And you know I care about my constituents. But anyway, I learnt that a long time ago.

Is there anything that you can think of that I didn't ask about with the test site that's interesting that would be valuable to our study, or any story that came up that—?

Well, something that, I think everybody's neglected is the whole test site in regards to the United States of America owns that out there, the federal government. And there's so many miles of valuable property out there, that they can *utilize* that, and they *need* to start looking at trying to utilize that property, whether it be training American forces out there to fight terrorists or whether they use it to have people learn how to drive armored trucks, or something. They need to use that facility out there because there's so many nice, wonderful barracks that they have there in Mercury, and cafeterias, and whatever. And it's a remote area and you won't have to worry about making a little bit of dust or whatever. And it's *really* a vital spot. And matter of fact, we had some of those outfits that come out there for exploratory, for missiles and so on, and some of them are paying off now in some of the other states. That one we had over here in Edwards Air Force Base that they launched, it was put together and all that stuff and all the testing was done on the Nevada Test Site. So anyway, there's so much land and so much facilities out there. We got some buildings out there that were millions and millions of dollars they cost so that they could take these bombs and defuse them and so on. I mean some of the walls are forty foot *thick* and stuff. But I mean they could be utilizing them. I mean there *so* many good things out there

that they should do, and when they do that, that'll put people to work in those small contracts out there, like, well, some of them small developments they have like Lathrop Wells and Beatty and the new Pahrump and so on, they could utilize that, and we could use the work. And there's no use just letting it go to waste, really. So I think eventually somebody'll probably do that. If I was up there, we'd do that. Sure. There's *so* many things that they could do out there.

[00:45:00] *So is there anything else or—? I think we've got it all.*

No, unless you got something else.

No, but thank you—

[00:45:07] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[End of interview]