

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

Interview with
Luciano Lopez

July 8, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

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(With Frances Lopez)

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

Suzanne Becker: *So I first thank you again for taking the time. Just wondering if we could start at the beginning, just with some general background information, where you're from, where were you born, where did you grow up?*

Luciano Lopez: I was born in Arizona; Harshaw, Arizona. And I went to school there, and then I went in the military. When I come back in 1947, I married my wife Frances in '48. Then I started my mining career there in Harshaw. The name of the mine was the Trench Mine. Then from there, I went to Superior, Arizona, where I mined there for about five years. And from there I went to Glen Canyon Dam. I sunk the spillways there. And from there I went back to New Mexico, and I mined there for twenty-eight years.

Frances Lopez: From '59 to '82.

Luciano: From '59 to '82, yes.

What were you mining there?

Luciano: Uranium. I'm mining uranium, yeah. And then from there I came to the test site. I worked at the test site almost nine years, where I performed different duties, like running the man train. 6:30. Running smelting machines. And drilling and blasting. And then I went in the man train. That's when I took the men in and out of the tunnel.

OK. So it's really called the man train.

The man train, yes. And I also took in the device, you know, to ground zero.

Wow. So first of all, what did you do in the military?

I was in the infantry. Yes, I was in the infantry, and then with the combat engineers.

OK. And were you part of any of the wars?

Well, I was in the Philippines, you know. I just took care of prisoners of war.

Wow. And then how did you end up in mining after you got back?

Because it was the only job that paid more. Mining then was one of the best jobs you could find as far as steady work, you know, mining was. When I started at that Trench Mine, we were mining lead, zinc, and copper. And then from there I went out to Superior, Arizona. We were mining copper there, too. And then I went to New Mexico and I was mining uranium there for about twenty years now.

Frances: From Superior, you went to Glen Canyon.

Luciano: Glen Canyon.

Glen Canyon is in Arizona?

Frances: It's in Arizona. It's in Page.

Luciano: Page.

Frances: It's between Page and Utah site.

Luciano: Yes. The canyon divides Arizona and Utah.

OK. So you probably drive, on the way out to Nevada, depending on which direction you're coming from.

Luciano: Yes. Well, we couldn't drive it because there was no bridge, so we walked a footbridge across the canyon. And we went and got our groceries in Page, and we had to take a grocery cart across, then bring one back, you know.

[00:05:00] *On foot.*

Yes, on foot.

Frances: And then when we had to buy the big amount of groceries, we had to go to Kanab, Utah.

That's quite a drive.

Frances: It was about, I would say, like about fifty-some miles?

Luciano: Something like that, yeah. And then we left there and went to the test site, where I was transferred to Yucca Mountain, where I did a lot of boltingdrilling and loading dynamite.

And so you were helping to build the tunnels.

Yes, the tunnel. Yes, we started that tunnel. And we drove the tunnel in for about maybe three hundred feet, and then they brought the machine that started drilling. When you see that tunnel now, you can see where it starts perfect round, you know, and that's how far we took that, drove that tunnel in.

So now, did you just come out to Las Vegas from New Mexico?

Yes. There was some friends of mine who were working here.

At the test site?

Yes. And I came from New Mexico to the union hall here in Las Vegas, and they told me they couldn't accept me on the list because there were too many. So then I talked to a friend of mine, and he was a steward, and he says, I'll get you a card, he said, and he did. And I was on the list for about two months when I was hired.

And you were hired out at the test site.

Yes.

Did you know anything about the test site before you came out here, or had you heard about it, or—?

I heard about it, yeah, I heard a lot about it. I wanted to come here early.

Frances: In the sixties.

Luciano: In the sixties, but she didn't want to because my kids were too young. Teenagers.

Frances: The boys were teenagers, just teenagers. We had four.

Four boys? Wow.

Luciano: Yes. And then they told me that you had to stay over there, you know.

At the site?

At the test site. So I didn't much like that, you know. But from then, when they started hauling us with buses, then—

So you didn't have to stay out at the test site by the time you got out here. You were bused in.

No, I went back and forth, yeah. I went back and forth.

And this is through REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company].

Yes. And then I went to work for REECo, Area 12, and I stayed there until they transferred me to Yucca Mountain.

OK. So you were out there at a time when there was a lot going on, as far as they were doing a lot of tests.

Yes. Oh, yes. Lot of tunnels and lot of tests, you know.

So were you actually drilling, helping to drill, or clear out some of those tunnels as well?

Oh, yeah. I did, you know, drive tunnel for a lot of data; tests get away from them, and we had to start a new tunnel.

Which one was that?

Misty Rain, I believe.

So you probably worked on a lot of tests.

Oh, yeah, a lot. I worked on a lot of tests.

How many, do you think?

I had all of my papers. I don't know what I did—maybe seven or eight tests, you know. Different kind of—yeah.

So I'm just curious about the process [drilling]—because those holes are huge and some of them go down, what, 700 feet or so?

Yes, well, I didn't work in the shaft. I just worked in the tunnels. My son is the one that worked in the shafts.

Oh, really? Does he live out here?

Yes. He's retired out of the test site.

Frances: He worked longer than Dad did.

Yes. I would love to talk to him at some point, too, if he'd want to talk about it. So what was that like? I mean, how does that process work?

Luciano: [00:10:00] Well, everything was done very careful. Safety was a priority there.

It was.

Yes.

Yes, I bet.

And that's about it, you know.

Were you ever—well, you weren't really in the shafts, but I imagine it gets really hot in the tunnels.

Yes. Well, in the tunnel it wasn't bad, but at Yucca Mountain where I was on the grouting machine, we stayed outside all day in the sun.

That would be hot.

Yes. But I liked that job, running the grout machine, you know.

So what was it like working out at the test site? It seems like there's a lot of camaraderie. It seems like one big family. It's pretty close knit.

Right. Yes. Correct. And I made a lot of friends there. Go to work as good miners.

Yes. I guess there's a lot of people that have worked out there for a long time.

Yes. And we all got along so well, blacks, Hispanics, white, you know.

Yes. So it was fairly diverse and there was not a lot of—?

Yes. All the supervisors that I had, they were cooperative, very good persons, you know.

How does this experience of mining differ from some of the other jobs you did, if it does at all?

Was it that different?

Oh, it did, yes, very different because when I worked in the mines, I drove a tractor where the trains ran and hauled the ore. We did a lot of development, and then mining the ore, the uranium. And the test site wasn't. It was just driving tunnels and putting the pipe for the device in there. Or a cavity. We had cavity tests. And one we had that I worked at the weekend, and it was a device that they set off like 700 feet underground. And then you could see it, when it went off, it felt like an earthquake.

Yes, what was—because you must've been out there when they shot those off.

Yes. We were looking at the ground zero, and when it went off, you could see the trembling, and you could see that dirt moving. And then about, oh, ten, fifteen minutes later, you could see it cave in. And a *big* hole would settle.

Did you ever have a tunnel cave in?

No. No, not here at the test site. I did when I was mining in New Mexico. We got buried, me and two of my partners. They were very young. And when we got buried, well, just the exit was cut off. And I rode a wave of mud like maybe twenty, thirty feet. I'm just lucky I didn't—I rode it. It

just pushed me and I fell on top of it and rode me down the track. Then I had to talk to the guys because they were very young and they were getting hysterical. And I put them inside of a car and told them to turn the lights on. We were just going to keep one light on. [00:15:00] And I put them inside of a car and I covered the car and told them not to move. You know, the oxygen, get it going.

And obviously you guys got out.

Yes. Oh, yeah. They were going to start digging us out with mucking machines, you know, but it would've taken too long, so they decided to crawl in there and just, with buckets, drag enough dirt to go in there. And it was a long ways. God, it was like maybe 150 feet. But they went in there, and once they broke through, this guy that went in there, he brought a rope with him. And one of my helpers didn't want—he was afraid because it was just, you know, high enough for you so you could—

Frances: Squeeze in there.

Luciano: Not even crawl. He had to pull him.

Oh, wow. So did you ever get claustrophobic?

No.

That's good.

Oh, so he was afraid to—what we had to do, we took him down and tied both feet with a rope and put in there and they pulled him out.

That's very intense. So probably the work you were doing at the test site sounds like it was safer.

Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, a lot safer, because in New Mexico we had a lot of shale, and it would cave in a lot. I got hit by slabs many times. And I'm just lucky to be alive because I felt in a shaft over there.

In New Mexico?

I fell ninety feet.

Wow! How did that happen?

Well, we were drilling a main divider in the shaft, and the mine inspector had told us, no more excavation until we changed that divider that was bent. So I took this guy with me. His name was McNally. He was big, but very young. Young man. And I got everything ready so when we blasted, the guys went to eat lunch and we went down to change that divider. And we took the bolts off and everything, and had everything we needed, and I told him, Start pushing your side and then about maybe a quarter of an inch, and then I'll push mine to keep it going straight, because it wouldn't bind. And he kept hitting it and hitting it. I had my safety belt on and so did he. And after he couldn't do nothing with it, I said, Come over here and I'll go over there. So he walked across on that divider. Then we had, they call it button board. It's a legging that fits on the divider, and it's too long; it hits the side of the shaft, and you can walk on there, you know. It was twelve-inch boards. And I went over there, and I didn't put his safety belt on, and I hit it a long time. I hit it, and it came off. So I stayed there, you know, trying to get my belt and I said—

Ninety feet! That is—

Then I went. And my teeth didn't break. They just bent like that and pinned my tongue. And I couldn't close my eyes for my mouth, because it was full of sand. If there would've been rock there, I would've gotten killed, but it was nothing but sand. No rocks whatsoever. Then I hit like three feet of water and then the sand, you know. I went in the sand. And lucky that this grease monkey was working on our mucker, and he seen me, and he jumped down, and he couldn't pull me out because I was stuck in the sand. And he put a cable on my feet and pulled me up with that tugger.

Wow! So that must be a lot for the family to go through.

Frances: Right.

Yes, so I bet getting to the test site was sort of a relief?

Luciano: [00:20:00] Oh, yes, it was, because it was big—big tunnels. And that tunnel, mines over there, they were nine feet high by eight foot wide. And the tunnels here, you know, gosh, they were like forty feet.

That's huge. So I guess I've got a couple of questions. The first is, when you were drilling the holes or making the holes or even driving the train, did you ever think about, that you're drilling these holes for nuclear weapons?

No.

Because I mean they're huge [the tunnels].

Yes. And it was just a small silver device, you know.

Yes. The device itself is small, but the shaft that they—

No, we went in the tunnel and we got it to ground zero and then the scientists took care of all of that.

You just dropped it off.

Yes. We didn't touch it. There was always soldiers in the front, soldiers in the back, and soldiers on the side when we took a device in. And all the switches were bolted together to make sure that you couldn't—somebody would throw the switches, you'd go someplace else. They were bolted.

It was very interesting.

Yes? How so?

Because the way they worked, you know. It's so much different working for the government than mining over there, you know. They had rules and regulations that you have to follow.

Was that better or worse?

Better. Oh, yes.

It was more regulated?

Yes.

Was there ever stuff that you guys did that you couldn't talk about?

No. Well, we had interviews with government people, and they would ask us a bunch of questions, you know, and when they asked me where does—not safety, but where does [pause] you know, being careful not to say nothing, he asked me, he said, where does [pause] you know, what he meant is where did keeping your mouth shut, you know, start?

But he said, where does, you know, like security, where does it start? and all that.

I told him, It starts with me.

And he said, well, I'm glad that you said that.

Was this before the job or during the job?

Well, we had this interview when we started. And they wanted to make sure that, you know, we didn't go talking about our work or nothing like that. Yes.

Right. Because you guys probably saw a lot.

Yes, but the things that we're not supposed to talk about, I never mentioned them.

Yes. I mean, is that strange, going to work and coming home and not being able to talk about some of it?

Well, yes, there was a lot of things that we weren't supposed to be talking to, you know, because they said that they'll come and ask you one question and you answer it, you tell them, you

answer the question, and then he says they'll go to somebody else and ask them another thing, and then they put it all together, you know.

Right. To get information out of different people?

Yes. Getting information. [00:25:00]

So you just weren't supposed to talk about anything, period. Wow. So [pause] I'm just curious, too, because you were out there when they shot off some of the tests. And you said it felt like an earthquake.

Yes, but that was only one time that they did it in the shaft, 700 feet underground. That was the only time that I experienced anything like that because when they had other tests, they evacuated the area.

Really? How come they didn't evacuate for that one? Because that was so deep?

Oh, yeah, because that was in the shaft. And I just happened to work that weekend, you know, and we seen it. We seen that test. And you could feel the vibration, exactly like an earthquake.

Was that scary at all or was it just too far?

No, it was too far.

Yes. I think if you saw the above ground testing I would think that would be scary.

Well, it was underground. It was underground, but it caved in 700 feet.

Made a big crater?

Yes. Big, big crater, yeah.

Were there ever any accidents while you were out there? Any mining accidents? You mentioned that it—

Well, the only accidents that I had were out of the test site.

Yes. It sounds like their safety procedures were in place.

Yes. It was different, yeah, at the test site. I only know of one getting killed. It was a friend of mine. They were cutting a pipe, but the pipe was like ten feet in diameter, and it was *thick*.

That's where they have the tests, you know. And then they cut it all [and] take it on out. And they had this one piece tied to a bolt on the ribs. When they finished cutting it, the bolt didn't hold nothing and thing went and hit him against the rig. It killed him instantly. And they threatened to shut the test site down because of that accident. Like I say, the safety was higher, you know. Safety was a main concern.

So they didn't end up shutting the test site down, though, right?

No.

No. They were able to get around that.

Yes.

So you mentioned that you went for a screening for silicosis.

Yes. And I haven't gotten the results. I went over here where I had the screening, the test, but they said that they sent them to Yucca Mountain, you know. So I'm going to have to call there [and] see, because it's so important to me, because I want to find out if I have anything, you know, bad lungs or anything like that. Because uranium miners, you know, where I worked over there, they worked a lot less than I did and they got the \$150,000. And I'm working on that now. So I need the results from Yucca Mountain.

Now, is that through the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA)?

Yes.

OK. And when we were at the REECo breakfast a couple weeks ago, those folks were out there from NIOSH [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health] talking about the different

types of illnesses and the different compensation programs. Are you involved in any of that?

[See also Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program]

[00:30:00]

Well, that's what this is for.

So it's the same thing. OK. And is this the first time that you've done that?

Yes, and well, I got—no, that was—

Frances: You started in '98. That had one in 2002, and now in 2004, was his third one.

Luciano: On one report that I got, they sent me a letter and they said that I had scarred lungs and that I might be eligible for compensation. But see, everything, like my hearing, you know, they were paying people here because of loss of hearing, but I couldn't do nothing because they said that I couldn't hear when I came here.

Prior, already, before the test site.

Yes.

Is that true?

Yes. Because, well, when I worked at Glen Canyon, the tunnel, we didn't have no ear protection like we have now, you know, and can you imagine thirty-five machines going at the same time?

No. That's loud. So I don't know if you were out there during this time. I think you were. Other people have talked about taking the bus and going down the road and at times there were protesters lined up on the roads?

Oh, yeah, a lot of them. They had a lot of protesters there, and they would lay on the road and the cops had to come and drag them out. They built a fence, a chain link wire, and they threw them in there.

Right, the different pens to keep them in. What do you think—?

And they were all hippies, you know, and women that didn't care. One time we went, there was a woman up there on like a bus and she was naked and screaming from up there. They had people like that, you know.

Wow! Yes. So, I guess their whole point for being out there is that they're against the nuclear testing.

Yes, right. So we just ignored them, you know, and they just stayed in the bus and we'll get through them. And the patrols would move them. One time they were holding hands so the buses couldn't cross, and they made a chain, you know, a human chain. And then about six highway patrolmen, they were big, and they all got together and pushed the line. You should've seen them all fall.

They just pushed them all out of the way.

Yes. And they wouldn't let go of their hands.

What did you guys think about that? You just paid no attention to it?

No, no, we didn't pay no attention to them. We were just careful they wouldn't throw rocks at us, you know.

Interesting. I guess getting back, I'm just curious to what it was like on the test site, especially with the miners as a group? What kinds of experiences you guys had, what kinds of things you did. Because it seems like everybody I talk to, everybody's got some good stories, and it seems [a] very tight knit community.

Yes, now that we have those breakfasts, you know, we get to talk about old times there at the test site. [00:35:00]

Yes. You kind of compare stories?

Yes.

Any good stories you want to share?

Oh, well, the guys that I sit next to, oh, they have stories. [Pause] So I think that covers everything.

OK. All right. Is there anything else you want to say about the work that you did or the job, or your experiences at the test site?

No, you know. Routine, you know.

Well, routine to you, but I mean, that's a pretty big deal, driving the tunnels and then the train, and actually taking the device to ground zero.

Yes, well, one time, his name was Mike, I forget his last name. Mike and his partner, they were drilling into a cavity that was supposed to be cool, but it wasn't. When they punched through, fire came out of there and burned them both. Not too bad, you know, but burned them. And we had to go in and get them. But we had run the man train, you know, and we went in and got them.

Oh, I'll never forget about the mine rescue team. They set up outside. And we went in and I said, Well, what are they doing out there? They're supposed to be the rescue team. He said, Oh, if anything happens to you, they'll come and get you. *So they're the backup rescue team.*

Yes, but there was one in the front car with me, taking readings from the gases, you know, radiation. Yes, his name is Mike Gamboa.

Did you guys take a lot of readings while you were out there?

Oh, yeah. Yes. Always.

And what were you looking for in the readings?

You know, when I worked for REECo that time and when they were like having a test, you know, or something like that, we got paid for the whole eight-and-a-half hours because we worked through lunch. We never had a lunch hour, me and my operator. So yeah, anything that would happen, we'd go in, [and] bring them out. Take them in, bring them out.

How did you end up driving the train? Was that just part of one of the jobs that you did?

Well, yes, once they had tunnels where it was worth it, it was outdated, you know, all the wiring and everything, it was outdated. So they closed it down, and I went to Yucca Mountain. No, I went to P Tunnel, and then from P Tunnel I went to Yucca Mountain. And at P Tunnel, my job first thing in the morning was to—a truck brought the water and I put the water in flat cars. I took them in and delivered the water to the work areas.

Was this at Yucca Mountain or—?

No.

At the test site.

Yes, P Tunnel, yeah.

It sounds like a pretty systematic—like there's a pretty good system going.

Yes, it's interesting because you're not doing the same thing all day. You're doing different things.

That's good. [00:40:00]

Then I had papers that went into the office. I brought the time cards to the office. You know, we were busy all—

So you did a lot of different things in addition to the mining.

Yes. Yes, different things.

So what was a typical day like?

Well, a typical day was when we had people coming in for visitors, and we took the visitors in, and took them in safely, brought them out safely.

Were these visitors just from the public or were they from—?

Yes, from the public.

OK. That had business there or just—?

No, they were just visiting.

Just visiting. OK.

On tours. There was this one black sergeant, he was the one that would tell them about how everything went there, you know, the blasts, how they controlled it, and all that. Yes, that was a good day because we'd take them in and we couldn't go nowhere with them. We had to be there.

So you would just take them in and then the sergeant would take them from there.

Yes, he would take them right then. One time, this old man, I think he ate too much at the mess hall, and he got sick over there underground. So we rushed him to the Porta-Potty, and then we brought the crew out, and they were taking in new Porta-Potties, you know, underground, and he went and got in the one that they were going to take underground. He went and set there. Then a forklift went and got it, lifted the flatcar with the Porta-Potty, and he was in there, and he was screaming. And old Ray, he said, who in the hell is in there? And he was kicking the door, you know.

I'll bet he was surprised.

Yes, so it ended up, they put the car down and he came out, pulling his pants, and they said, You're not supposed to use that. That's clean. There's no water in it yet or nothing. You know, they put chemicals in those Porta-Potties. And he said, I'll never come over here again. And he blamed the food at the mess hall.

That's great. He's just lucky he didn't end up underground. I never thought about that. I guess you have to bring Porta-Potties underground.

Well, no, they have—the Porta-Potties that are underground, see, they opened a new working area, we brought new Porta-Potties in there, and then the guys that take care of them put the solutions in there, you know, and then they go in there and they pump them out.

So I notice that your name actually said Lucky Lopez. How did you get that name?

Oh, I got that name when I was in the military, because my name is Luciano. You probably heard of Lucky Luciano. He was a gangster. I'm not. Later he got deported. I have his book, the story.

That's a good story, actually. So they started calling you Lucky and it stuck?

Yes. And then before I went, there was somebody that knew me by this [name]. When I came here to the test site, there were a bunch of guys from New Mexico here.

Frances: And then from Glen Canyon, too.

Luciano: Oh, from Glen Canyon. Let me tell you, I hadn't seen this guy, oh, in over twenty years.

Frances: Because you was only—no, you weren't that, because you was only twenty—you was only—when we lived in Glen Canyon, you was only twenty-three. No, wait. [00:45:00] When Rudy was born, you was twenty-three, when we were in Superior. Then Rudy was six in 195—when you left in '59, Rudy was not even six yet. And that's our fourth boy. So you had to be like, OK, that was in '58 and you was twenty-three in '53. Twenty-three, and then you was about twenty-five—

Luciano: Anyway, when I came to the test site—

Frances: You was fifty-five.

Luciano: —we were processing, you know, and I look over there and there's an office there and it had Bud Edwards on the door. So I looked at him but he had changed, you know, put on so many years, but I went and asked him, Are you Bud Edwards, the one that worked in Glen Canyon with me? He said, Yes, I am. That's me. And he was the—what do you call it? The project manager.

Oh. Out at the test site.

Yes. He was a project manager. And he said, You keep your mouth shut about what we did over there, all that drinking and fighting.

At Glen Canyon?

Yes. And he didn't want me to say nothing about it. And then I got up there to the office and I meet another one. My superintendent, I met him over there. See, Bud Edwards was just a miner like me, and over here he's project manager.

So that was quite a long time ago that you worked with him.

Frances: He couldn't believe it.

Luciano: Right. I couldn't believe it. And then from a miner to a project manager.

Yes. How did that happen?

Yes.

And then my superintendent was in there, too, and we start talking about back there in Glen Canyon, and he said, he asked me, What size shoes do you wear?

I said, I wear a nine, nine-and-a-half.

He says, Oh, I have a brand new pair of Redwings. I'll sell them to you.

I said, OK, how much you want for them?

He said, A nickel.

So next morning, he's in the office and he said, There's your shoes.

I said, Oh, great, brand new.

So I went to get it and he says, Hey, hey, hold it, where's my nickel?

And I did have a nickel. I gave it to him. He took it, you know.

And he told me, Well, you know, after a year's passed, I'm going to retire, and I'm going to put you on the best job in the test site.

And I said, Doing what?

He said, We're going to put in a man train, and you're going to stay on as straight days.

Oh, let me tell you, I had a lot of people mad at me because, you know, I was one of the newest there and then I got a job like that.

And then you got that job. I bet.

Yes. But I knew all the guys that were out there. Superintendent, project manager. And then I knew Rocky Hardcastle.

Frances: Yes.

Luciano: He used to go to the house when I was in Glen Canyon.

Frances: And visit us.

Luciano: Yes.

Frances: When I made *tamales*, he liked those *tamales*.

Luciano: Yes. Oh, and then when I was getting in the bus and guys were getting off over at Area 12, I got off the bus and the guy going in said, Hello, Lucky. I said, Hi, Robert. And Rocky Hardcastle said, I worked with a Lucky Lopez in Glen Canyon. [And he said] Oh, that's him at the door. So he got out of the bus and called me, but he weighed like 130 pounds [back then], and he weighed like 230.

Wow. So he's changed a bit.

Oh, yeah, he changed.

[00:50:00] So the whole mining community seems like it's pretty small. You seem to keep running into people.

Yes, you run into, you know, one of your friends all the time.

And a lot of people ended up out here.

Yes. A lot of people from Arizona and New Mexico. From New Mexico was, you know, more people than from any other place.

Now, you did a lot at the test site. You had a lot of different jobs. Which ones did you like the best?

Well, the man train. I liked that best. Oh, and I—they brought the cars and all they had was boards, you know, for the bench where you sit, and I upholstered them with foam rubber. Real nice. And they're still using them. I seen them at Yucca Mountain.

So you drove the train. How did that work? You met at a certain place at the test site? And then how far out were you driving people?

We would pick the people up in the lunchroom, and then outside, you know, we would wait outside until they come to get off the bus. And the first thing I did was make sure that my motor was serviced, had fuel and oil and everything. And then I go get the cars, the man cars, and park the ore cars on the side, and get them ready for the people to go in.

And then how long of a drive was that?

About, oh, maybe a mile-and-a-half.

OK. But when you were out there, it was pretty isolated from the rest of the test site.

Yes, and then we went to different places. We went—I forget the name of that drift now, but there were so many that were going there. Well, we were going in and out all day.

Taking people back and forth?

Yes. In wintertime, it was bad because the cold air would hit you.

How cold would it get out there in the winter?

It got pretty cold, like twenty [degrees]. And then with the wind blowing in the tunnel, you know, that made it bad.

That sounds like tough working conditions in the wintertime.

In the wintertime, yeah.

So how long did each hole take?

Did the train come out?

Well, when people are working on digging the holes and the shafts, about how long does that take to complete?

Oh, we took a long time. Like when we were doing a cavity, that took a long time. First, we drove a race, and then they brought a machine to start cutting around it like this [demonstrating], and it cut all the way to—and then we got up there and drilled it and shoot it down here. And then, oh, the way these people worked, it was unbelievable. They brought dirt from Arizona, from Yuma, Arizona, and then you dump it down there and we would level it off and tamp it. If it was too hard, then we had to soften it up again and tamp it down just perfectly.

And that dirt was used to—?

It was a special dirt that they brought. Oh, when they were dumping that dirt up there on top, it was dusty. God, it was dusty on the bottom there.

I bet. So among other things, were you ever worried about like exposure to radiation or anything like that, or other contaminations? [00:55:00]

No, because they were always taking readings, you know, and we had—

Those little pins?

Yes, that we carried with us, and then that would—they'd never say how much radiation we were exposed to. But they checked us all the time.

But they never told you whether there was a lot or a little or nothing.

No. No, no, they never told us. I never knew.

Do you think that there was, or you don't know?

Oh, yeah, there had to be because we brought contaminated tools outside to the dump. And then all that radiation from uranium.

Right. Right.

All this time we're on a physical when I went to work at SOHIO. This one doctor. [And I said]

When do I know if I'm radiated? He says, The time to check is when you start glowing at night.

I guess that hasn't happened yet. Now, when did your son [Rudy] start working out there? Was that at the same time or was that before you?

It was about the same time, and then he stayed—

Frances: No. He [Rudy] came here in, I think it was in '89.

Luciano: We worked together at Yucca Mountain.

OK. It was a little bit later.

Yes. And he stayed like thirteen years.

Frances: Twelve or thirteen.

Really? And then working over at Yucca Mountain.

Luciano: Yes. And now he's working here in town.

For REECo?

No. The last years that he worked, he worked for—what's my company's name?

Frances: Oh, you have a shirt?

Luciano: Yes.

Frances: What is it?

Luciano: God, my memory.

Frances: I know. He worked for that company but not— [leaving the room]

Luciano: Well, and REECo took over—I mean, they took over when REECo left.

They took over from REECo. So he worked out at the test site for a couple of years.

Yes.

And then, obviously, there was a moratorium and testing stopped and you guys went to—

Oh, Bechtel.

Bechtel. Yes, Thank you. I couldn't think of it either.

Yes, Bechtel. Yes, I pitched horseshoes for them. We'd get a gold medal every year.

Really? You must be good.

Frances: [Coming back into the room] There you go. Right there [showing shirt].

Luciano: Yes, Bechtel Nevada. I get a shirt every—

Frances: Because he's in the—

Luciano: Corporate Challenge.

Frances: Every year. And since he was working at this site, and then they changed companies, he can—

Luciano: I can pitch for that company, yeah.

Frances: He pitches horseshoes with them.

Luciano: I have my pitch up there, where I pitch. Where I practice. [Pointing to backyard horseshoe area set up]

Oh, yeah, look at that. Wow, very nice.

That's the first thing I put in when we moved here. There was nothing. I'm glad because we landscape it the way we want it, you know. There was nothing but dirt.

I bet. And have you lived in this area and this house since you've been out here?

Frances: No, we've been here sixteen years.

Luciano: No, a couple of years.

Frances: Yes, because we didn't know if we were going to stay here or not, so it took us about three years. Finally I told him, well, I guess we're going to stay here, so I want to start looking for a house. So we bought this house in 1988.

And so were you just renting before that?

Yes, we were renting. Yes, we lived in an apartment.

In case you didn't like it.

But then he stayed on working and working, and then I was working for Circus Circus myself.

Oh, really?

Yes. I worked at the Carousel

Good place to be.

So we stayed here.

So the test site must've been good, the Nevada Test Site must've been a—seems like it was a good job and you had good opportunities there.

Luciano: Yes, I'm so glad that I came here because of the pension. Well, in New [01:00:00] Mexico, we had our home paid for, and we have a lot of property over there that we sold a lot of it. I had trailers that I rented. Mobile homes, you know. But I'm glad I came here because of the pension. Otherwise, we would be barely making it.

Yes. That's good. Because that's rare these days.

Frances: Hard. A lot of people is just—

Yes, I mean, it was a good employer here in town.

And we both joined the good unions. He joined the labor and I joined the culinary.

Very good.

Luciano: Yes. You know, the labor union, that's a powerful union. You know what? We can go to the dentist and it don't cost us nothing. The union takes care of us.

Frances: When he retires, because I wasn't a retired.

And you were able to be an employee while you were working at the test site.

Luciano: Yes.

So you guys were all unionized.

Yes. Oh, yeah.

OK. Cool.

Frances: And then when I worked in New Mexico, also in a union, too, for a retail clerk. I used to work in a grocery store.

Yes, unions are good.

Piggly-Wiggly. Have you ever heard of—?

Absolutely. I shopped there. My family used to shop there when I was little. It was one of my favorite places to go.

That's where I worked. I worked eighteen years for Piggly-Wiggly.

I didn't know they were all over.

Yes. They were in New Mexico. But then they sold it out and they went to the—

Right.

And they don't have any over here anymore.

They don't have them anywhere anymore, I don't think.

Well, you know what? We went to—about how many years ago? About six, seven years ago?

Luciano: What?

Frances: When we went to see Joseph at South Carolina?

Luciano: Oh, yeah, in South Carolina.

Frances: And we went to this store and I didn't even—and then I seen this girl that had the—
her—

Luciano: Piggly-Wiggly.

Frances: Yes. And I said, Oh, my gosh, is this Piggly-Wiggly? She said, Yes.

Changed a little bit. Wow. I haven't heard that name in a long time. Great. So any other thoughts or stories that you want to share about the test site, or experiences you want to talk about?

Luciano: No, not that I can remember.

You guys seemed to be talking about a lot at the breakfast.

Yes. At breakfast, yeah. And then they tease me over there because, oh, they broke into my pickup, you know, and I bought an old car, just to go to the bus stop, because they broke into my pickup over there.

Where did you catch the bus from?

We caught the bus over here on Owens.

Frances: Owens and Lamb.

Luciano: And this one morning, it was a weekend, it was Saturday, and I took her to work, and I was supposed to stop at the store on my way back, but I didn't because I had to come to the bathroom. So then, I left my pickup there, I jumped in the old car, and I went to the store. And

then when I came out of the store, I thought they had stolen my truck. And I was gun shy already, you know, because they had broken into it. I looked for my truck all over the parking lot, and nothing.

You just forgot you took the car.

Yes. So I called the police, and they came over and took notes and everything, and then I wish I would've never accepted a ride. He said, *You need a ride?* And I said, *Yes*, they took my ride. Well, he opened the trunk and I put my groceries there. And when we came around the corner, I see that truck in that driveway.

Did you say anything?

Well, there was a woman police officer with him, and she slid down off the seat laughing, and boy, he was mad.

And he said, *That's your address, right?*

I said, *Yes*.

[And he said] *Whose pickup is that?*

I said, *It's mine*.

He said, *Well, is that the one you lost?*

Gosh, I wanted the earth to swallow me.

And I told the officer, *And I just filled it up with gas*.

[01:05:00] As soon as we got here, he stopped there.

He said, *Let me see you turn the key on*.

And I did, and it was full. I wasn't lying. And so then he came in and the girl police officer, she walked all over the house, went outside, and come back, and she was still laughing. And boy, the

guy, he was sitting there, he was mad. So then the guy says to me, you know, if I [want] him to take me back to the car. I said, No way, man. No.

Yes, I wouldn't either. So that's a pretty good story.

Frances: They even called me at Circus Circus.

Luciano: Yes, they called her and asked her if it was true that I took her to work and all that.

Now, did they think you stole it?

Luciano: Yes.

Frances: You know what? When they told me, Frances, close your— because I was working in the Carousel—they said, A police [man] wants to talk to you on the phone. I said, 'Oh, my gosh, I bet he had an accident.' Right away, I thought about that. So, oh, I was afraid to, you know.

So he said, Did your husband bring you to work?

And he says, Did he bring you in the car or the pickup?

I said, In the red pickup. Dodge.

And they says, What time did you go to work? and all that.

He started asking me questions, you know.

So I told him, and I heard him say, OK.

He says, Don't worry about it, he's all right. [laughter]

Luciano: Oh, and then I would've never said—I would've kept it under my hat, but Rudy, my son, he went and spilled the beans over there, told everybody.

He told everybody at work?

Yes. And they still ask me, Did you ever find your pickup?

Wow. So it was probably good to have your son out at work, though. Maybe not so good for those kinds of things, but that's kind of nice that he's out there. Well, I definitely appreciate you talking to me. Do you think—I would be interested in talking to your son, too, to hear about some of his experiences out there.

Frances: I don't know what—he's hardly never—he's always working.

Luciano: Well, he's always working, seven days. He's on call all the time. I don't know when—I can talk to him.

Yes, if you could ask him, that would be great. And I'm very flexible, too.

OK, I'll talk to him.

And the thing is, this is a long term—

You're going to leave me a card or—?

Yes, I'll give you a card, actually. Thank you for reminding me.

Frances: Honey, where do you have to call for your—?

Luciano: I've got to call Coors [Trujillo] He's got the phone number.

And so now you're retired?

Yes.

Frances: He's been retired ten years, going on eleven.

Great. That's got to be nice.

Luciano: Oh, and then I went to work at the airport, baggage claim.

Out here?

Yes. McCarran. I worked there for a year. Oh, and if you didn't show up for work, they sent somebody to look for you.

Really?

Oh, yeah, they made sure that—

At McCarran.

Frances: Yes! One time I told him, I'll just call that you're sick. He wasn't sick. We wanted to go out.

Luciano: Yes, we were at the Showboat, and I called in sick, and they came looking for me to make sure that somebody didn't make me call in, you know, because I had the tag that would open a lot of doors and elevators, and they wanted to make sure that—

Right. Security.

Yes.

Wow! It sounds like security at the airport was more secure than at the test site. Actually, that's an interesting question. Was there a lot of security that you had to go through at the test site?

[01:10:00]

Yes, we had to stop there at the gate, you know, and they check our nametag. And when we filled [out] the résumé, I don't know what this friend of mine did, because I didn't know of anything wrong that he had done. He was just a kid. He was my son's friend. And he must've lied about something because security went and got him over there.

Really? At the test site?

And brought him out. And didn't let him pick up his car or nothing, just told him—they brought him to the gate and told him to keep on going. Don't ever come back.

Wow. He must've really lied about something. So what type of hours did you work?

Well, we just worked from eight to four. But I left the house at 4:30 in the morning.

Did it take that long to get out there?

About an hour-and-a-half. And I slept all the way. You know what? One time, I went to sleep and the guy didn't wake me up when we got there. And then I was working that tunnel, and I wound up over there on Yucca Mountain.

Well, we're just about at the end of this first CD, and I didn't know how many CDs to bring, so I have an extra one. I didn't know if you had more stories or more that you wanted to talk about.

No, I think I said everything.

All right. OK.

[01:12:04] End Track 2, Disk 1.

[End of interview]