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

Interview with Navor Valdez

June 20, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Charlie Deitrich

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The material in the *Nevada Test Site Oral History Project* archive is based upon work supported by the U.S. Dept. of Energy under award number DEFG52-03NV99203 and the U.S. Dept. of Education under award number P116Z040093.

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Charlie Deitrich: *OK, we're recording. Could you state your full name and with the date and place of birth?*

Navor Valdez: OK, my name is Navor T. Valdez. Navor Tito Valdez. I was born in Monero, New Mexico. I have been in Nevada more than anywhere else. But I was raised in Utah. I went in the Army when I was seventeen-and-a-half and more or less migrated from there to Nevada. I've been really in Nevada from about '60 off and on for many years.

Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their names?

My mother's maiden name is Maria Montoya. My father was Navor Valdez. And they were both from New Mexico. And they migrated from New Mexico to Utah because he worked in the coal mines, and that's where he went. That's how we ended up in Utah.

Where at in Utah?

Price, Utah. Actually, Rains, Utah. It's a mining community. There's about five little towns up the canyon out of Helper, Utah. And from there, we went to the town of Helper, to Price, and I was there till I went in the Army when I was, like I say, seventeen-and-a-half years old.

This sounds like a small town.

Yes, Helper, probably the max might've been 3,000 people if there was ever that many. Price is a little bigger. But other than that, they're actually small towns really.

They're all mining towns?

Yes, they're mining towns there. Coal mines. Mainly the only industry there that was really big was the railroad and coal mining.

Siblings? Brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had two brothers, one sister, and one brother's deceased and so is one sister. So the only living brother I have is now my brother Albert. And he ended up with throat cancer. Not thyroid. Throat cancer. He just came back from Long Beach. He had radiation treatments through the Veterans'.

What did he do for a living?

He didn't work in mines that much. He was more or less raised in Utah, too, and he moved here to Vegas and, you know, he just worked here in town, but that's about it.

What was it like growing up in the small kind of mining towns? What was that experience like?

Well, I enjoyed it. I think afterwards I realized, especially when I had my first bout with cancer, that I used to read a lot of articles and so forth. And I think at that time they didn't say the downwind went that far, but then I've a lot of articles since that it's as far as Butte, Montana this downwind went. And at that time, when we were younger, I remember my mother used to buy not pasteurized milk, buy raw milk in the little town of Wellington because it was much cheaper, you know. And I honestly feel that the downwinding went farther than they try to say it did, especially when it went as far as Butte, Montana. So how has it not got as far as Carbon County? So here's the cows eating the grass, and if there's any fallout, well, where's it go? The milk. I do know that when I had my bout with cancer, when I was twenty-six years old I worked in a uranium mine in Moab, Utah. At that particular time, I used at the section of the mine that was more highly radiated than the other section of the mine. There's two sections you work. They had lost my dosimeter records one time, and being I was in the mostly high radiated area, they pulled me out of the mine and worked me outside till I guess they determined they found the records. They never did really tell me. So they put me back in the mine. Meanwhile, while I was

working there, I developed a big tumor in the side of my neck on the right side. I paid no attention to it. Finally, one of my co-workers asked me, you know, What's that? You got a swollen gland or something on your right side. I says, Well, I don't know, I guess maybe I ought to talk to the doctor. Well, what happened is I had broke my finger, pulled the nail off and broke it, so I had to go to the doctor to get it sewed up. When I did, I asked the doctor about that. I said, Doc, I've got this tumor I've had here. **[00:05:00]** Well, no, excuse me, I went to him prior to that and he give me penicillin, thinking it was a swollen gland. When I broke my finger that I had went back maybe two months later, three, whatever it was, I asked him if he ever determined what was wrong with this tumor I had in my—well, he said it was a swollen gland in my neck, and that's when he told me that he was going to have to send me to Grand Junction to a specialist. And my sister worked with this Dr. Griese [sp] that she told me that I should go see first, before I went to Grand Junction, and I did. And the first thing that man, when he seen my swollen gland in my neck or supposedly, which was cancerous, asked me if I had this rotten discharge taste in my mouth and I said, Sure do. He told me, You're going to the hospital tonight. We're going to operate on you tomorrow. So they did. They removed my tumor, and then he come in there and told me that two weeks from the date that he had removed the tumor, he was going to have to do more surgery on my thyroid. And I asked him at the time why. Well, he didn't let me know that I had cancer. He did let my parents and my wife at that time know that I had cancer and that I had to go back [for] surgery, which I did two weeks later. At the time, they claimed they removed half my thyroid, and after I had my thyroid, supposedly half of it removed, I started taking medication for thyroid. And from there, I went right back to work in the uranium mines, and I was there just a little over a year. But at the time, when I put in for the Department of Justice that

I told them that was the first time that I developed it, they tried to say that I was not working long enough in the uranium mine to develop that, you know, it should've been maybe longer. My contention is who knows how much radiation, how much you can do? I was in the mostly high radiated section of the mine, and the reason I stayed in that section of the mine instead of the other section was because I knew the mine very well, and we was contract mining. We got paid by the amount of work we did, not by the hour. So like I said, I feel it couldn't have helped me at all. And are they as people to say that it's not possible it could've happened? I feel they had a lot to do with it because they pulled me out of this, like I told you, section of the mine to keep me out of the radiated area, but yet I'm hauling all the ore back and forth at the mine. So it concentrates, you know. I don't think it was done very well at one time. It's like I said before, if I was to do it all over again, I sure wouldn't do what I did.

Sure. Let's go back a little bit. I'm kind of curious. What was your date of birth? I don't know if you—

Oh, I'm sorry, March 1, 1942.

So when were you in Utah? Were you in Utah in the fifties, as a kid?

Yes. See, I was—now, that I'm going to say, I was less than probably two or three years old when we moved to Utah.

OK, so that was like the end of World War II.

Oh, yes, because I went through grade school and everything in Utah, from the first grade. And I left in '59 to go in the Army.

So then you were like throughout most of the atmospheric testing at the [Nevada] test site, you were in Utah.

Oh, yes. Yes.

OK. I mean as a kid, did you guys know about that atmospheric testing?

Never did. I was too young and probably, you know, it was never mentioned that I can recall. See, that's why my Dr. Griese, thyroid, Carbon County had the most outbreak of thyroid cancer. He could never understand it. Because when I had my bout, Dr. Griese goes, I don't understand it, but we're just having way too much thyroid cancer in Carbon County, Utah, which is Price, Utah and Helper and so forth.

What was the name of the doctor?

Dr. Griese.

Do you have the spelling of that?

I'll tell you what, I've got his—let me see. I'll tell you what, I've got—I saved everything here.

As you're looking for that, I was just wondering like as a kid growing up in a small mining town, what do you do for fun? What were your activities, hobbies, stuff like that?

Oh, here it is right here. I tell you what it was. When we lived in the mining camp, there was not a whole lot to do. We just played in the mountains, if you want to know the truth. When we went **[00:10:00]** to town, just hanging out and so forth, you know. I never really did that much. We played a lot of baseball, basketball, as we were growing up, when we lived in Helper. But when we lived in the mining camps, there was not a whole lot to do then. But when we were in Carbon, I played a lot of baseball. I played it all through my years till after I was fifty years old.

Is that right?

Oh, yes. Another one of my big entertainments was my movies. If I didn't go to church, I didn't get to go to the movie, so I made sure I went to church to go to the movie. Let me see, this is the—

Did you play baseball in high school?

You know, and I never did for the school. I did everything else but for the school.

Like Babe Ruth, stuff like that?

Yes, everything, Pony League, Little League.

What were your goals in high school? Do you remember like, you know—

I think I mainly wanted to be a mechanic. I remember that's why I went in the Army. And Lordy, here's everything I had then, but it was Dr. Peters referred me to—now, let me see. Moab Medical Center. Dr. Peters [was] the one [who] referred me to Dr. Griese, but Dr. Griese did the surgery. I've got it all here somewhere.

We can go through it later. I just wanted to double-check the spelling on that. So you wanted to be a mechanic in high school, and that's why you ultimately joined the Army?

I went in the Army then and they had put me in mechanic, which I did get to do, but it was more or less on-the-job training. I didn't get to go to school. And I only went in as National Guard. In other words, six months. And my intentions were, if I liked it good, then I was going to do like my brother Albert. He went six months, got out, and he knew that he didn't want to do National Guard time like I did, so he went back in for two years. That's what my concession was. A lot of our friends were going in for six months, they liked it. If you went regular Army, it's three years anyhow. So anyhow, that's how we—but I didn't get the training I wanted, so I couldn't see going back. Plus I got married very young.

How old were you when you got married?

Let's see, when I got married I was nineteen years old. My wife was seventeen at the time. My first child was born when I was twenty years old.

Wow. So you were just in the National Guard, then, for six months?

Yes, when I was in the Army, yeah. That's what they called it. Called the Weekend Warriors.

And then what did you do when you got out?

When I got out, well, like I say, I ended up probably getting married within a year after I got out. Well, then, I had to go to work. So I worked for the [U.S.] Forest Service a lot, worked on the railroad, and then I worked on the oil rigs a lot. I worked on drilling on the oil rigs from the time I was twenty years old till I was twenty-five. That's when I went mining, after that.

What did you do for the Forest Service?

We used to more or less, they had larvae that used to attack the trees, and we used to go spray this larvae to actually kill the larvae so next year it wouldn't become a beetle and contaminate the other trees. So I did that off and on for I think two years. Plus we used to go fight forest fires.

Did you like it? Was it fun?

I really enjoyed it. We were always in the mountains, you know. The only thing is, just strictly in the camp, you know. But no, I enjoyed it. I was in Wyoming, Utah, in a lot of places. We fought a forest fire one time, it was, well, not exactly out of McCall but where the Snake River runs where the Oregon-Idaho border is where the big redwood trees are at, you know. So I got to see a lot, like I did a little bit in the Army, not too much.

Were you stationed just in the States when you were in the Army?

I was stationed at Fort Ord, California. That's why I say, I didn't get to go nowhere, go to school, just on-the-job training.

Yes. Why'd you leave the Forest Service?

Well, because it's only seasonal work. See, what it is, soon as it starts snowing, well, they'll start getting—I even used to survey at times. After we would finish spraying the beetles and so forth, the larvae, we would go ahead and survey for the following year, see what new trees were attacked, so the following year they could come and spray them. But as soon as it'd get, you

know, where the weather was too bad, that was just—it was seasonal. And so I had to do a lot of odd jobs.

Sure. What were some of the odd jobs you had to do to kind of make ends meet?

[00:15:00] I worked one time for this cleaner service, and I used to deliver dry cleaning clothes to Moab, Utah, which was I think Moab's about 100, maybe 110 miles. I don't remember for sure any more. But anyhow, I used to deliver there and in town and so forth. So I worked for a cleaning service for a while. Railroad. Worked construction, regular road construction. Just anything just to keep me working.

Yes. Whatever it took, right?

Whatever it took.

And then after that, the next big gig was the oil rigs, is that right?

Yes, that's from the time I was twenty years old until I was twenty-five. That's when my daughter, my oldest daughter Penny, which she's forty-three now, she was going to start school, first grade, because at that time they really didn't have much for kindergarten, you know. So then, at that time, my ex-wife told me that she couldn't follow me no more, so that's when I had gone to Pioche, Nevada. I had a father-in-law and my mother-in-law that lived there because he used to work in the mine, silver, lead, and zinc mine, and I asked for Charlie Steen that actually owned the uranium mine in Moab, Utah. That was his mine, Pan Am[erican] Mine [in Pioche]. And so we went to visit him and I told him that it looked like I was going to have to follow the oil field by myself because she's going to have to stay in one place. That's when he told me he was the head mechanic for Charlie Steen, told me then, he said, `Well, let me see. Would you like mining?` So I'm more or less, `Well, I don't know, I've never done it but, you know,` to make a long story short, he got me the job.

Well, when they asked you if you wanted to do the mining, did part of you go, "I've been around it my whole life," and even if you didn't have any experience it was kind of—?

Yes, but I didn't like the coal mines, I mean because it was so much dangerous, the coal mines, you know. I ended up working them, but I didn't like it. But anyhow, but this was later on. So I went and got a job there at Pioche, and we were there till the mine closed down, and I think that was eleven months. Then after that, we went to Moab, Utah. That's when I went to work in the uranium mine.

When you're growing up around coal miners, I mean you have to kind of be a fly on the wall and hear them talk every now and then. What was their perception of what they did?

Well, like my father, for instance, he used to be a machine operator, you know, and he got banged up so bad that he had to retire early because he almost lost one leg, you know. And I had a lot of uncles worked—I had two of them got killed in—well, one was a cousin, one was an uncle—in one of the mines. It was just a very dangerous job, but that was the only thing they could get to make money, you know what I mean? So it's just a way of life. And then they end up, a lot of them, with black lungs. One of my step-dads ended up with black lung, and he's been very fortunate. He's quite a few years up. But anytime you work underground, you're going to pay the price. I don't care what it is. Because diesel smoke—when I was in Moab, Utah, a lot of our scrubber systems, they didn't work. I mean you could go in ahead and it was plumb black. You would blow the air to blow everything out, but still—you didn't realize the harm it was going to do you. The year after I left the mine in Moab Utah, still I would cough off phlegm plumb black.

A year after?

A year after. That's what I was telling them, I couldn't believe it. So put it this way: anytime you do any type of mining, you're going to pay the price. I don't care what they say.

So you kind of—I mean I guess when they offered you the job in Moab, I'm sure there's something in the back of your mind going, I wish I didn't have to mine.

No. I'll tell you why. Because I made very good money. I was just like the rest of these young kids that worked years ago. They don't realize the consequences they're going to pay behind it. When you're a young person, you're making that good of money, you don't look at the risk that's down there. As you get older, you wonder, well, I was dumber than a bed bug to do something like that. But it's a little bit too late. At the time, it was very hard physical work, and I was not that experienced at it, so when I got in Moab, they showed me how to run a jack leg, a lot of things, you know. But the money I used to make. I said man, how many kids, you know, this age that are making this kind of money? Because I was, what, twenty-six years old, possibly, then, because I quit at twenty-five, went to Pan Am, and went to Moab. I was a young man.

So you were twenty-six. That's what, '68, I guess, is when you started?

I would say yes. I could get my dates even better, but it was like I said, I quit Roughneck-25 **[00:20:00]** and went to work at the Pan Am in Pioche, Nevada, was there almost a year, then I went to Moab, Utah. When I come back out here—no, let me see, that was—let's see, I went in the Army '59, to '60, come out here in 1969 mining at the Nevada Test Site. So my uranium mining was done from, had to be what, '65 to—no, wait a minute, '67 to '69, because I think I hired on [at the NTS] in '69, yeah. So it was a two-year period there.

So it was about two years when you were in Moab doing the uranium mining.

Yes, a little over a year that I worked, because I just made enough time—I tell you what, I got it right here. Uranium mines let me start up here at Ely. When I was in Ely is in '67, 04/67 to

10/67. Oh, and then I went to Ely, Nevada to roughneck a little bit before I went to Atlas Minerals. Atlas Minerals, I've got 11/67 to 05/69.

When you say "roughneck," what does that mean?

That's working on the oil rigs. Working, in other words, drilling for oil. It's actually oil rigs, I should've said, but we call it roughnecking, is what you do. And then we worked from 05/69 to 06/70 here at the test site. We went on strike, and then I went back to the uranium mines and the coal mines. We were on strike for six months. I worked three months in Moab, again another uranium mine, and then I went and worked in a coal mine for the first time for three months, and then I come back out here in 1970.

So when you started working at Moab, that was the first time you did any uranium mining, right?

Yes, uh huh.

Was there any sense, as a twenty-six-year-old man, of what uranium was? I mean was it, you know—?

Truthfully, I knew what they used it for, but as far as what damage it could do to you as an individual, no, I never really–see, in them times, they don't have like they do now. They do a lot of safety meetings, a lot of features. In them times, if you were qualified to go to work, you went to work. Now grant you, they did keep records supposedly of how highly the area was radiated when you was in there, you know, and they used to log it down. That's what your foreman did. But like I say, for some reason, at one time, they lost mine. So they pulled me out of that section of that mine. I think I was only outside about two weeks, but I was still hauling the ore in and out of the mine, so I was still exposed. It wasn't as though they took me two weeks and sent me home and come back, you know. But like I say, now I'm pretty sure things are a lot more safe, a lot more contained. I know it is where I work. But at that time, no.

Was there any conversations between you and your co-workers of—I don't know, I guess I'm just looking for—because now, looking back, you think uranium? Yikes! You know. Was there any sense—?

Yes, now the word scares me, but at that time—

It was just a good-paying gig?

It was just I was doing good. I figured they knew what they was taking care of, so I depended on everybody else, I should say, you know. Like I say, now, I guarantee you, I'd make extra precautions because I know even if better safety issues were done, I wouldn't do it no more. Because of the consequences. I don't really feel they know exactly how much damage they can do to individuals. They tell you they don't, but then all of a sudden, why, they've been compensating everybody because, you know, they're downwinding and people have got contaminated. Because it wasn't taken care of.

Was there any sense—I mean you knew that uranium was used for atomic weapons, right? You knew—

Well, mainly I just knew that they were using it, yeah, and I mean I've always known that, but I didn't—it just didn't figure to me. Nobody ever took me to Los Alamos or here to, here, here's where it's going, or something. You know, I don't know.

I guess what I'm looking for is a lot of—I mean was there a sense of, you know, we're in the Cold War, was there a sense of kind of a greater patriotic thing you guys were doing, or was it, again, just it was a good-paying job and that was—?

Well, I feel that that's what they was doing, but as far as lecturing me about it, no. You know, they didn't come to me saying, man, you're doing great for the United States and whatever that and all. Nothing like that was ever approached. I just knew it was made into plutonium and, you

[00:25:00] know. How they used it, I never questioned until, like I say, mainly probably when I come out here.

Yes, so describe that process, going from Moab, being a uranium miner, to the test site.

Well, I'll tell you what it is. They come down there looking for miners. You had to have two years' experience. You had to learn how to run a jack leg. And at that time, I'd already had my bout with cancer. So I had got a job one time, same person that run the mine in Moab when I worked—Virgil Biddie [sp], if I remember right. He was running a mine in, oh Lordy, in California, in Desert Center. Well, I went down there, and I think it's Kaiser, if I remember right. I had the job, so I left Moab to go down there. I took my brother-in-law with me, Gary. To make a long story short, I couldn't pass the physical because me having that thyroid cancer, they said it'd take at least five years to a clean bill of health because I had too great insurance. Yet when I was in Moab, they told me as long as I had a good back, knew how to run a jack leg, they wasn't concerned, so I could come. When I come down here they were already made aware of all this, and so I got the job, you know, and I stayed here [Nevada]. Like I say, we only stayed about a year. They went on strike, then I went back to Utah for four more months, and then when the strike was over with, I come back.

A "jack leg"?

Yes, that's what you drill with, what you drill a heading with. Jack leg and jumbos.

Is that like a—how many—

It's a machine that drills into the ground, just like I did in Moab. You got to drill and blast, in other words.

OK. I just never heard of jack leg before.

Yes, it's a machine you drill with. Jack leg is a machine you drill with.

OK. Is that like a one-person thing?

Yes, exactly. Just a six-foot drill. All depends what you're drilling. Two foot, four foot, six foot, even as far as an eight-foot drill run on a jack leg.

When you were at Moab and you had the growth and they took it out, did you know then, did you have a suspicion then, that it was probably because of what you were doing in the mines and stuff?

Well, not at first, because like I told you, when they removed that tumor, the doctor didn't let me know it was cancerous till after he did this surgery on my thyroid, because that's where the cancer leaders come from. Then I did, I questioned it a little bit, but never—I think, like I told you, because I'd only worked there a year, they assumed that I didn't work in the uranium mine long enough to have this exposure. So my contention is a lot of it, well, maybe yes and maybe no, but if this downwinding went to Carbon County in all them years that I was—supposedly if there was downwinding there, too, that they say there wasn't. And me drinking this raw milk, and then going getting exposed to radiation. Who knows? Maybe it took two exposures to develop. I don't know. But their contention was when I put in for this uranium mine, for thyroid cancer, at the time they was only paying for lung cancer for uranium mine workers. See, and I got a problem with my lungs now, you know. But anyhow, they just more or less told me no. But now as time gets on, everything that I see that I read or I get told about, they can sit there and tell me no, but I believe otherwise. And I'll always—today I'm just lucky I'm still around to still be able to talk about it.

Yes. What did you do—who did you work for at the test site? Was it REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company]?

Yes, when I first come here, yes. See, but I come here the very first time on a drill rig, in 1963. That's when I showed here that I had—1963, 11/63 to 10/64 at the test site. That's when I used to work on the oil rigs. I worked out here three different times. Like I say, '63, '65, '66. I worked three different bouts that I come back. We'd only work for a short time, then we'd leave. At that time, it wasn't for REECo. Well, it was for a private contractor, Moran Brothers, who I worked for. I worked for them for over two years at one time. And that's who I used to come out with. Then one other time, I worked for another drilling contractor. But the first time, we stayed eleven months, from November—I'll never forget the date, November of '03 to, you know.

Sixty-three?

Yes. Matter of fact, the day President [John F.] Kennedy was shot, that's the day that I was out there. That's why I'll never forget it. That's why I said—

Yes, November 22nd.

[00:30:00] Whatever it was, you know. I remember it was just November. And I was there till the tenth month of sixty [four]—we was there eleven months that time.

What was your first impression of the test site?

Too damn far to go to work. That's my first impression. Couldn't believe it. And they used to have the old road they used to call the Widowmaker, you know, it was a two-lane, and they had portions of it as freeway. Well, like I say, I made better money here. They paid us more than we did in the outside world, as far as I'm concerned, I would call it. Because I used to make actually like almost a dollar more an hour by coming out here. And then we used to get benefits, gas and so forth, and—

They paid for your gas?

Well, no, no, not the company. The company I worked for. In other words, they would furnish you your supply car, you know. So what I'm saying, we got a little bit more benefits. That's what encouraged me to come back here to work. Because I seen the amount of money they could make opposed to where I was making in Colorado, Utah, or Wyoming, or wherever I had to follow the oil rigs.

When you were working here the first time in '63 and '64, you lived in Vegas and commuted out there?

Yes, we commuted. We used to work actually twelve hours on, twenty-four hours off. And at that time it used to take you a solid three hours to work where I worked, twelve hours, then three hours back. We spend a *long* time.

Yes, that is a heck of a commute.

Yes, so it was a long ordeal.

And what did you do the first time in '63 and '64? You said you worked on—

Oil rigs.

What does that mean? What does that do—

It's roughneck. You just drill. Straight down.

OK. Did you have a sense of what the test site was doing?

Put it this way, I didn't ask and I didn't want to know. We were there to do a job and, you know, and there were contractors. We were never put to where anything—like I always said, what I don't know, I can't talk about, and I don't want to. I mean I think that's the way I've always worked all my whole years out there, you know. When I could've known something, I didn't want to know it because I figured my job was to be a construction worker, and that's all I want to

know about. And that's the way it's been for my whole ordeal, and I've been out there off and on for, Lordy, till I retired last year. See, when I hired out the last time was 1980 until 2004.

OK, so you were there in '63, you did uranium mining, you went to the test site again. What did you do when you worked for REECo at the test site in '70?

OK, when I come out here the fifth month of '69, I worked in the shafts then. Shafts and tunnels. I was a miner, I should just say, you know. Both shaft and tunnel miner. And like I say, that time, other than when we went on strike, that I was gone, I think it was six months, if I remember right, and then back in, let me see, yeah, because I come back, I worked probably from 12 of '70 again to, well, I'm going to say from '70 to '78. Then I left again and went back to Price in the coal mines, and then I stayed there about six months, then I come back. But I was drilling then. Now, I had changed crafts. See, I mined till, I'm going to say I joined the Operators in 1974. Prior to that, from '69 to '74, I was a miner. And then from '74 up till I left a little after '78, I was a core driller. And even when I had left six months and I come back, that I hired back out, I went out and core drilled another time out there for them.

"Core drill"?

Core driller.

What is that?

Well, I don't know how I can explain it, but it's just drilling. Maybe I don't want to say no more other than that, you know. But we used to drill. It's just like directional drilling and **[00:35:00]** more or less to determine what they needed. Like I say, if you know that, maybe I can answer it. I'd like to because there's nothing that I feel that's bad, but—

Yes, just as somebody that's never mined before, this is all kind of new to me.

Oh, yeah. Yes, they're just like directional drilling. A lot of times, just like—we used to do in Moab, just like we did here. They call it long-holing, core drilling. Well, what you do is you drill—like there's places that I could drill, let's say, five or six hundred foot straight ahead in a heading, and they can run a probe in there—well, not exactly five hundred, be some within a hundred feet, and they run a probe to determine how much uranium is in there. If it's worth mining, in other words. You know, instead of mining five hundred feet and find out you've mined five hundred of nothing. So they call it long-holing. And then I could drill straight ahead, directional, and they'd run their probe in there and they'd see a high percentage of uranium and you'd run your headings there.

OK. When you were working for REECo the first time around, before the strike, you said you were mining. Like what exactly were you doing?

Well, we were just mining, just like you would anywhere else. You're running direction, you know, in other words, running tunnels or running shafts.

Except isn't this kind of—was this a different type of mining in that you're not really looking to dig something up, you're actually making—

No, you're not, you're not doing—it's not like you're mining like you do when I was silver, lead, and zinc in Pioche and uranium in Moab, you know. It's for the government. We just worked for the government.

Yes. So you were just digging holes.

Yes, that's right, whatever we were told, you know.

What was the strike about?

Well, generally, I don't know. At that time, I think it was probably maybe wages, whatever. I really don't remember. All I know, I prepared myself for it. It's generally—it's always on the

labor disputes for something the company don't want to do and the union maybe wants and they can't compromise, so they go on strike.

So they went on strike and you didn't really—and from then, while they were on strike, you went back to Moab.

I already had a job. I had a job before we went on strike. They were just waiting on me, you know. So when we went on strike, I went back there. Matter of fact, after the strike was over, I didn't come back till two weeks afterwards.

OK. And that's when you went back to Moab and you did uranium mining again?

Yes, I went back to work in the uranium mine for a little over two months. Then we thought we were going to come back because the strike was going to be over with. Turned out it didn't. Then in the coal mines, I had friends working there, found out I could run a stoper and a jack leg. This new particular mine they was opening up there in Waddes, they needed people that could rock bolt. Well, I could rock bolt to beat out. I could run stopers and jack legs. So—

OK, wait. So it was a stoper?

Yes, a stoper is what you put rock bolts in with. And so the mine superintendent found out that, you know, that I could do this, so he called me up and asked me if I was willing to come to work for him. And I told him, I said, well, no, I think we're going to go back to Vegas because it's going to be on strike. I said not only that, my youngest daughter was going to be born then so I said not only that, I got to wait till after my daughter's going to be born and it's going to be any day. Three days later, my daughter was born, and he calls me back again, said they need help, so I did go. That's my first bout working in a coal mine. And that was rock bolting, stoping. And so I worked there a little over two months. Then finally the strike was over and I wanted to stay a little bit longer, but I didn't like the coal mine, so that's when I come back.

OK. So REECo and working out at the test site was paying more than the uranium mining?

Not really.

It was just closer to home? That was—

Well, what it was, at the time I wanted to get out of the mines and uranium mines, especially after having that bout, and then I realized it wasn't good for me, so when they come down looking for miners, I chose to, because when I first come here—see, because down there we was contract miners. We got paid by the footage. The more tunnel we drove, the more heading we made, the more vent line we hooked up, water line, air lines, and everything, you got paid by footage. So I was making actually more money in Moab than I was here. But here was by the hour, you know, and that. But I wanted away from there. Because I told you, I went to California first. They rejected me there. So my brother-in-law stayed there, and my sister, in Desert Center. I had to go back to Moab. So when they finally come out looking for miners, I was glad to get out of there. I wanted out of the mines.

How did you get around that, if they said it was going to be five years of clean health before they'd take you out at the test site?

[00:40:00] Well, I think what it is, see, different insurance companies got different regulations. It's just like my own doctor told me, it's actually five years before you get a clean bill of health, you know, that the cancer in them times—just like right now, I go every four months and get all my lab work and all my CAT scans done, you know. And at that time, I never really went back to recheck, you know, where now they give you radiation after you had your—like after I had my throat surgery this time, they pumped me full of they call it CMIs, 200 CMIs. So if I had any lymph nodes or anything left in me that was cancerous, that, you know, it'll kill it, where at that time they didn't. I wish they would've. Maybe it'd have never developed. But I don't know. But

anyhow, my contention is I've been around enough of this damn radiation, I know what's caused it. But like I say, I can only speak to feel what I know has happened to me, you know. They may contend no, but I—no way. Because like it says, what causes thyroid cancer is low doses of radiation. I went and questioned these doctors and they told me like for instance, when they X ray you, an X ray, like my neck, they put a lead sheet on it. They've already said that the radiation is too low of levels to create that unless you were doing it just constantly. You know what I mean. Because I used to worry about that, even when I had radiation done for my teeth, when they used to put that on there. So, you know, that's the way I feel. I mean, like I say, I'd like to say more what I actually done but by golly, I know where it come from.

So let's go back to where the strike is over, you go back with REECo, is that right?

Yes.

And work back out at the test site.

Nineteen seventy.

I'm sorry if I missed this, but your family is out here now, was that right? At that time, when you were working at the test site for REECo, your family is in Vegas now with you?

Yes, Oh, yes. They've been with me all the time.

And when you went back after the strike, were you doing the same stuff you were before the strike?

When I come back? Yes, I just worked in a different area. Yes. Still mining.

OK, still mining. And then how long were you there that stint?

That time, I was there from, I told you, 1970 to '78. Then I went back. I quit. I actually quit. I think I lacked, seemed at that time, for a total of about like four months or something working ten years that time. So I've been out there a total of probably, oh Lordy, every bit of more than

half my life. I was there the first time when I was, like I say, when I went out there at twenty-three years old in 1963.

So that eight-year stint, do you have any recollections of that experience from those eight years?

You mean when I was working here?

Yes, from '70 to '78.

No. I was still, like I said, a young—Lord help me, let's see, I was thirty-eight years old when I left the mines. Then I worked out there, but I worked in a different area, you know, got out of mining. According to my doctor, like he said, I carried this thyroid cancer a long time. Like they said, if you're going to have cancer, the Cadillac of cancers is thyroid because it's so slow-growing compared to, you know, if you got in your lungs or anywhere else.

They really call it "the Cadillac of cancers"?

Well, I tell you what it is. I've got another friend named Johnny Lopez, he's from my home town and got thyroid cancer bad, too. {and] his brother, oh, I can name you people. That's why I say, in Carbon County, if they say that this downwinding didn't hit that part, bull crap. But anyhow, his doctor told him that: `Let me tell you, you're very fortunate because if there's any cancer you can call a Cadillac, you got the Cadillac of cancer.` Because it's so slow-growing. It's not something else that'll take you, *boom*, right away. So he's the one that used that phrase on me one time. So if there's such a thing, if there's no Cadillac, no cancer, what, but if there's one that's the least, you know, takes you right away, and that's that one.

I've never heard that before.

Yes, Johnny, when he told me that, I like to have died laughing. He said, `Well, he didn't really mean there's any, but if there's anything that'll help save you, it'll be that one.`

[00:45:00] *When you were out there in the seventies, because you know the consciousness was changing in the seventies as far as, you know, kind of becoming aware of radiation and stuff like that, was there kind of a—did you guys—were you more aware of what you were doing, you know, as far as—*

Very true. Let me tell you something. Like I said, I wish I—I'm not sure if I'd be giving anything away, but what I did—they'll never convince me that I wasn't exposed to a lot of—well, I had exposure, they'll never convince me I didn't, because of the type of work that I did when I went in the Operators, when I core drilled. I'm going to say that most of mine that I feel that I had most of my exposure from the time '74 to '78, whenever I left. Because I used to just be in the core rigs. I used to core drill. And I'm not going to tell you how I did things because—I wish I could say it. I don't think I'd be giving anything away, but I was exposed. If ever I'm entitled to say what procedures that I had to go through, I'd like to do it, but I just don't know if I'm allowed to say all that.

No, I understand. I understand. I completely respect that. You know, were there conversations between you and your co-workers about—at the time?

Well, put it this way, the old-time drillers were a little smarter than we was. We was young, you know, we'd do anything and we'd do it where some of them, they wouldn't. So now again, if they was to ask me to do what I did once before, I'd say no, you'd better go find you somebody else.

So the old-timers didn't—

Well, there was one particular time that a couple of them said, `No, we're not going to do [go] in there.` But we did. So like I say, there's probably some things I feel we shouldn't

have done, and I know I definitely wouldn't do now, but at the time you don't know. But I feel like it was wrong.

When the old-timers say no, no, we're not going to do that, you guys do that, did it—

No, no, they didn't say for us to do it. No, they never did that. No, no. They just—one particular time that they didn't, we said, `No, don't worry about it, we'll take care of it.` No, no, we were never told we had to. We took it on our own to do it.

OK. Because I was going to say, I mean that would, you know, alarm bells would go off in my head—

Oh, yeah. No, no, no, no, they just like I said, `Ah, hell no, we'll do it for you`. Put it this way, I had already worked in the oil rigs. I knew fundamentals about drilling. You know what I mean? So when I got into core drilling, directional drilling, or vertical, horizontal, whatever I did, well, I more or less knew how things worked. I just never did so much core drilling itself. So I was aware of it, so when I was a helper, they put me drilling not too long after I was a helper, because they knew I could handle it. Because of my past experience. It's just done a little different.

And so there wasn't any conversations about, you know, with you and your co-workers during that particular stretch of time about, you know, given that the country had changed and that our perceptions of radiation and stuff had changed, that there was—I don't know, I'm just wondering if you guys—

Well, like I said, you always had your dosimeter. If you had any exposures, they were supposed to let you know because you had to change it every so often.

[00:49:07] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 1.

OK, and we're back. We were talking about, you know, in that middle-seventies period, were you guys becoming more aware of the dangers of what you were doing?

I would say yes, but I just sort of felt confident that they were taking care of it. Now that I've developed all this again, then I realize, you know, something wasn't right. I'm not going to put the blame of anything or anybody, but—

So that was the general view. The general view is if the powers that be say it's safe, then it's safe?

Yes. In other words, they had people that were supposedly checking for us, you know. So you put your trust in them. But I think it's like anything, everybody tries to do the best they can. But sometimes, like I told you, I don't care what you say, you go to mining and somebody's going to pay some consequences, one way or another.

Oh, yeah, you've seen that your whole life.

Oh, Lordy, I've been through a lot of it and I feel that—and I've had all my relations, like I told you, in the coal mines, black lung, and it seems everything, you know, and it's—Because now I think they take care of matters a little bit better as far as ventilation, the air, and everything. Years and years ago, hey, man, you just get in there and let's three of them get this shot, this round shot and everything and clean it out so we can make money by this payday. They took too many shortcuts. Well, I don't believe they'll let you do it now. I don't know. I've been out of the mining division for so long, and I guarantee you, I'd never get back into it. Well, I'll never say that. I'd have to be pretty hungry. I'd have to be pretty damn hungry.

You quit in '78.

I quit in ’78 and I went back to Price, Utah because I had got divorced then. Let me see, that’s when—yeah, that’s when I went there, me and my daughter. Went to work coal mines, ’78. Then I come back here in ’79 and I worked, like I say, about six months down here.

Why’d you quit?

Well, between my matrimonial that I was going to get divorced and my second-to-the-oldest daughter wanted to go up there. So if you want to know the truth, I was drilling one day, one morning, and they had already talked me out of it. I had a very good foreman, Howard Allen. That guy was righteous. He talked me out of it a couple— `No, don’t worry about it.` I said, `Things are not going too good. I probably need to get away.` Make a long story short, finally my daughter told me that she wanted to move back there, and like I say, me and her mother were split up. That morning, I just got done drilling, went in there, checked out, quit, took off.

Is that right?

Yes, and he just followed me, caught me down the road about ten miles, asked me, `Man, what are you doing?` And I told him, `Howard, I just need to—I didn’t tell you, didn’t warn you no more, because you keep talking me out of it.` So I did, and then I went back there, and after I was there six months, my daughter didn’t like it, and I damn sure didn’t like no coal mines.

Where was this?

In Price, Utah.

Price, Utah?

Yes, I worked at the Waddes Mine, and then the other one was Soldier Canyon. I worked at two different mines. And I had good jobs, as far as coal mining is, in the mechanical crew. But it

still—oh, I dreaded every day I had to go to work. So that's when I say I come back. And I called my friend again, Howard Allen [and said], I need a job. So he said, Well, plug in the hall and I'll call you out by name. I said, Well, at least give me a week. So that's how I ended up going back out there.

Was this guy, Howard Allen, was he your foreman a lot of the—?

Yes, he was my general foreman. Very good person. Very good person.

Tell me more about him.

Yes, see, he's the one more or less took me under him one time. I went helping him and he was just drilling at the time. Jess Witz, I think, was the general foreman then. So I worked for Howard Allen. A very intelligent driller. He showed me a lot that I didn't know about. And anyhow, one time, see, we went to Los Alamos, New Mexico and then went and did some drilling for them people there. Well, they asked Howard Allen, because he was the best they had out there. Well, I was his helper. Well, I'm going to tell you how righteous this man was. They wanted to send a mechanic to help him because that way he could do the mechanical and be the oiler.

> Well, Papa Howard said, No way. My Mexican don't go, I don't go.
>
> And so they said, Well, I guess you ain't going.
>
> And he said, No problem.

[00:05:00] Well, we went back in there, but they knew they needed him. So I went with him. That's why I say, I learned a lot from him.

You said "Papa Howard." Was that his nickname?

Well, I used to call him that. Everybody did in "George" camp. "Papa Howard." Because if he liked you, I guarantee you, he'd help you. And then he went general foreman. Then when he

went general foreman, that's when I went driller. So I've always more or less worked for him, really, from the time he was a driller and general foreman. A very good individual to work for. Best I've ever seen.

So he took you back after the—?

Oh, yeah. Well, see, after I went six months, I called him back up. And then what happened was, I only went back there and drilled just one hole because actually drilling, I had to go through drilling on the big oil rigs, but they barred me to go up there. And make a long story short, they didn't keep me up there. They were supposed to, they told me they would, but they spoke with forked tongue. So I had to go back to drilling on the big oil rigs, and I was there and drilling not quite a year. Friends of mine called me to go work with them on running heavy equipment. So that's when I got out of drilling completely. And that was right after I hired out in '80. Probably '81.

So you said you got out of drilling completely, then?

Yes, I got out of drilling and went to running heavy equipment.

What does that mean, exactly?

Running like loaders, scrapers, dozers, small cranes, and everything you do to build roads, underground, just heavy equipment.

And this was still at the test site.

Yes.

Yes. Were you still working for Howard Allen then?

No, no, no, then I no longer—when I left the tunnels, I no longer worked for Howard. He was in charge of the tunnels. Matter of fact, when I went to drilling, that man put a recommendation in for me. First, they didn't even want to hire me because I had not worked in regular oil rigs for

over ten years, and yet when I went down there, they offered me a tool-pushing job one time, and old Papa Howard's the one that recommended me to go, and I said no, I don't want to stay in drilling.

Why'd you want to get out?

I tell you, roughnecking is not a—they were just like tunnels. You worked day shift, swing shift—well, they used to call it, you know, evening time and morning time, graveyard, you know. Just rotating your work, six days on, two days off. You never had actual [weekends], you know, you worked six days on, you might have Monday and Tuesday one week. Next week, it's Tuesday and Wednesday. Wednesday and Thursday. You know, you might fall so many weeks before you got a Saturday and Sunday off. And then I was never that fond of roughnecking anyhow. Like I say, I did it because it was good money. We used to move all the time, and hell, I could be in Moab, Utah, next time in Price, next time in Rifle, Colorado, next time up in Wyoming. You followed wherever they were drilling. I did that for many years. That's how I ended up here at the test site first time in '63. And it was just too much moving. Too much rotation. You get used to one shift, then you go on the other. That's the same with mining. That is two places I left that—they used to tell you it gets in your blood. I used to have a driller [who said], `Once you start roughnecking, it's in your blood and it'll never leave you.` I never looked back on that one. Mining is the same way. They say it's in your blood. Well, to talk about, but I've never looked back one time. Now, when I left running heavy equipment or being foreman, now, that I have. But I guarantee you, mining and roughnecking, when they say it's in your blood, well, it might get in some of them, but it didn't stick with me.

Yes. Well, it's dangerous. I mean obviously we know now it's dangerous in the long run, but in the short run, it's dangerous, right? I mean—

Yes, it is. Yes, it really is.

Did you have any close calls, just as far as—

Oh, yes. Heck, yeah. Three or four. I was lucky. One time, an object fell off somewhere, bounced, caught my toes, broke two of my toes. There was a pump and it hit my shoulder. I was lucky I never—another time when I was drilling in the uranium mine, you always go up inside of your heading to make sure there's no voids to pull all your slabs down. Well, this particular time, usually when you rock bolt, a lot of times you can rock bolt right up the face, but a lot of times we let it go back, you know, six foot or so after you'd shoot a round. And this foreman, the one that always come in with the dosimeter to see how much radiation is in your heading, well, he come in there and sounded that out. He said, You know, did you see that thing right **[00:10:00]** over your head? And I go, What? So he had me pull out away from the heading, I went up, and there's about that much of a gap on a slab. So we didn't even pull the jack leg or anything out. I just got a bar, slammed it down, and it was probably, oh, Lordy, it must've weighed four, five hundred pounds. And that's actually how my brother-in-law—he had his back broke—he had a slab come down on him, and he was paralyzed from the waist down. And another time, did the same thing. Like I told you, anytime you work underground, it's—there ain't no amount of money that they can give you that's going to be good enough, as far as I'm concerned. I'd never do that again in my lifetime.

That's dangerous stuff. What's a rock bolt?

Rock bolt is actually what you do is like when the heading's down, just knock it in right there in that rock. You drill a hole in there, like generally we'd put like a six-foot rock bolt. Depending on where it's at. Anywhere from four foot, two foot, to eight foot, to even more. And you drill a hole in there and you put this bolt. It's got—well, they've got different styles, wedge, cones, and

so forth. And what it does, it gets right up to the back, wedges in there, and this bolt, this rock bolt, it could be six foot long, with a plate on there, holds everything up. So let's say if it's going to come down, it's got to be beyond the length of the rock bolt. So you rock bolt everything so that slab don't come down and get you.

That's kind of like back in the old Comstock days, they'd have the square-set kind of thing to make sure—

Yes, exactly. And then they got steel sets. Where they run the bigger, they do. Some places put steel sets. A lot of things that I used to do when I was in mining. We used to gunite, and the reason that is, is so it don't get air slack in there. Anything that'll get air slack, it'll start getting in there. But when you gunite it, it's just like pouring concrete over the wall, you know what I mean? It'll hold, or it'll at least let you know. You gunite something, you come back later on, you start seeing a gap up there, it's trying to tell you something, ain't it? So there's a lot of safety features that we used, but still nothing's foolproof.

You guys really had to be on your toes.

All the time. And then another thing I didn't like about coal mines either, I mean the only light you had was what you had on your head. Where at least when we was out here, you had a light up in and out of the places where you worked. Not everywhere, but the majority of them. Your main hallways. Coal mines, no, man, they're just a dark, desolate—and then you got methane gas in there. You can't smell it or taste it. You got a piece of equipment to let you know that it's got this in there. And I had it happen, when I was mechanicing. You know, it cuts all power off. After it gets to a certain level of methane, all electricity goes off. [The mine I worked in didn't have power to stop the machine when the methane gas gone up. The mine I was talking about was in Colorado.]

And then that tells you to—

That tells you the methane is coming up high levels there. You've got to change—you got to get more air to take it out.

They don't use canaries anymore?

Oh, and then they don't have them old mules that they used to keep in there all the time, poor things. No, but still, a lot of them, when I was there, they used a little lantern, you know, if it turns a certain color like yellow or orange, whatever, it lets you know methane level's coming up. But there's a lot of them which—the particular place where I was at, they didn't have—but they would have them on the continuous miner that's cutting all the coal. So they get a certain level, you know, the machine would stop. Or they're always checking it.

Was there a sense, you know, working on the test site, I know you were working for REECo, but there's also a larger government presence there. Did you get the sense that there was more kind of safety features and more logistics working out at the test site than there was working in the coal mines and stuff like that?

Well, let me tell you what it is. As years went on, safety becomes better because of the issues of what happens. They learn by their mistakes. But during those times, I'll say yes. As far as the years went on, I think it got better. But years ago, no. You had, more or less, your experience, you know. I think if they'd been prepared a little better, they'd have been all right. Like I say, now they do because the incidents that happened like here. You better watch this now, you know.

So now we're in the 1980s and you're not mining anymore, you're moving—was it moving heavy equipment, is that what you said?

Yes. Yes. From the time I went back in about 1981. I got in the construction world then. I have never—last time I was in a tunnel or a mining section, probably in 1980, ’81, that I went up **[00:15:00]** there and drilled another long hole for them. And I was there, I think, two months, maybe.

And that was it?

That was it. When I left then—they was going to keep me there because I actually liked—I shouldn’t say I liked as far as the conditions we were at the time because when I was drilling, but what become of my drilling I didn’t like. But anyhow, I had myself and a helper, and I had the support of them people. That part I didn’t mind, but the rest of the mining section of it, that’s the reason I got out of mining. I could see that, you know, I did it for ten years and I said no, no, there’s got to be better things to do. That’s when I went operator.

Were you still working for REECo?

[00:15:54] End Track 3, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 4, Disc 1.

OK, you were still working for REECo at the time?

Yes.

OK. So with the same company, just different job.

Yes. See, REECo didn’t change till, let me see, it was in ’95, I think. Then January of ’96 is when EG&G [Edgerton, Germeshausen, and Grier] took over. So at that time, from then, you know, that’s who I worked for. Which EG&G was the mother contractor anyhow. REECo was just the subcontractor, I guess, to them.

I got you. And so you were construction and heavy equipment from, what, ’81, ’82 until—

From ’81, let’s say, till—then I left in ’94 [2004]. I was there twenty-four years, I think. In the heavy equipment end of it. And I enjoyed that, I tell you right now. It’s the best job I’ve ever had.

Is that right?

Oh, yes.

Like what kind of stuff did you do?

Well, everything. You do underground. Overhead, you put up buildings, you do roadwork, you do everything. Anything heavy equipment does. Just like you do here. You know. Build pads. Roads. In other words, see, we belong to the Operating Engineers. That’s who I retired out of. They’ve got a training site down there. They have everything. Anything you don’t know how to run, they teach you. And that’s like backhoes, like I told you, dozers, scrapers, you know, smaller cranes that I run. I never ran no big cranes. Smaller cranes and, like I say, everything in that department.

What was your favorite thing to operate? What was your favorite part of it?

I think a lot of it, because a good friend of mine showed me, and that was backhoes. That was my specialty. Well, that’s what I liked better, I should say. And that’s really what I did more.

That’s just like digging a lot of stuff and moving—

Like anything for underground, water, sewer, electrical, whatever it takes. Man hole, like you do for sewer, unless you got to dig a big man hole area, you know. Lift stations and—just whatever construction you do here in town, the same thing, you know what I mean? That was my world. It was construction.

Who was your foreman for that—

I’ve had so damn many of them in twenty-four years.

Nobody just sticks out in your head?

OK, like my last one, now, my superintendent, John Coleman. And then you got as they go on up, you know. You've got department manager. Another one that I worked for that I really liked a lot was Alec Clay, you know. He was a young engineer. So it just depends on what you're doing. You have different superintendents for different jobs, so really you're working for a combination of people. But the one that I was assigned to is Mr. JohnColeman before I left.

And so this is what you did until you retired. When did you say you retired from there?

I retired the April the 30th. Yes, March—April the 30th of 2004. So it's been a little over a year, about a year and what, two months now, whatever. April, May, June, yeah about a year and two months.

OK. We're getting to the end of the CD, so we'll stop this and take a little break and we can go on to the next one, if you want.

That's fine.

[00:03:09] End Track 4, Disc 1.

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

All right, and we're back. So, you know, there was that long stretch of time when you were working the heavy construction, primarily doing the backhoe stuff, right?And I was just kind of wondering if you had any stories, any anecdotes, just your general impression, because you said that was your favorite part of working out there.

Yes, really, and no, I just more or less enjoyed that particular type of work more than anything else I've ever done. Because like I told you, to me, it was like a learning process. You never learn everything, ever. Always new tasks that come up that you enjoy doing, you find out about it. And like I say, I've always had a great friend that works here in town. What I didn't know, I'd

darn sure call and ask, you know. But there's a lot of different things I think I've done, but I said might anymore just be enjoyable. I didn't feel like when I went to work that I really had a job. [But] not always, either. There were times that some things can get frustrating because things are not going right or vice versa, but the majority of the time, no, you know. It was probably the least stressful job I've ever had.

And what's the saying? If you love your job, you'll never work a day in your life.

Yes, what some of them mean. A lot of them, like I say, I'm not saying its good for everybody but I enjoyed my last twenty-four years anyhow, or twenty-three years that I was there. And like I say, there's a lot of good moments that I had where I'd be clowning around while you was working, you know, because I was always a prankster, and I used to get pranksed on every now and then, too. But like I say, I enjoyed everything overall. That's basically it.

So there was good camaraderie between you and your co-workers?

I think we did. Now, there were some that by golly no matter what you do or you don't do, they ain't never going to like it, but no, 95 percent of them I had no real problems. Or if we ever did have any, by the next day, we'd be talking. And I can honestly say for all the ones that I worked with, you know.

Now, at some point, you were a foreman?

Yes, I was a foreman quite a while.

What was that like?

Well, that was good. I used to coordinate the work. Actually, I only worked about three or four years and they put me as foreman. I was then working foreman. Then I become a general foreman. So my last probably—I can't even for sure remember. I was a foreman for three or four years—

[Break for telephone]

[00:02:52] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 2.

OK, so we were talking about when you were a foreman.

Yes, like I said, I probably only worked I'm going to say three, four years as the operator there, and then I went foreman, then from being a foreman I went to general foreman. And probably the last, what, twenty-four years, twenty-three, whatever, and I was foreman the majority of the time. But actually what makes foremen is your workers, you know. So they were always helping me, and that's really how I started off, because I wasn't ready to accept the job. And I had a lot of friends say you better take it or otherwise we're going to have somebody else do it, and we may not like who's going to be in charge. So actually, they helped me to do what I did. And actually, your hands are what makes your foremen. Same with the foreman make the superintendents, as far as I'm concerned.

Yes, absolutely. Tell me the story of they wanted you to sign a piece of paper—

Oh, that's comical. Yes, that was in the tunnels. That's when I first went to work there, so that had to be, what did I say?

Seventy? Sixty-nine, seventy?

When I first went out there as a miner. But yes, I don't think they meant no animosity or whatever by it, but they wanted me to sign a paper that states that I was a minority. And I think the way they approached me with it, it offended me. I said, `Wait a minute, what are you talking about? All the years I've worked everywhere, I've never been brought up with a piece of paper that says that I'm a minority.` So I wouldn't sign it. So actually some of the guys that were from New Mexico, they were Latin and they sort of felt that I should've signed it and I stuck it to them. My work carries my reputation. My nationality should

have nothing to do it. That's the only reason I didn't sign it. But I think they probably wanted, more or less, to show that there's so many minority working there. But at the time, I never heard the word. Well, I mean I did hear the word, don't get me wrong, but in my hometown, like I told you, Mexicans, Italians, and Greeks, we all looked alike, so you couldn't say hey, you know, you look bronze, because we all did. So that was the only time that I didn't. I think that [was] the first time that I really heard that I was a minority.

So you don't think you were treated differently out there?

No, no, I wasn't in that respect. No, I never was, not because of my nationality, no. No, I can't say that. But it was just sort of strange they asked me that. Maybe if they had explained to me, well, we're getting a head count and we've got to consider you one, then I might've signed it. But the way it was approached to me, you know. But no, I was never treated in—like I say, I never felt that way.

The men that were out there were treated basically as to how hard they worked and—

That's, I think, what it is. Like I say, a lot of people didn't like one another, but I don't think it was due to nationality. It's because you just didn't click together, you know. Everybody has that kind of animosity. But no, I never was. I never felt that because I was a minority, I was treated wrong.

And, you know, from an outsider's perspective, when you hear "the test site," you get these very strong impressions of the Cold War and the atomic bomb and stuff like that, but I'm getting the impression from you that you guys didn't really—there wasn't much sense of the bigger picture. It was just it was a job—

No, I didn't. Like I told you, I guess because I basically did construction work or production work, I figured I'd leave that to somebody else, let them worry. I mean I put my trust in them. I

grant you, I read the paper and you'd see it or whatever, but I figure they know what they're doing. You know, "that ain't my job," in other words.

But did you have a sense that you were playing a part in the Cold War during the Reagan years and stuff?

Well, yes, yes. Well, you knew you were. Yes, you knew you were. You knew by working there that's what it was for. Well, I won't say it was exactly that, but you know, that you were helping in some matter or another.

And you mentioned that you found out more about what was going on out there from the media than you did actually working out there.

Well, very true, because like I told you, even things that I might've been able [to know]—and I wouldn't have even known if they would've been secrecy or not. But whenever I'd be approached by someone, I'd tell them, My job is strictly construction to help build this for **[00:05:00]** you. Whatever you're doing, that's your business. So I don't never, you know, I always felt just my work was, what I did was that's all I wanted to know. And there was times, like I told you, I read more in the media or [George] Knapp on TV would tell you more about what's going on out there than I think that *I'm* supposed to know. And that's the way I liked it anyhow. What you don't know, you can't hurt.

Sure. Did you ever see any protesters going in, that you know—

Oh, yes, for years. Not as much now. For years, when we used to travel through Mercury. Well, every Easter, that was a big thing. They'd even get out in the middle of the road and they'd arrest a bunch of them or whatever. And here's a strange [thing] too. One time I was here. There used to be a 7-11 down here off of Rancho. And here these protesters were looking how to get out there [to the NTS]. Well, my son-in-law, one of these girls asked him if he knew the road to go

out to the test site. So he said, Well, yeah, I do, but you can ask [my] father-in-law there, he can tell you more about it.

So here she comes up to me and asks me if this is the road to the test site. I said, Well, you're going on it, you know. Here this girl had purple hair, earrings in her nose, I mean just whatever.

So she asked me, Well, they told me you worked at the test site.

I go, Yeah.

She goes, Well, is there anything wrong with you now? You know, looking at me.

I go, No, but let me ask you something. Is there anything wrong with you?

I mean because, you know, I'm going man, that's gall for her to ask me that. So anyhow, I think she caught on what I said. She didn't mention it no more, so that protester didn't say too much more to me.

Oh, that's funny. Was there ever a sense of—did you know what they were protesting?

Well, anytime they had testing with atomic, and that was before they had actually quit, you know. And they [the protestors] are still out there, after they quit [testing] anyhow. So I think they'd like to do a circuit myself, the way I used to feel. Which there's nothing wrong to protest. It's a good thing we do have protesters, but if you don't know basically everything, you got to find out first, you know. Especially after they quit. They're still out there. And I think they still do it on Easter. You'll see them walk out there every time. But you don't see anywhere near the protesters you used to. My gosh, at one time the whole valley was full of them.

Did you ever have the thought of wow, I'm working at a place and doing something that is such that people are protesting it?

Well, I put it this way. I knew there were things that I didn't know about. I felt that we were doing the nation a justice by helping, you know, like you said, in the Cold War and so forth. Well, like I say, my job was strictly construction, but whatever else they did, that was their doing. I relied on them, you know, and I'm pretty sure there was things that probably they could've protested on, but I was never made aware of anything that I would've thought that, you know, that I'd have been standing out there protesting.

I guess that's what I'm asking is, you know, did it ever—?

No, because I felt that if we wasn't doing something to help our nation, then something's got to be done, not always. I'm going to say, it's in the right but you've got to do some type of testing somewhere to determine if it's going to be right for what you're going to do. But like I say, I never afterwards, and I wouldn't to this day.

Yes, it's just kind of curious because I've never had a job where people would protest.

Yes, I think they're professional protesters. They go from here to the nuclear plants to I hear everywhere, you know. They make a circuit. I think they're paid protesters, you know.

I don't mean to spend this much time on the protesters, but has your perception of them changed over time, like from your first perception till now?

Well, I'm pretty sure they have. You know, I think you just look at Russia when they had that nuclear power plant go to past you know, and everything—

Chernobyl?

I think, yeah. I think that things that they do, it's helped more scientists or whoever's involved in it, not necessarily just scientists, whoever's involved, they got to take more precaution. Where maybe if you didn't have protests and so forth, then they could continue doing what they want to

and you know you'd never have to tell whatever's going on. So yes, it's got to help some, some way or another.

Yes. So you retired in '04. From the time you had the growth in the thyroid and stuff like that, **[00:10:00]** *you know, what was that, '67, '68, in there somewhere, right?*

When I had my thyroid cancer?

Yes, the first time.

It was around then.

From then, when did the health problems come back? When did they kind of manifest themselves again?

Well, I'll tell you what happened is I had a—and I can't understand why my family doctor never used to check me for this, and I should have my family doctor—but anyhow, I had a real bad irritation in my ear, just constantly itching, just irritated me. And I went to my regular doctor and he didn't think too much of it, [he said] it'll go away. So I went to an ear, nose, and throat specialist because I had nasal surgery at one time, so I went back to the same—well, supposedly the same doctor but he retired. So they had this Dr. Ing [sp] was an ear, nose, and throat specialist. So I went back to him and I told him, `Man, I just got this irritation in my ear. It's just about to kill me.` So he started looking and there's a little bit of buildup, wax, whatever. He cleaned it all out, prescribed medication, but then he got probing my throat because he asked me if I ever had—well, I think he seen one of the operations, see, because I've got two different ones.

Oh, right.

See, I got one when they did the first one, and then the other one that goes all the way here up to the top of my ear. And he asked me, he said—got probing around my throat, just more or less

doing this inspection, and he felt a knot there. He said, Man, you ever felt that growth there? And I said, No, but now that you're pushing on it, I damn sure do. So then he felt another one. So then he goes, I think we'd better go have you go get some X rays. So from there, I have everything done. PET scans, CT scans, and everything, and then they found that tumor. They did a biopsy on it. They determined that one of them was malignant. So he specified me to Dr. Wang, who did the surgery. So I went to him and I said, Well, that one biopsy they took showed it was not malignant. He said, Well, let me tell you what it is. You've already had thyroid cancer before. You've got a vocal cord that ain't functioning. Now, something's there. But he said, My version is you still got quite a bit. Well, he didn't say "quite a bit," just said, You've got cancer but, he said, we won't know until we got a—make a long story short, so they went ahead and it was I think the 30th of December I had it, probably the 29th.

What year was this?

It's been over two years ago.

OK, so it's like '03?

Yes. I'm going to say '02 is when I had it because it's been two years and '05 would be two years and what, four months. No, five—six—this is the sixth month, so it's been two years, six months.

Yes, two-and-a-half years or so.

Since I had my surgery.

So from the first time in the sixties until 2002, there was no—you were—

No, I think I was all right. What happened, like I told you, what happened there. Then he checked it and we went in for a three-hour surgery [that] ended up being six hours because of the

extent that I had in there. You know, I had quite a bit. So like I say, I'm very fortunate I'm still around.

Absolutely.

But I was trying to find his other records that I had. I've got them here somewhere.

That you had cancer at such a young age, were you kind of more on guard to look for it? You know, did you go to the—

See, that's what I said. My family doctor, which I won't give his name, but anyhow, I went to him because I'd moved from Utah to come out here, I told him that I was taking thyroid medication. I told him what happened. Well, he said let's do lab work on it. He did lab work and he said I no longer needed to take it. Because I thought they had removed all my thyroid, but they didn't. Apparently it was half. And he said, `You no longer need thyroid medication. Your thyroid is producing enough where you don't need medication to do it.` Like right now, I take Synthroid because I have no thyroid at all. And I more or less relied on him. But we never did tests to determine, like they do this thyroxin, they call it now, that I do all the time, lab work. Them levels get up high, that means there's a possibility that I'm developing it again.

Did your family doctor know what you did for a living and what you were around?

Yes. I been going to him for, my gosh, twenty years? Longer? Longer than that. I've been going so long that one time I asked him if he could look in my records, but they can only hold so much **[00:15:00]** files, and I think he only went back to '91 or something. I said, `No, I've been here before that.` Or around '91, excuse me. So I been with him—see, I hired out in '79 and I bet you within 1980-something, you know. So I was sort of not grateful about that because I think there should've been precautions taken on that and they never did.

So they never kind of—REECo, the people out there, never—

Never [said] let's go check you, let's make sure you're thyroxin levels or whatever this and that. They never did.

Was there any sense from the company and stuff of, you know, a sense that maybe what you're doing is more dangerous than a normal job and you should be more on guard for it?

Never was I told that. You know, in other words, like here's a good example. Well, you've had thyroid cancer once before. I'm not quite sure if your drilling is very good for you. And I'm not thinking, so I'm figuring if my doctor's not saying nothing, they're not saying nothing, I ain't doing nothing wrong. Now I feel different but it's always the aftermath.

So tell me again, what was the diagnosis in 2002?

In other words, that I had cancer. But it wasn't definite—the did a biopsy on the big one—until he got in there, and then I had a lot of lesions. That's what I'm saying. I was looking for [a document]—I don't even know where I have it but—you want to shut that off for a second while I go check?

Sure.

[00:16:32] End Track 3, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 4, Disc 2.

OK, so we're back in 2002, so why don't you just kind of go through again when you went to the doctor and what were you diagnosed with?

Yes, in other words, I was diagnosed with cancer. What it was, they didn't think it was really that much until they got in there. Like I say, he figured three hours and I would be in and out of surgery. Well, when he got in there, he found a lot of masses that he didn't think I had. So mine's quite extent [extensive]. And right after surgery, I'd have to look at my records, but it wasn't a whole lot later, I had to have—they call it CMIs. They give me a total of 200 CMIs, each pill that

they which consisted of 50 CMIs. What they did is they give me four horse pills and I had to take one at a time. And the nurse come in there and got it out of the lead box with forks. She's wearing a lead vest, like, and she gives me each one, I take it by hand, and do this.

The pill's in a lead box?

Yes, it's radiation. That's why they say, low doses of radiation cause cancer, high doses are supposed to kill it. I don't understand it, but that's what they tell you. And I asked the doctor then, why was it they first told me I was going to have 100 CMIs, Dr. Dimitri [sp], one of them other cancer doctors, and then they went to 150. When I was there, they give me 200, and I said wait a minute, they told me first 100, 150, not 200. So I asked the doctor that was in charge at Valley Hospital. I said, Why was I given so much radiation to kill it?

He said, Well, let me tell you what it is. It's like Pearl Harbor. When they went in there, they went with everything they had. And that's what we did with you.

I said, Well, if it works, get it on.

So anyhow, so I was confined in my room for three days. They would come in every day, see how—because you're supposed to be, I think it's 35 CMIs lower before you're allowed to the public. So when I used to be in there, they used to knock on the door, give me paper plates, I would eat, I'd open the door, pick up my food, eat it, put it in a plastic bag. When I told him I needed to urinate, they told me I had to sit down on the toilet because I was shooting out radiation. So I had to sit on the toilet. And I had to clean everything. I had my own pajamas. Nobody was allowed in there but the nurse. Every day, she come and checked me with the Geiger counter. Finally, the third day that I was locked in I said, Man, you people have got to do something. They don't even give you a damn view. The only thing was a window up there. You're like in jail. I was in the window up there and I could reach up there to look out the

window. All you're looking at is a roof. So after the third day, they finally come in there and told me that my levels were low enough to go home. So then they released me. And then even when I come home, I was scared around my grandkids because they told me not to hold somebody close to my neck, or don't be kissing nobody, or—

Is that right?

Oh, yeah, it's—

Now, when somebody hands you a pill in a lead box, wearing this vest, with a fork, and then for three days you're shut off from—I mean what's going through your head at this point?

Man, I totally—well, I tell you what, I won't lie to you, I didn't think I had much longer to go. I thought they were just—like these poor people, some of them, that just go through all their procedures and then they pass away, you know. That's what my thoughts were. They're just trying to keep me going for another month or so or something, you know. Oh, for the longest time, I just knew I wasn't going to be around. But now that I am, I want to get these people resolved with me [Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program, EEOICP]. And not so much the money as it is – because I put in for this – as to acknowledge don't do that to nobody else. Take extra precautions.

And when you get home and you can't—they actually said to be careful about having people too close to your neck?

Yes, they told me not to—see, I had my grandkids staying here with me. I was so sort of petrified, I just went in my room. I still stayed in there three more days in my room, watching TV, and I'd have my wife deliver the food to me, because I—but anyhow, so I wanted to call them because they—I still wore my clothes here, you know, the clothes I had there. So I told the **[00:05:00]** nurse, `Should I throw these clothes away?` She goes, `No, you're all right, Navor. We wouldn't have released you from the hospital unless we felt—`

the only thing we caution you, don't have nobody sitting on your—you know, don't hold a baby right next to your neck because there's still a lot of radiation. People that have had radiation treatment can set off the counters out there [at the test site]. You know, now there's somebody in here. Did somebody else get radiated? Oh, yes, OK, here, put your hand up, you know. You're supposed to let them know. But I waited quite a while before I went back to work. I was off work a total of four months before I went back. So I didn't expose myself that much. But I still stayed in my room here three more days before I—

Yeah, well, it's got to terrify you to think that you might, you know, if you interact with your grandchildren in the wrong way, you might affect them.

Yes. But she told me that I was good to the public, or otherwise they'd never let me out. I guess the law in Nevada is you have to be complying, have to get to a certain low level before they release you. She told me there's some other states that by golly they just give it to you and send you home and tell you to stay in your room. Which I'm glad they confined me to there, you know what I mean?

Did any of your co-workers—was there other people that worked out at the test site or that worked with you at REECo that had developed these kind of problems?

Thyroid cancer? You know what it is? I've had so many of them that probably has either passed away or whatever, I don't really know, because I've never kept track of a lot of them, you know what I mean? I know a lot of them have died of cancer from out there, but I don't know exactly what all they had.

I mean when you get back to work, when you're diagnosed and then you go back to work, I'm assuming you tell your co-workers what had happened.

Oh, yes, because I had another friend that had—he had to get them CMIs, but I think his was way less than mine. He wasn't confined but, I don't know, a day or so. Because there's different dosages of it. Like I told you, they ended up giving me 200—

But this friend, did he work out there, as well?

Yes, uh huh. But his was not thyroid cancer. His was—I can't remember if it's overactive, underactive, whatever it was. It had to be overactive if they give him—they give him the CMIs, but I thought he told me it was only thirty-five. Thirty-five, you're supposed to be good to the public. Just don't hold them next to your neck or where they'll get—because apparently what it does, it goes right to the tissues. It's supposed to kill any lymph nodes that might still be carrying cancer. My cancer doctor, Dr. Dimitri, told me that all surgeons, no matter how much surgery they do on you, they claim they got all the cancer but, he said, they don't because there's still lymph nodes could carry it. That's why they either give you chemo or—well, he didn't just say necessarily the chemo, but that's why we chose radiation for you. High doses kill it. Because when I was in the hospital, I go this don't make sense. Low dosages cause thyroid cancer. High dosage is supposed to kill it. I still don't understand, but that's exactly what they told me.

It seems ironic, you know. Yes.

Yes. And I tell you, them pills—see, when they give me that, I thought they was going to try to give me four to swallow at one time. I said well, how in the hell am I going to swallow that horse pill?

How big are we talking?

Well, they're about that long.

What is that, like an inch, inch-and-a-half?

Well, no, I'd say not quite an inch. About three-quarters.

But pretty thick?

But I tell you what, you'd better have a good throat, you know. And then me, I was having problems anyhow.

Well, yeah, I was going to ask you that because—

See, I had problems a lot of times. When I chew my food, I got to chew it good or sometimes—not so much now, because the doctor used to ask me. That's why he's going to try to inject my vocal cord to get it to function a little better so my voice isn't the way it is. But he told me he don't think it can get much better. But at least I can speak with my own voice. There's other people that's got to use that bolt put into their neck, and I won't do that.

And so when you go back to work and you're sharing this story with some of your co-workers, I'm assuming, did you know what had caused it? Did the alarm bells begin to go off in your head about where—

A long time before that. When I started reading all these articles on thyroid cancer—see, I had put in for thyroid cancer even when I was at the Department of Justice. At that time, they claimed they only paid for lung cancer or—

[00:10:00] *That was back in the late sixties, early seventies?*

No, I put in for it in the early nineties, '91-ish.

Oh, '91, OK.

And they told me that you'd have to talk to your congressman for they devote—that they develop [include] other illness, you know, like thyroid, other than lung, which they finally did. That's when they told me at the Department of Labor. Well, I knew then, and every time they get an article, like I said, like in Utah, I would get it. I was more convinced after I got cancer when I worked in the uranium mine, that I read where low dosages of radiation causes thyroid cancer.

The only thing I've got articles—I'd wish I'd brought them here for you. I've got them, too, I can always get them. What they always say, low doses of radiation causes thyroid cancer, which, like I say, a lot of the fallout and everything like that. So then I knew. But there was nothing I could do about it until they finally passed a law that they were going to start paying other than for lung cancer or beryllium.

Do you remember when this was, the law? Just in general terms?

Well, Joe—you'd have to ask Joe [Krachenfels]. It's been probably—like I told you, I been doing this since '91. The nurse tried to tell me no, I didn't, but I have, and I've got the letters to prove all this.

Yeah. Like mid-nineties is when this law was passed or—

Well, somewhere in there. The Department of Justice said no, they denied me. And then I went to the Department of Labor. That's when they said that they're starting to compensate for other than lungs. And so then, they told me I could put in for it and I re-did it again through the Department of Labor. That's when I went through Joe. And actually this woman, Rosie Rockwell from Grand Junction, Colorado, she told me to get a hold of Joe. Because I couldn't get a response from any of these people.

Who's Joe?

Joe, the one—remember the speaker that was there at the breakfast [REECo retirees' breakfast]? Remember he even brought up that now they—

[00:12:14] End Track 4, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 5, Disc 2.

Well, he's the caseworker who I go through. Actually, whatever his title is, whatever. That's what's it got on there, just a caseworker, Energy Employees Compensation Resource Center.

OK, so you're trying to get compensation based on the original thyroid cancer, and this begins in the early nineties, and this battle, I'm assuming, is kind of continuous throughout the nineties.

Yes, they was telling me that they did not have any funds or anything to take care of thyroid, you know, just lung cancer. Lung cancer that they claim that the uranium mines did at that time. Well, I've got a lung problem, there again. But like I say, at the time, they claimed that I didn't work there long enough to develop this. Well, I disagree with them on that, because the higher the areas are, the worse it gets. But anyhow, then it went from there. So finally in the nineties, they said they finally passed the law for other ailments other than lung. So that's when I reapplied for thyroid. But this has been going on for, my gosh, I don't know how many years. Joe's got my record. But quite a while. And I had what they call my last verbal interview. First I had – by golly, she helped me a lot, too—she works with [Southern Nevada Building and Construction Trades Council]–Sandie Medina. So she helped me file all my paperwork. She helps a lot, quite a bit. Meanwhile, finally they said the last thing I had to do was wait for a verbal phone call from them, which she told me it'd last probably an hour or so. They told me when it was going to be, what time. I got my phone call. That's got to be over six, eight months ago. I don't have the date yet. And I talked to Joe a couple of times. Well, they didn't respond well. Now that the new president got in, he changed what she was talking there. They went, I think, from C to D or E, whatever forms there are now, that we're going to have to re-file. So everything's been set back, and it had been set back all the time.

What did they ask you in the interview?

Well, more or less, everywhere I worked. See, I could tell them, you know. And I wasn't even aware myself a lot of it. But she helped me put them down. And that's what they told me.

So they wanted to know where you worked and what you did there and stuff?

Exactly. Exactly. See, with them—but that was Department of Energy. So, you know, it's not like we're doing now. So anyhow, I told them the places I worked, times I did, what I did, and so forth. And anyhow, so when I talked to Joe here a couple months ago I said, Joe, you know, I don't understand what's going on. I know the president changed it, different forms so we going to have to re-file. He said, Navor, in your case, they're supposed to let you know by the end of the year or the first of the year. And like I told him, anybody would like to compensated for it, I said, but mine is don't do this to nobody else, you know, don't let somebody else come up with what I did, because I honestly believe that my work status did it. There's no other way. I've never done nothing else, you know, and I don't have a history, like he said, as to diabetes and high blood pressure is compensated along with all this thyroid. Well, I was never told that till I heard that at that [REECo retirees'] breakfast.

Yes. Was that right? That was the first time you'd heard that?

That's the first time. I said, Joe, I said, I've been diabetic over twelve years, and we tried to trace our family history who had it. One time we thought an uncle, my dad's brother, had diabetes. So I called his son, Max, and Max said, No, my dad never had diabetes. Because the first thing they ask you, who in your family has had diabetes? Nobody in our history of our family has had it but me. So in other words, like remember he said that all that's other symptoms, diabetes, high blood pressure. Well, what happened with me, I carried diabetes longer, I ended up with high blood pressure, and I was skinny as a rail. I told the doctor, You got to be not right, I go, look at me. How in the hell do I have high blood pressure? [And he said], I'm sorry, but you got it, bud. What happened is the same doctor that I used to go to for twenty-some [years], I would get a bad cut and man, it'd never **[00:05:00]** heal. I'd go to the doctor, Look at this, so he'd give me antibiotics to heal it and

it'd heal up. I might go six, eight months later, a year, I'd get another bad cut. But I had all the symptoms of a diabetic, but I didn't know what the symptoms were then. Urination, dying of thirst. I used to work here in town. I drank two gallons of water, a gallon of Gatorade or two quarts of Gatorade, and my stomach would gush from so much liquid, and I was dying of thirst. So I had all those symptoms, but I didn't know. So finally the doctor goes, Well, maybe we'd better check you for diabetes. Boom! Sure enough, there I was, 250, 260, whatever it was. So I started taking medication for it. And that's when I tried to find out—[from] my daughter, who has a family history of who had diabetes. Because it generally falls from somebody in the family. Nothing, till Joe mentioned that that's one of the downfalls. Now, I know where I got it from. But I didn't till—I'm glad I went to that breakfast. Best thing I've done. A friend of mine asked me; he's been asking me all the time to go, but I was always doing something, always going somewhere or something, and I didn't, but I'm sure glad I did go. Because he mentioned that and that's when I told him, Joe, you know I've had diabetes for over twelve years. I've been taking all the medication. It tells you what I take. You know. But he never mentioned it. He said, Well, I thought I had. I go, No, I just found that out today. Now I know where my diabetes came from. You know, maybe it's from my first bout that I ever got thyroid cancer, might've as the years went on. But it surprised the heck out of me because my daughter, we went everywhere to try to find out who in our family might've had diabetes. I'm the only one. And I'm the only one that's ever had thyroid cancer. Twice. I think all these things, like I said, time goes on, you're finding out more and more, and I'm more convinced and they'll never convince me otherwise.

Well, I mean a lot of your co-workers, a lot of your comrades, they have a lot of the similar ailments, correct?

There's a lot of them different and we got different ones. Like I say, I'm just sort of sad that I didn't keep up with who—I've got another co-worker that worked with Sandie who's actually related—well, I think he was related to his ma or him and Arnold. He died of this. He had quite a bit of complications, you know. He had passed away of thyroid cancer. And I told you, in my home town there's, oh, I could name a bunch of them.

Did you lose complete contact with the guys that you did the uranium mining with?

Well, yes, I don't know of anybody—I do know that my ex-father-in-law and mother-in-law are still alive and they can't believe that it has not been taken care of on my part when other people that they know of that worked and died of cancer because of the uranium mines, they've already had their matters taken care of. They can't believe it. And they live in Moab, Utah. They would've been two people good to talk to, because they can't believe that I have not been taken, you know, and more or less been acknowledged that where all it might come from.

Yes. And from what you're saying, it's less a compensation or money issue and more you want them to at least—

Acknowledge. Acknowledge what took place. That way, it'll never happen again to somebody else. Like I say, I'm fortunate. A lot of the rest of them, they—the dear Lord or somebody is trying to take care of me. I don't know. Maybe I got too many grandkids to take care of, I don't know, but I mean I've been fortunate, you know, because when I read—I have it there somewhere. But as many lesions as I had. Well, you can see, all the way from here all the way up to the top of my ear. Then the other one I had it before right here. So I'm one of the few that's come out pretty good. There are a lot of them [that] hasn't. But at least I'd like to be around for them to acknowledge. See, I don't want to be passed away, and then they'll acknowledge later on, you know. And I really feel that. It's like "give me an apology." I mean, don't get me wrong,

I'm not going to refuse money, but just acknowledge that, by golly, that, you know, things didn't go right on my part. And I honestly feel that way. And even more after I read all these articles, you know. Anyhow, that's my theory on it.

[00:10:00] *Do you—other than, you know, an apology and an acknowledgement, I guess the most important thing is maybe, from your perspective, if I'm understanding you correctly, is that, you know, that they use the past to learn so they can take more precautions and—*

Exactly. Exactly. Just like they did all the aerial shots that they quit doing or whatever, you know, there's consequences behind it. They don't do it no more, right? So that the main thing on everything that's happened to me. Which the uranium mines, they don't work no more now, but still, if it ever had to again or whatever, do different precautions. Check different levels. Have the men get every-six-months X rays or their lab work, something to acknowledge they're still—this certain time—they were all right, instead of waiting as long as they did on me.

Sure. You know, it's funny. From an outsider's perspective, the atomic testing at the Nevada Test Site, from my perspective, from '51 to '63, the atmospheric testing, you know, everybody talks about it, you have the mushroom cloud. Until I went to your breakfast, you know, the REECo breakfast, I never thought much about what happened from '63 until I forget when it ended, but whenever it ended, how much work and how much effort and how many guys and people worked out there to do the underground testing. I think a lot of people feel the way I do, which is, you know, we didn't really have much sense of what was going on from '63 on.

Yes, well, that's what I said. And one time, this was public or records that didn't come out, I was working at the time. Like I say, I won't name times or whatever but there's a lot of times that I know that I was exposed to it. They say no, but a lot of them did. I was lucky, one of the ones that when I went out of there, they claimed that I wasn't, but a lot of them were. There's a lot of

incidents, but I don't know what I'm entitled to give [say due to classified issues] or whatever or not, but they know. Put it this way, the Department of Labor knows. And that's mainly why I haven't explained it to you. But like I say, it's mainly for—learn by mistakes, that's all, you know. Because it's been no picnic for me since all this has happened, and I know it's just—for the rest of my life. Well, you see how sometimes my voice will pitch. That's why I have to constantly have some, you know, when I'm talking to coat my throat. A lot of times, I'll go into high pitch. Well, like I was saying, then that's when I go [makes gargling sound, laughter]. Regardless, I'm still alive after two-and-a-half years, but I'm still paying the consequences because I have to watch the way I eat, I have to talk, I always feel like from right here to here, it's just like I've been shot with Novocain. It's like this side I can feel good. This side is just like when you go to the dentist and they shoot you. It's always so irritating. I'm always, you see, and around my chest or whatever. So regardless, even though I'm still around, but I'm still paying the consequences from it.

Has your perceptions of nuclear power changed?

Oh, yes. Hell, yeah. You know, I mean I realize we have to do things, but there's probably other methods, you know, there's—or do different methods to do the same type of work, you know. But yes, it's been a hell of a ride. Some good, and a lot of it bad. And I think I'm going back on the bad stretch. I'm still very lucky every morning I wake up that I'm alive, but I can see and feel it ain't a very long time, you know.

Yes. Is there anything you'd just like to conclude with, anything you'd like to say to wrap it up?

No, I think that you've more or less asked me what probably that I want to say, you know. Just more safety. More awareness. And hopefully, by golly, that this'll help get me started. I want to be around when they say OK, we acknowledge that we did that. Or, we acknowledge it could

happen to you. Because a lot of times they'll acknowledge they'll compensate you, but never say that they created that. But I figure when they have to pay, that they acknowledge they have to pay, then that means, as far as I'm concerned, they admitted guilt but not in the way that they got to say, **[00:15:00]** you know, "we're sorry." But it's just like anything, like you all were saying, you hit them in the pocketbook, then that's telling you that, by golly, they're aware of what they've done, or otherwise they wouldn't give you a dime. They might not give you an apology like they said in a lot of these claims, you know, we settled this but we didn't acknowledge we did anything wrong. Bullshit! You know.

Well, great, and I just wanted to thank you for your time and agreeing to do this.

Well, like I say, I hope this helps matters out, you know. And I've got these copies. I don't know if it'll—or if it's even—you can look at them before you take them. If you don't think they're going to do any good, you don't have to, you know.

OK. So thanks again—

[00:15:44] End Track 5, Disc 2.

[End of interview]