

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

Interview with
Donna Smith

November 4, 2006
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Angele Moor

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

Angela Moor: *This is an interview with Donna Smith today, at her house here in Summerlin, and I just kind of wanted to start a little bit about your childhood and things like that. So where were you born?*

Donna Smith: I was born in Southern California, and we moved to Southern Nevada when I was seven. We lived in Boulder City and that's where I went to school.

That's where you grew up.

I grew up in Boulder City, very small town at that time, 4,000 people.

A little different than today. So what brought your family to Boulder City?

My mother came for a divorce. She came for six weeks to get a divorce and stayed and remarried; and we really enjoyed living here at that time.

So she kind of came for a divorce and ended up with a marriage.

Yes. She did.

That's interesting. So what did your mother do? Did she work?

She worked. During the war [World War II] in Southern California as most women did, she went to work; after the war we came out here and she worked for the Bureau of Reclamation [BOR] in Boulder City, a government job.

And then your father was who she married or—

Yes, right.

And what did he do?

My step dad [Ward Lindquist]. He was a boat pilot. Well, he did a little bit of everything. He was a bartender at Lake Mead Lodge. At that time it was a very snazzy resort on Lake Mead, just on the shore there. He did that for a while and then took a [U.S.] Coast Guard test, he studied and took a Coast Guard test down in Southern California to get a pilot's license, and at that time he went to work on Lake Mead. And he worked for the Lake Mead Boat Company for a while and took the tourists over to the dam [Hoover Dam] and back; and then on other boats, so he was piloting all of them. Then later on, he was asked to be a pilot for the Last Frontier Hotel for their boat, and he did that. It was a great life and a great job for a man. Fish, cook and drive a boat.

Lake Mead was a pretty big deal.

It was, and it wasn't crowded at that time.

So you grew up in Boulder City. What schools did you attend there?

At the elementary school and the high school and the junior high. That was it. They had one school.

Yes, just one of each.

One of each.

Your classes were pretty small and—

I think when we graduated, there were sixty in our class.

So it was a pretty small—

Right, and it was, at that particular time also, almost everyone that I went to school with, we went through all the grades together, it was not a transient population there. I think everybody was really settling after World War II and so those friendships that I started at that time, we still maintain. It's very, very strange.

It's very nice.

It is.

Growing up in Boulder City, did you go into Las Vegas much for shopping and things like that?

Yes, we probably went into Las Vegas, oh, maybe once a month for me but I think my parents probably traveled more.

Do you remember what it was like going into Las Vegas?

Yes, it was much different than it is today. At that time, all the shops were on Fremont Street, and it wasn't closed off. It was a real street, and at the end of Fremont Street, where Main Street crosses there, was the railroad station.

Right. Where the Union [Plaza Hotel] is.

And the Union Pacific Railroad was there. And there were saloons and gambling places, the Golden Nugget, of course, and some others that were there. Then further [00:05:00] down the street there were shops and stores. I can remember the El Cortez was there, and that was on the outskirts of town. I mean as far as shopping or anything, that was the last, so from that street west were where the stores were.

And so that's where you'd go to buy your clothes and shoes.

Clothes and things like that, right.

Mary [Palevsky] has told me a little bit that your father also worked at the [Nevada] test site?

Yes. Well, I'll tell you a funny story about when I was a teenager, when my father worked for the Frontier. He was really a neat guy and he was quite handsome then. He really was cute. But the hotel would call and say, You haven't been in lately and we would like you to come in, bring your wife or your family. So occasionally we would do that. And at that time the showrooms had two shows, a dinner show where you actually had a big dinner, and then a midnight show which was the cocktail show; there was no food service. But in between the

shows, there was a band, a live orchestra, music, and everyone danced in between. And so one of the time—I must have been maybe sixteen and gangly—anyway, we met some people for dinner and my parents took me into the hotel for the show. And one of the women was a countess and the man she was with worked at the hotel. And he was called the bell captain at that time, but he really wasn't the bell captain. Anyway, he asked me to dance and I went out on the dance floor with him, and I noticed that something was wrong with him. And so in the car on the way home, I mentioned to my dad—he was called my Uncle Bud. If anything happened when I was in Las Vegas, you know, as a teenager, I was to always call.

Your Uncle Bud.

Call Uncle Bud, and he would take care of this guy I was with, or a date or whatever. And so I told my dad, I said, Something's wrong with Uncle Bud.

And he said, What do you mean?

And I said, I think he has a tumor or something. I noticed when I was dancing with him.

And he said, Oh no, that's his .38.

So later on I learned that he was an out-of-town collector for markers for the hotel. But he was very charming and very good-looking and did not look like a mobster of any kind. He just had a different job.

That's interesting. So what was it like on Las Vegas Boulevard then, when your dad worked at the Last Frontier? A little bit different than it is today.

Oh yes, completely different. The Frontier, where he worked, had a swimming pool in the front, in between the hotel and the highway.

Oh, interesting.

And it was right out—oh yes, you could just drive by and everybody was out at the pool and then the hotel was, you know, set back just a little bit. And the El Rancho was there and the Frontier, and the Sahara was called the Bingo Club or something. It was quite small and different than it is. And then they built the Desert Inn and the Thunderbird and then I think later the Tropicana which was way out of town.

Right. Far, yes.

Really far out of town.

A little different than today when it's going so far out there.

Right, and it was not as commercial. A lot of things were different. People wore western clothes, you know, the people who visited, it was kind of a dude ranch atmosphere. But at night, at five o'clock, you'd better be dressed. Everyone was dressed. The first thing I did when I was eighteen is buy a cocktail dress so I could look like I was supposed to be out there; people dressed up, there were no tennis shoes or anything [00:10:00] like that, or hardly any western wear for gamblers or people who were out to see a show. Everyone dressed in evening wear. And it was more sophisticated than it is now.

Right. Yes. That's interesting. So you graduated from high school in Boulder City with your class of sixty.

Right.

What did you do after that?

We moved over to Las Vegas and we lived on Evergreen Street, near Evergreen and Decatur, pretty close to there.

Out on the edge of town, then.

It was the very edge of town. They told us [it would take] two years to get a telephone. The nearest phone was up the hill, a telephone booth. The bank that's on the corner of Charleston and Decatur was a trailer. And there was nothing out there west of us. But we moved out there and my dad began the sheet metal business, and he got into that trade. We had a friend that he'd had on the lake, taking fishing and so forth, who owned a plumbing company, and at that time the big new thing was air conditioning. Before that we had swamp coolers in your home. So he said, I'm going to need people and I'm going to bid contracts and this is the new thing. So my dad became a sheet metal worker and installed air conditioning.

Did you like the move from Boulder City to Las Vegas?

I did, I was ready. Boulder City was really nice and it was a great place to grow up, but when we have class reunions we all talk about the little cocoon that we lived in. There were no police, our police were park rangers. The town had no drinking. Well, they had a beer bar. And no gambling. We were in this little protected government, town. So we all say, well, I don't know how we made it in the outside world.

You managed.

We all seemed to manage. But I went to business school here. There was a business school, it sounds really strange if you look at the town now but it was on, I believe on Third Street.

So downtown.

Downtown, by the post office, close to where the old post office is. And I had to walk I don't know how many blocks to catch a bus, and I rode the bus downtown every day and went to secretarial school and business school downtown. And then I'd only been seventeen just a couple of months when I graduated from high school, and in my little cocoon I really am glad I did that because I was not ready to—

To move away.

To go, yes, to leave home. I was not mature enough. So I stayed at home and went to school and got a job until I married.

Where did you work?

I worked downtown for a while. I think it was like a finance company, a loan company. And then I went out to Nellis [Air Force Base] and took the Civil Service test and I went to work out there.

Is that where you met your husband?

I did. And that's where my mother eventually came back to work for the government after working for the Bureau of Reclamation; and she worked at Nellis the same time I did.

Oh, that's nice.

It was. It was very nice. And my dad was, at that time then, about that time started with the test site. But he worked for contractors, local contractors who did building up there.

Right, at the test site.

At the test site.

So he went from doing the sheet metal with the air conditioning to working for different contractors, or was it the same company who maybe just got contracted out there?

It was the same company.

Do you know the name of the company?

[00:15:00] Yes, it was J.M. Ritter, I think he called it Plumbing and Heating after he got into the other. And then he passed away and he went to work for another company, Ron Spratt Air Conditioning, and they also had contracts.

At the test site?

Yes.

Do you have any sense what it was like when they got the contracts at the test site? Was it kind of exciting or a big deal?

I think so, yes, I think it was, and at that time it was called Mercury, or we just called it the Flats.

Right. It is pretty flat, yeah.

We're going to the Flats, so everybody knew what that was. But in Boulder City when I was growing up, I remember that they had the tests, the above-ground testing, and they would sometimes announce it, and sometimes they didn't. I do remember a few times that it shook so hard even in Boulder City that it knocked our cups off the little hooks in the cupboard and rattled things, and several times it blew out the big store windows downtown on Fremont Street. And I think then later on the taller buildings had a sway afterward. But I also remember my dad saying, They're going to set off a bomb tomorrow. That's when we were in Boulder City. And he said, If you can get yourself up, we'll drive out to Railroad Pass and watch it. And we did.

So you got to actually see—

Yes, I've actually seen the mushroom cloud and the whole business.

How old do you think you were, I mean—

I was probably—I think I was in junior high. Old enough to remember.

Do you remember what it was like watching it or kind of how you—the experience maybe?

Oh, well yes. It was just very awesome-looking and looked like the pictures that you see. We were familiar with the pictures of an atomic blast, but we actually would see it just come up and form, and it was very bright.

When you would go to Railroad Pass, would there be other families there watching?

Yes.

So it was kind of a—can you describe maybe the atmosphere then as you're all waiting for the test?

I don't think so, no. Well, there was no apprehension, no one was afraid, we weren't that evolved yet that we knew that. No one was afraid, you know, everybody was like, whoa, wasn't that something. And I think somewhat just awed by the power, to see it.

Right. I imagine it's pretty amazing.

It was. And to feel them, I mean it was kind of like a little earthquake, they just kind of roll.

Did your teachers ever talk about it at school, if you remember?

I don't recall that. I don't recall any teachers ever talking about it.

Did your classes ever do the kind of Civil Defense drills, the duck-and-cover kind of things?

I don't think so. I don't really remember. Maybe we did. Yeah, I think so.

But it wasn't a big deal.

No. Excuse me. [Pause for telephone call]

[00:19:06] End Track 2, Disc 1.

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

OK, we can go ahead and pick back up.

OK, where were we?

I think we jumped around a little bit. We talked about your family watching the tests out at Railroad Pass and kind of, you know, going to school and if there was any—

Right. It just, it was just something that happened in your town and I don't think a lot of people thought a lot about it and I think everyone at that time trusted the government, which we found out now that radiation is dangerous.

Did you talk to your friends about it, like maybe the next day at school?

Yes, we might compare notes: Did you go? Oh yeah, I went. Nah, I went last time.

You know, one of those [laughing].

It became kind of a blasé thing.

Well, we just got in that kind of a “this-is-what-happens-here.”

Right. That just seemed pretty normal. And so then, a little while after that is when your family actually relocated from Boulder City to Las Vegas.

Right.

And your dad was the contractor.

Right, and that’s when he began working up there.

At the test site?

Yes, in about 1957, in that area.

So they were still doing atmospheric testing.

Yes, above-ground testing was being done, I think, until ’60 or ’62, but he began working there in 1957, I think maybe until ’62. But he did, yes, he did work up there. It wasn’t daily. They had other jobs. They would have a contract up there and a contract in town.

So when he actually went out to the test site, did he go out for just one day or did he go out and stay or—

I think sometimes he went out for a day or two. But from what I can remember, and my mother and I talked about this before she passed away, he would go out on Monday and come home

Wednesday, Wednesday night, and then go back for Thursday and Friday, and then come home.

Come back for the weekend.

Right.

So it was kind of—

I think they stayed in some kind of dormitory. And I know I can remember him talking about the rec hall, the recreation hall, so that must've been where they ate or something.

Right. So when he was out there, your family didn't really get to see him too much, then, during the week.

Yes, during the times that he was there; but I recall several times that we would come home from work, my mother and I, and he would be home and we were surprised to see him. [We'd say] What are you doing home? And he'd say, Well, they kicked us off the job site today and told us to go home and take a shower and take your clothes, change your clothes, or whatever. I can't remember in what order that was but they would, I think when—there must've been something on their badges, he wore a badge that measured, I guess, the amount of radiation.

Do you remember his kind of reaction to being told that? Did he think—?

I don't know. He wasn't upset about it.

Right. He kind of—"OK."

Yes.

That's kind of an interesting experience.

Yes, and one of the men that he worked with, I remember him saying, Gorley and I, were told to leave today. Or whatever.

Do you know exactly what he did when he had jobs out there? Was he—?

He did his trade. They put in air conditioning in buildings. I'm pretty sure that that's what it was.

Pretty much what he did.

Right, because he belonged to the union, the Sheet Metal Workers' Union.

And so when he was working out there, did you ever happen to go out to the test site and see him or visit Mercury?

I did. Not him. My first husband worked there. He worked at NRDS [Nuclear Rocket and Development Station] which was some kind of a rocket site, and it was different, and they had a family day. And he worked for Pan-American World Airways, and they had the contract out [00:05:00] there, not the scientific things but he was a budget analyst. He was an accounting major and he worked in their financial office out there. But that was quite interesting. They had a helicopter pad. And John F. Kennedy had been out there. And I can remember the interesting, really interesting part was if you've seen movies where they have a big glass window that's really thick and they have the robotic arms that are metal that you can work, they have that where they handled all this material. And we were allowed to try that, to work those things and move mechanical arms. That was a rocket development site of some kind.

And so when your father was working out there, did he ever talk about the tests, then, after they happened, or did you continue to watch them?

I don't think so. I don't think we watched any more. I can't recall that, but I just recall the earlier ones, you know, that people would go out, drive out to see.

So then your father was exposed to radiation, then, at the test site.

I think so.

And so he continued to work there sort of contracting—

I think until about 1962, something like that.

And after that, did he just take jobs more in the city?

The contracts were in the city. The city started growing.

Right. Pretty fast after that. And so Mary has mentioned that you had some compensation issues and some different struggles related to your father's exposure?

When the, I guess it was about five or six years ago, maybe, maybe of 2001, my mother read that they were going to have some kind of compensation. And she checked into it, and she filed a claim for survivor. But she passed away last year. I've just received a letter asking me if I wanted to file, if I was interested in doing that. And I talked to the resource office here in town about it. I'm not sure what's going to happen. You just have to prove a lot of things and that was fifty years ago; we don't really have a lot of paperwork hanging around and we're not even sure if Social Security would have things or whatever. But my mother did know his badge number, and so I know they've read his badge. But one of the criteria is the time period which he falls into, which was above-ground testing. Another criteria is what you pass away from, and he had lymphoma, which is authorized—and then another thing, another criteria was you had to work 250 days. And I'm not sure if we can validate that, that he worked that number of days up there. So it's still an ongoing issue. But they're trying to help me here at the resource office.

So how would you describe your experience, then, with the resource office?

Well, it's very strange. The resource office, the woman there that helped me was absolutely wonderful, but I had no idea that it would affect me that way to do that, and I just started crying [00:10:00] and crying. I really had a very, a very emotional experience about doing that. And I was embarrassed. I didn't want to embarrass her, and I just couldn't stop, and it was just really strange. And I guess it's still part of grieving. But it just seemed that no matter what the money is, it just doesn't—it doesn't make up for a really great guy having his life cut short. He passed away at age sixty and he was sick with lymphoma for three years prior to that. And his parents lived a lot longer than that and his brother and his older sister is still alive. She's still living. She just had her eighty-ninth birthday. So it makes you feel like, well, maybe it was him, passing away early was not genetic, that it was something else. And I probably haven't cried over his

death in, I don't know, maybe ten years, you know. But it was really—I was there yesterday, so it was a very emotional experience, but I told my husband it just seems like no amount of money, whatever, that's immaterial. It's just his life was cut short.

So, looking back then on all these experiences, what are your thoughts, then, about the test site?

About the test site? I know two other people who have passed away just about that same age who worked up there and who worked there for a long time, permanent workers, not like my dad even, and just at like retirement age, and their life is gone. But did the government really know how bad it was? I'm not sure they did. I don't, I just really—and you stop and think about they put military men in trenches out in front of these blasts, and I would assume that most of them aren't here. And also the blasts—they call them the Downwinders from Utah, and it seems very strange—they made a movie [*The Conqueror*] up there with John Wayne and Susan Hayward and they're all dead from cancer. They said that it's just very strange that people on that production, on the set up there—

Right, so many have died.

Yes. They rolled around in that dirt and—

Right. Who knows?

So, I feel like I'm sorry my mother, that she is not here to receive the money, if there is any money, but that's not ever going to make up for my dad, or her husband. He was just a great guy and it's just very strange. And considering his family living, long, his parents—

So long, right.

And his siblings, it's like, well, what happened?

Yes. Hard thing.

I think most of it was ignorance. I really don't think they knew. But maybe they were just careless about any safety procedures. I don't think there were many.

Well, I think the compensation process is usually pretty difficult and lengthy.

It is. And it's up to the person to try to prove their claim.

Yes. Did your mother read about the compensation in the newspaper?

I think so. And then I really admired her. She really got into some of her records and found out where he worked and who for, and she had his security clearance, a long form that you [00:15:00] filled out, you know, at that time in 1957 for a security clearance to work up there.

And I couldn't believe she had some of these documents but she did.

She held on to them.

Yes, enough to file a claim, and six years later we're still into it.

And your mother continued working out at Nellis?

She did. She retired from Nellis, from working for the [U.S.] Air Force, and so did I.

So have you lived in Las Vegas, then, continuously?

Most of the time. I did divorce and remarried a pilot in the Air Force, and we moved around for a while to different Air Force bases, and I lived in Europe for three years, in Germany. And then we were divorced, and I have not moved since then. I've stayed in Las Vegas.

Do you picture staying in Las Vegas, then, or do you want to retire somewhere else?

I'm not really sure. We just took a trip a week ago and we went to Arizona and New Mexico on our way to Colorado to see my daughter who lives in Colorado Springs now with the grandchildren. And we looked at Santa Fe, New Mexico and it just really looked like a nice, smaller town, 66,000 people, slower pace. Had a lovely facility at a brand-new, beautiful community college. Gorgeous community college, and with a lovely fitness center, three

swimming pools, two basketball courts, just everything that are available for people to use. And I don't know, it looked like a pretty good place. We'll just have to see.

What are your feelings about Las Vegas, after living here for so long?

Well, a lot of times I want to remember it the way it was. But it's grown and it's lost the little elegant edge that it had when it was smaller. And the Strip is so commercial, commercialized, and downtown, you know, is just really funny. But a lot of times I just remember it the way it was. And it was great when they had the Helldorado parade that went right down Fremont Street. And I laugh. My attorney, his dad was an attorney, and there was a Coronet Store, a dime store, on Fremont Street, and his dad's office was upstairs. And he said, Oh yeah, we used to go up to Dad's office and, you know, and look out the window and watch the parade.

And I said, Oh, really? I said, Boy, I used to sit right down on the curb, you know. Right with the horses and everything.

And the small-town thing was cute, you know. There was only one high school in Las Vegas.

Right. I graduated from Las Vegas High School. The new one.

Did you? The new one. That was the only one that was there. And of course there were just three in the area: Boulder and Basic and Las Vegas High. And then I think Rancho and [Bishop] Gorman [High School] came a few years later.

Yes. The city started to grow.

Yes, and it started to grow.

Hasn't stopped.

I think we said there were maybe 25,000 people in 1947. I don't know. You probably have the stats on that more than I do, but I think it was about that, and it was a very nice, very nice small

town. And of course I think everybody who lived there then remembers that maybe when the gangsters did have it, it wasn't real apparent to anyone. But everyone felt pretty safe, you know.

So you raised your children, then?

[00:20:00] My daughter was raised here but she moved with her daughters about ten years ago.

Her husband was a policeman, and he told her, I think we need to raise our girls somewhere else. So they moved to Colorado Springs and he said police work there was a lot different than here. And they're quite happy there. And the crime is not like it is here, or just the atmosphere, it's quite different. So a lot of times we, my daughter Gina says, You know, I remember, Mom, it was a small western town, and it was great. And she really enjoyed growing up here. She had a horse and we lived on the edge of town. We lived on Jones in between Cheyenne and Vegas Drive, and Jones was a dirt road then, and there was nothing in front of our house except Mount Charleston.

A nice view.

Yes, and there were no homes. We were the last—that would be the last house there. So it was out in the country and she and I used to ride; and my dad had a horse and we all would ride just right out of the driveway, just take off and nothing was there. But she said that it all changed, and especially her husband being a police officer, they see the worst side to it, and he said, I think it's better if we move. And they did and that's why we took this trip.

To go see them.

Yes. And they're doing great.

So you said when you moved to that house near Decatur, they said it would take two years to get a phone?

Yes.

Do you think it took two years?

I think it might have. I can remember that we used to have to walk up to the telephone booth to call. I think it did. It took quite a while anyway. But that development was called Charleston Heights; and now it's just in the middle of everything, too, but it was out at the edge of town, that whole area there.

A little different. You're almost on the edge of town out here now.

Yes, we're close. We're close. But there's a lot between here and there, in between.

Now there is. Do you want to look at the pictures some?

Oh yes, would you like to see the pictures I have?

Sure.

[00:23:07] End Track 3, Disc 1.

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

[At this point, Donna Smith is identifying photographs in her collection. See UNLV Special Collections; see also see Ward Lindquist photograph collection]

I'm sure that this is the campground at Lake Mead. Look at that old car.

And those are the lake.

Now, this was my dad's—one of the boats that he drove, the *Topper*, on Lake Mead. This was for the Lake Mead Boat Company. And he took this party out. This is a movie star, Martha Vickers, and her husband. Oh, this looks like her, too.

Now, this is in at a hotel.

Here in Las Vegas?

Yes.

And those are the fish that they caught. That may not have been their honeymoon but that was a trip.

And these are just some party people.

And that's Phil Harris and a bunch of fish. That's a publicity photo. He was married to Alice Faye.

And those are just fish.

Now this was a honeymoon. This is Tony Martin and his wife Cyd Charisse on their honeymoon.

And that's my dad. I think that was their honeymoon. I can't remember.

All of these are stuck together. But there's the Last Frontier boat.

OK. So he worked for the Last Frontier and just piloted their boat out there.

Yes, and piloted the boat, caught the fish, made the martinis.

Now that's the Thunderbird boat, and he was the captain of the Thunderbird boat.

And this is J.M. Ritter, who he worked for, had the air conditioning company, and his wife.

And he was a pilot of the Flamingo, I believe.

So every hotel pretty much had their own boat.

Yes. Golden Nugget. I was wrong. There it is, the Golden Nugget, that's him. And this is his little girl. Anyway, there's just some pictures.

This is Gene [Genevieve] and Doc Dietrich, and they owned the boat company. They owned the boat company.

See, a lot of these are just—they took and just—yes, trying to publicize the lake.

Some girls.

Oh, this is Martha Vickers again. Maybe she had publicity people out there. I don't know.

They sure caught a lot of fish out there.

Now this one is just a kick. That's Doc Dietrich. I thought that was Abe Schiller but it is not. He owned the boat company. Do you know who that is, in those fancy cowboy boots?

I can't say that I do.

That's Kirk Douglas when he was young. I told Mary, I said, I'm going to send him that picture. She said, wait till we copy it.

Well, there's Martha again.

I don't even think you can go that close to the dam anymore when you go out there.

[00:05:00] Oh no, no, I'm pretty sure.

Well, this came off one of the pictures, but I think that's what most of these are for. Anyway.

And there's Martha.

These are just pictures that I think they'd use to promote, you know.

That's my dad there.

That's one of the boats.

Some pictures of the dam. The turbines.

I don't know what that is.

I'm not sure.

I'm not either.

Maybe it's one of the spillways or something.

But we did have a good time. Oh, this looks—is this part of it? From the other side?

Oh, it's like a waterwheel, almost.

Yes. And there's another picture of the dam. See, I think a lot of these were used for sending them out, you know, for publicity.

This is kind of nice. It's a sailboat there.

Now these were the little twins, the *Topper* and the *Alibi*.

Oh, OK, so they were the same.

Yes. There's somebody fishing.

That's my dad.

He looks like he really enjoyed working out there.

He did. He was a cutie. He looked like Clark Gable.

Well, that's so old it's not even there anymore.

That's my dad, piloting the boat with some kids that were out, and all these fish.

Oh my goodness.

That's John Ritter.

That's my dad.

The rest of them are kind of like this.

That's not my dad. That's somebody else.

This is my dad when he was a bartender at the Lake Mead Lodge. And I said it was such an elegant place, you know.

Yes, you can see it, the way the people were dressed.

Oh yes.

I don't think you'd find anybody out there like that today.

No. I don't know what this was in, but I think that was my dad's boat at the time.

Anyway, there's waterskiing and stuff there at the dam.

So he kept a scrapbook of his—?

No, I don't know who put this in.

“To Ward, who can really find the bass.” So somebody took his picture on the boat and then just sent it to him.

All the pilots had that kind of one-upmanship, you know. Did you get any fish? No. Oh, I did.

This is out in front of the Lake Mead Lodge, and that’s my dad and his mom.

That’s my dad.

[00:10:00] Anyway. I don’t know. You may want to look through some of those and see if you wanted them. They’re all, as you can see, they’re all really old. I don’t know.

That’s the dam again.

Rattlesnake.

A snake.

Oh, that’s kind of a cute picture. Anyway.

So your father took these pictures or had them given to him.

Yes, they were given to him, and some of them had belonged to Gene Dietrich. I showed you a picture of her. She and her husband owned the boat company, and they were good friends with my mother, and a lot of these were hers and she just gave them to her.

They’re great pictures of what it was like out on the lake.

At that time. Oh, it was really neat.

She’s about to crown somebody there.

There were some that showed Sandy Beach that we used to go.

I think that’s Lake Arrowhead.

Some places up the lake that we used to go and party, and they would take me along.

I think that’s Boulder Beach, way back when.

So there are just a lot of duplicates in here. There's one that's—but I think a lot of these were sent out to advertise, you know.

Look at that. A little coyote.

I don't know, maybe that's the Thunderbird or something.

Bathing beauties.

Anyway, there's just a ton of these, if you want to look through some, or did you pick some out, or we can let Mary look or whatever.

I do think, I mean I don't know for sure but it seems like they'd be ones [UNLV] Special Collections would be interested in having.

I wish I knew everything that—what these were all about, but I don't.

Oh, there's some more of the Boulder Campground. They are kind of funny.

Is the album more pictures of the lake also?

I don't know. I think so.

It was quite a different lake than when you go out there nowadays.

I know, they said that there were—sometimes there are 250,000 people there on the weekends.

Oh, that's a friend of ours. He was a boat pilot, too. He just passed away not recently. And he worked up at the test site, and he passed away from lung cancer, and he had a claim in.

I think that's up at Lake Arrowhead. Yes. But that's here. Yes. He was a great guy.

So you have annual reunions with your Boulder City classmates?

[00:15:00] Well, not anymore, not annual, but we do have them. We had one this year. We did.

It was really fun.

Do you want to look through there and see if you see anything interesting?

Sure.

I thought that was somebody else but I—on that picture of Kirk Douglas.

Some of these are famous, some of those.

Are they?

Just to see the swimsuits and everything else they wore when they went out there.

I know. Look at that one.

Yeah. I don't think they'd be very comfortable.

This was a good friend of my mother's. She has "Lena" on there. That's Lena, and this is Lorna Kesterson, I think. I don't know who that is. But that's Lena when she was a youngster and a cutie.

So you spent a lot of time out on the lake, then, as a kid?

I did. I think probably because I was an only child and a lot of times when I was, like in grade school, I'd just go down with my mother. She said, I'm going down to the lake and get Dad, or we're going to go do this, You want to go down to the lake? And I'd say, Oh yeah. And then later on in junior high and high school, my dad just bought a little boat, just a little outboard fishing boat, and he taught me how to water-ski.

So you went waterskiing out on the lake?

Yes. So then later on in high school, I water-skied a lot, and behind different boats, and that was really fun. And sometimes we'd just go for like two or three hours, he'd say, Let's go up in the canyon, or let's do this or that, and really have a long, good ride.

Well, I don't know what happened to those. They're in there somewhere.

Well, thank you.

Well, you're welcome. Can you think of anything else you'd want that you need?

No, I think that was pretty much all the questions I had. I was just curious about kind of what it was like to go and see the tests as a youth, and I've been interested in kind of what it was like going to school here then, because there's a lot of stuff written about children who went to school back East and places like that where they did all these drills, you know, in case of attack, and I was just curious if it was ever that way here.

You know, it wasn't, that I recall, at all. But I do remember in California, before I moved here, the war was on, when I was in kindergarten and first grade, I guess, and I remember we learned to get down under our desk and on your knees and put your arms over your head and that kind of thing, but I don't think the A-bomb thing we did. We just went out and watched it. We just went out and looked at it, but I don't think we did that in school.

Yeah. It's kind of interesting because it was so close—

Yes, and I'm sure that—no, I remember that I've read that kids did that back East, in case the big one came, you know.

Not so much out here?

No, we didn't do that.

[00:20:00] *Well, it's interesting to talk to people who've been here for a long time and seen the changes and remember what it was like.*

I know. And it was really, it was a great little town. Really. But I don't know. My dad used to say, You know, people just don't know how great it is here, but when they find out—

When they find out, that's when we get a million people.

And I think that's hilarious.

Yes, that's a great picture.

I thought that was—I had it in my mind that that was somebody else, but I know who that is.

That's the guy that owned the boat company there.

Those are some pretty flashy cowboy boots.

But you can see, now that looks like it had to be like '49 or '50. I think that's funny.

That's good.

[00:21:16] End of Track 4, Disc 1.

[End of interview]