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AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN J. PAGE

An Oral History Conducted by Lois Goodall

West Charleston Neighborhoods:
An Oral History Project of Ward 1

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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An Oral History Project of Ward 1
University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2014

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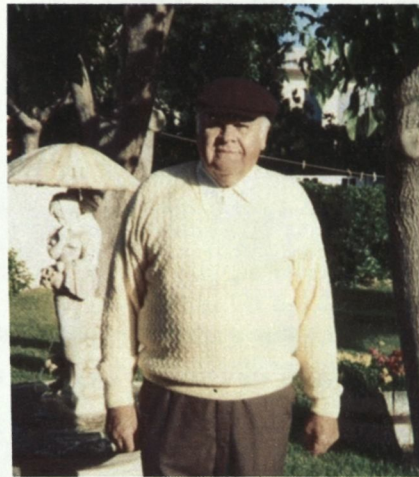
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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

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PREFACE



John J. Page attended 13 schools before graduating from high school in the Ozark Hill Country of Oklahoma. Although he engaged in no combat, he was drafted into military after completing two years of college at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. After his discharge from the U.S. Air Force, he helped his wife, Reitha, finish the credits she needed to complete her degree, and he then worked to complete his in Norman. Following his graduation, the couple relocated to Las Vegas in February 1959, when Reitha found a job at Washington Elementary School.

In Las Vegas John completed his practice teaching under master teacher Lamar Terry at Twin Lakes Elementary School and under supervision of Dr. Holbert Hendrix at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. John held his first teaching assignment, fifth grade at West Charleston Elementary School (later called Howard Wasden Elementary School), for 27 years before transferring with his principal to Helen Marie Smith Elementary School.

For a time John and Reitha rented a small house at the corner of Bonanza Road and First Street that was owned by entertainer Horace Heidt. They bought their first house, a Pardee Park Home one block north of Tom Williams Elementary School in North Las Vegas, because Reitha taught there, and she and the children could walk to school together. In 1973 they bought their current house on El Cortez Avenue in the Westleigh tract.

Page not only worked in Ward 1 for 27 years of his 36-year teaching career (1959-1995); he and his family also lived in Ward 1 for more than forty years. As a teacher in the school that served the wealthiest Las Vegas families, Page witnessed the many ways that generous donations of time, money, and talent matter to schools, students, and teachers. As an early resident of Westleigh tract, Page saw dramatic changes to the area's built environment. And as a longtime educator, Page observed several cycles of experimental instructional techniques and philosophies.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada

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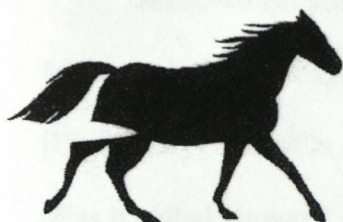
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West Charleston Neighborhoods:

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Name of Interviewer: LOIS GOODALL

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John J. Page 4-16-14
Signature of Narrator Date

Lois Goodall 4-16-14
Signature of Interviewer Date

Good morning. My name is Lois Goodall. Today is April 16th, 2014. Today I'm in the home of John Page.

John, would you spell your name for us, please?

My name is John J. Page, P-A-G-E, and I was a fifth grade teacher at Howard Wasden [Elementary] School in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Was it called Howard Wasden at the time you were there?

No. My first year there was in 1959 and the junior high had just moved up to Von Tobel [Junior High School]; it had just been built. It was called West Charleston Elementary [School].

Was that the first year that West Charleston Elementary was open or had it been there prior?

No, the first year it was open for just an elementary school, kindergarten through sixth grades.

Okay, very good. Let's go back a bit and start with a bit of your family background. Tell me where you were born. Tell me your parents' names and things like that.

My ancestors moved from Tennessee to Oklahoma in the 1890s. My mother's father was a doctor in Tennessee and owned a large plantation below the Shiloh Battlefield on the Tennessee River. He was killed around 1900 by being thrown from a horse. This happened in Oklahoma.

My father's father left home in Dyer, Tennessee, when he was sixteen, rode a horse to Texas, and joined a large herd of cattle being driven to Kansas City to market. He then rode back to Oklahoma Indian Territory and started a ranch in what is now Osage County.

Oklahoma became a state in 1907 and the town of Hominy grew up. My grandfather was the first mayor. My mother's maiden name was Kathleen Petty and my father's name Loy C. Page. I was born in Hominy, Oklahoma, on January the 21st, 1931. I was raised on ranches and farms in Oklahoma and Arkansas and my granddad and father bought and sold ranches and

farms throughout both states.

Now, your father's name was one that I'm not familiar with.

Loy, capital L-O-Y, C, Page, and the C was for Covington because there's a Covington, I understand, in Tennessee.

So you had a variety of places you went to school, then?

Yes. I started to school when I was in the second grade in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. My father during the Depression had lost the ranch and lost all the cattle. The only thing he could do at that time without an education was to sell used cars. So he got a job in Oklahoma City at that time. I was probably three years old, four, and we moved to Oklahoma City and he sold used cars. That was right during the severe part of the Depression.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes. I had two sisters. I was the middle child. My older sister was nine years older than I was and her name was Margaret Page. My younger sister was about nine years younger than I was and her name was Mary Jean Page.

Then after you left Oklahoma City, where else did you go to school?

My dad moved over to Tulsa, Oklahoma, which was real close to Hominy, where I was born, and most of the relatives still lived there. He got a job on a used car lot. I can remember my first soda pop. It was a hot summer night and Mother had kept the car and we drove down to get Dad at the used car lot. A man by the name of Scatter Wadell—now, that's an odd name—but he was a used car salesman. So he walked across the street. I think this was a '36 Ford. I was in the back seat. And he said, "My, it's hot tonight, isn't it?"

And my mother said, "Yes, it's very hot."

Then he looked in the backseat and he said, "I bet this boy would like a pop."

My mother looked back and she said, "Yes," so I shook my head. She said, "Just bring him a strawberry." So that was my first memory of soda pop.

And we used to call it soda pop then, didn't we?

Yeah, soda pop.

Tell me about how school was in the time that you were going to school, elementary and high school.

Right. After my father was working on the used car lot—my grandfather worked real hard. He worked for 30 dollars a month. Before the Depression he was a millionaire and lost all of his cattle. Then a banker helped him and he took a job for 30 dollars a month and worked himself back to enough money to buy a ranch. So he [my grandfather] asked my father to come back in business with him and we moved to just a very small town. Actually, there was no buildings there. It was just a school. It was called Phillipsburg and it was about 30 miles from Bartlesville, Oklahoma. It was a one-room school. The school master lived on the grounds of the school. It was a white school, white-boarded school.

I can remember the first day of school. My dad took me to the school and showed where the barn was for the horses and he told me to be sure and take the saddle off the horses and I was going to ride the horse to school every day. Make sure that I took care of that horse and be sure to put out water, take the saddle off. So he told me everything about it. So I walked over a stile. Now, later on in teaching the fifth grade I used that word, "stile," asking the children, "What did it mean?" Of course, most of them refer to their mother's dress or hat. That was a way that I could introduce another meaning of "stile," the ladder that went over the fence and let you crawl up and over.

So the first day of school I started on—to show you how times have changed—I started,

got up over the stile, and I was walking along and I heard this big man. I found out his name was Ernest Valentine Hoopengardner. That's quite a name. He was the master of the school. His house and family lived on the grounds. He had two boys by the arm and he said, "Take down your pants." And he said it real loud and I stopped and watched. And he took his belt off. And one of the boys was his son, I found out later. But he said, "I told you boys there would be no fighting on this playground and that's what I mean. Do you understand?" And they both said, "Yes, yes." So he didn't hurt them. He didn't hurt them. He just hit them and kind of—well, it was a little harder than just a switch. But he hit this one. Then he said, "Now, you pull up your pants. Now you bend over and pull down yours." And he hit his son like this. That made a believer out of me, I'll tell you.

I'm sure it would.

And to make just a long story short, when my wife and I got married, or right before we got married, she was working with the Osage County superintendent going around to schools and collecting testing material and grading them. She walked into a school over close to Tulsa and Mr. Hoopengardner was the head master. I was probably about 22 years old at the time.

So you had something in common.

Yeah, yeah. It was a short time. I still believe that he was teaching school.

Now, as I recall those old schoolhouses, the one-room schoolhouses, the teacher had to light the stove for heat and bring water in. Is that correct?

Yes. This school burned down during the winter of my second year. It burned down because they built too large a fire. Snow was on the ground, about a foot deep, and they built too large of a fire. He had one of his boys doing it, build a fire in the stove. The flue touched the rafters up above the room and it heated up and it caught the schoolhouse on fire and it burned down.

Were you in the school at the time?

I had already gotten there and all the children were outside watching it.

I love clocks. They had a large clock in the entryway. I always think about that clock because I always admired it every time I walked in the door. It had two rooms. We had a music teacher that came out from Bartlesville, Oklahoma. About the only thing I can remember about the music teacher, she came once a week and we started off with a song, "Loch Lomond." All the children gathered around and sang that. Then we had a basketball team and we didn't have enough boys for the basketball team, and we had three girls and two boys. We would go around to the county seats of the counties and play basketball. So that was quite exciting.

That sounds like fun.

I had a better education for two years than I ever got for the rest of my schooling. Mr. Hoopengardner—I used a lot of his principles—he would call you up to his desk and have you start off with the threes [times tables] and you said those and then you did the fours. He didn't rush you. He just said we would do your fours the next day, and you knew you should be prepared. Also, he had you—I was thinking about this the other day—he had you memorize in the fourth grade 200 lines of poetry. They could be any length. I memorized "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer. Then the next year, when you got to the fifth grade, you had to memorize 200 lines of poetry, but it had to have 50 words in it, 50 words in the poem. So I chose "The House with Nobody in It" by Joyce Kilmer. So in the fifth grade I would get up to introduce "Trees." I could still repeat the poem to them. And then after most of the children learned that I would get up and say, "Well, now, I have another poem by Joyce Kilmer. Was Joyce Kilmer a girl or a boy?"

And they would say, "Oh, a girl, a girl."

And I would say, "No, amazingly he was in the First World War, and he was a boy." So that got them all excited. So I said, "Now, I want you to learn a poem for me. It's called 'The House with Nobody In It,' that Joyce Kilmer wrote." And they said, "Well, Mr. Page—." And I said, "Let me just tell you a little bit about that poem. I'm going to repeat some of it. When I was in the fifth grade I learned it."

"Whenever I walk to Suffern along the Erie track

I go by a poor old house with its windows all broken and black.

I suppose I've passed it a million times, but I always stop for a minute

To look at the house, the battered house, the house with nobody in it.

If I had a lot of money and all my debts were paid,

I would put a group of men to work with brush and saw and spade.

I'd buy that place and fix it up the way it used to be

And I'd give it to people that wanted a home so they could have it free."

Oh, that's impressive that you still remember it after all these years. And I'm sure it helped your children as students to know it.

It excited them and they wanted to learn. Now, today the education is much different, and I think that's where we've fallen down a lot in our education. Children could do so much more if you expect them to do it.

We'll get to more about the children today and when you retired a little bit later. Let's move on to your high school days to see how things have changed from then till now.

Well, one of the changes I noticed is the treatment of boys and girls together. When I arrived we had a ranch, an open-range ranch in Kansas, Oklahoma, in the Ozark Mountains. I had gone to school there in the seventh and eighth grades. It was just in the Ozark Hill Country of Oklahoma

and Arkansas. I had a good education. So I transferred to Claremore, Oklahoma, because my dad sold the place that we lived in and rented a store in Claremore, Oklahoma, the home of Will Rogers. So as just a country boy, I'd walk to school with country clothes on. I went to the school. I had to walk to the school and it was on the other end of Main Street from where our store was located. I walked up and I looked on one side of the building were a bunch of girls and on the other side—it was a three-story brick building—all the boys. And then there was middle stairs, I found out later, for the adults to go up. So I just walked over and walked up the middle stairs. And I had a teacher named Mrs. Gassett, that I found out later was standing there watching that no boys or girls came up the steps. So she said, "Young man, come here." So I went over. She said, "At this school the boys go in on the side over here and the girls go in on the side over here and you don't get together. The middle steps are for the adults to come into the school."

So I said, "Well, I'm very sorry. I just didn't know that; I'm new."

And she said, "You're new?"

And I said, "Yes," and I told her that I had gone to school in Kansas, Oklahoma.

She said, "Well, come go with me. I want to introduce you to the office staff." She took me down and introduced me to the office staff. They were the most polite people I'd ever met. They accepted me.

The principal took me in. He was about 60 years old. I had my last report card from Kansas, Oklahoma. He says, "What grade are you in?" I told him I was a freshman. He said, "Well, do you have any paperwork or anything?" I said, "Well, I have this report card." So I showed him my report card. It was in algebra and it had A's and B's on it. So I felt pretty good. He looked at it. Then he got a map down and he found out that Kansas, Oklahoma, was located

in the Ozark Mountains, right at the edge of Siloam Springs, Arkansas. So he talked to me and he said, "Well, why did your parents decide to come here to Claremore?" So I told him about my dad just running out of money on the farm and had to sell it and he did find a store to rent in Claremore, and I came here.

In all of my schools that I went to I didn't find that I was accepted—I went to 13 different schools from kindergarten in Oklahoma City up to Claremore, 13 different schools—and I had never been treated so politely as at that school. The children accepted me. The teacher that had directed me to the office that was standing on the front steps, her name was Mrs. Gassett. She took me under her wing, and I became the star of the algebra class because the boys and girls in Claremore had not had any algebra and I had half a semester of it in Kansas, so I knew everything. She started calling on me about everything and holding my test papers up. Every time they'd say, "You're the teacher's pet."

And I said, "Man, that's a good place to be." I worked hard, and so I made good friends at that school and I went on to be elected to Boys' State.

That's an honor.

Yeah. I was elected as junior class president. Then I had to move from there because my dad lost the lease on the store. So I moved my senior year, which wasn't good for me, but I had to go.

Now, were you involved in sports while you were in high school?

Yes. I came there and I ran second my freshman year in the 220 yard dash. I ran it, I think, in 22 point seven or six. I can't remember for sure. But I was offered at that time a scholarship to Oklahoma A & M, which is Oklahoma State University. So I made the football team, and the basketball team, and also the track team, baseball team, all the years that I was a junior and

senior. So I was quite an athlete at the time.

Ah, that's great. So to be offered a scholarship your freshman year is really quite impressive.

Well, I thought it was. But I did good on the basketball and football. I had good write-ups in the paper on basketball and football. I was fast. I was very fast. And that got me the scholarship.

So what were you going to play when you went to Oklahoma State?

I got the football scholarship. I had another scholarship. I was turned down by Tulsa University. I went over and tried out for that. I was turned down. I was offered a scholarship to Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. Now, my wife—I married her—she was a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University. But I had already accepted this football scholarship. Then, of course, the Korean War came along. I wasn't recognized at all. They had a coach that—one of the players that had injured his shoulder—I don't think he even knew my name when I was a freshman. But he did know the names of all the boys that came from large high schools, Webster and Tulsa and some of the big high schools in Oklahoma City. They got to play every week, different junior colleges throughout the state. He never did call my name, so I was very disappointed.

But then I had a coach that came in that was elected that was a retiree, had dropped out of the Minnesota Vikings, and he took a great liking to me. He would come over and talk to me. He said, you remind me of a man that I knew. So that really built me up. So I got to play. I started the Arkansas game that year.

That's great.

He started me the night before. My dad had called me that night and I didn't tell him I was going to start. It made him a believer—I mean it made him so proud.

I'm sure he was very proud. And you told me about a baseball experience that you had

that I'd like to put on the tape.

Yes. I played baseball and I played for the American Legion team at Claremore. Mickey Mantle, the famous baseball player, grew up in Commerce, Oklahoma. His dad worked in the mines there. He had already made a name for himself in high school. We went up in the evening to play and everyone was talking about how Mickey Mantle was going to be there. So we at Claremore did not know, the boys did not know anything about Mickey Mantle. But the coach told us, "You're going to have to watch him, now; he can bat left handed or right handed."

So we all said, "Left handed and right handed both?" Because at that time I didn't know anybody—and I don't think anybody else did, either—that could bat either left or right handed. It was usually right handed, but there were some left-handed hitters.

So we started off and Mickey was—looking back on it, I don't know why they had him playing catcher—but he was playing catcher that night. He always played a fielding position when he got into the majors. He started off and he hit left handed and he got on base. I can't remember what he did. Then he turned around and batted right handed and I think he got on third, knocked in the man that was on second. We were all just flabbergasted. We couldn't believe anybody could bat right handed and left handed. At that time I had no idea that I was playing against one of the best baseball players that probably ever lived.

Well, maybe we should move on to when you met your wife.

Okay. I met my wife—I was a tail gunner. I went into the Air Force. I was drafted in my second year of college. After I had played against Arkansas, I got drafted. So I went in right after the first of the year. I came home. Let's see where I was. I had told the clerk that talked to me about what I wanted to do in the Air Force, I told him I'd like to fly. And he said, "Well, you don't have the education right now to go to pilot school, but we can put you on a bomber and

that'll give you some flying time." And I said, "That's okay." So I went to gunnery school in Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado. I went through B-29 training and was sent to Randolph Field to crew up for B-29s for the Korean Conflict. MIGs were knocking the B-29s out of the air pretty easy, the Chinese MIGs at that time, but they were still putting B-29s up. I had several nice friends that I went through gunnery school that were killed later on that I found out about, probably on their first or second mission.

But I went through the gunnery school and went down to Randolph Field and they crewed us up. To get the crew they took in pilots, navigators, radar operators, all the old-time men from World War II that flew B-29s and B-17s. Our training to begin with on B-29s, we all got together and we did touch-and-goes. And that was teaching the commander of the aircraft—Captain Reedy was our commander. He had been a pharmacist back in a drugstore. He owned a drugstore back in Indiana. So they brought him back. He was a fine man. So we started in making touch-and-goes. And touch-and-goes, when you come in, the pilot is learning how to land the airplane. B-29s did not have a nose, so they couldn't use the horizon as a guide to land it, to line it up to the runway. So sometimes we'd hit over on the grass or sometimes we hit on the other side. It was very nerve-racking in that airplane. We were calling off the position of the flaps. We were back toward the side of it and in the top of it and back of it, watching. Then we'd go around San Antone [San Antonio, TX] once and come back in and make a landing and then give it the gas and you go back up again. We did that all afternoon one day, just one right after another, until Captain Reedy got to where he could land the airplane correctly. But a lot of the older men dropped out because they didn't want to fly anymore. World War II was over with and they didn't want any part of war anymore. Captain Reedy stuck with it.

So we finally made bombing runs over Wendover Field up here. I think it was in Utah.

We came over to Las Vegas. I saw Las Vegas from the air. That's as far as I ever got to it until I came out here and taught school.

I was in the tail, I was a tail gunner. It was very cold back there. We made a bombing run on the southern tip of Florida. We were flying max altitude, the highest the airplane would go, and we were going to fly with three other bombers and bomb the end of Florida, just practice bomb.

I'm glad it was practice bombing.

Yes. The navigator missed the tip of Florida altogether and we went out, kind of, and came around and came back. But it was so cold in the tail, Captain Reedy, the aircraft commander, kept calling me, saying, "John, are you cold, are you cold?" And finally I told him, I said, "Sir, my feet are getting like blocks of ice." So he said, "We're taking depressurize," which you could go on oxygen masks and come down to a certain level where you could breathe. He depressurized, brought me back. When I got back to San Antonio, an ambulance was there and the paramedic examined my feet. A doctor was there. I had no frostbite, so that was a good thing.

So anyway, I went through gunnery training there. We finally got the day for graduation and all of us got into a great big room. I guess there must have been 200 crews. And some of them went to Korea. If you wanted to go to Korea, you could volunteer for it. Your aircraft commander would volunteer for it. And if you didn't, you wouldn't say anything and you would just take the pick of the hat. So we all voted before we went in there to just not say anything, not vote to go to Korea, but just wait and see where we went.

So we were assigned to B-50s, which hauled the atomic bomb, into a squadron in Biggs Air Force Base in El Paso, Texas. And so I went in and we worked. It was a very secret thing.

They went back and interviewed all my people in my town as to my reputation and what kind of student was I. They looked at all my records in high school. The principal told me later when I came back one time on leave that he had quite a conversation with them. But anyway, I got the secret clearance. So I crewed up on the team on B-50s.

Now, the only thing different between B-50s and B-29s is the rudder—the back part of the—the vertical stabilizer was taller and gave it more control than on a B-29. It had four more powerful engines.

So we were assigned to the base. I had just gotten married and we went back and we stayed there for about three weeks. We couldn't get off the base. We stayed on alert all the time. You had so many minutes, and I can't remember how many minutes this was, to get to that airplane and get that airplane in the air. And that would be about ten or 15 of the airplanes in the air the first week we took up. The Cold War was still going on. So we would make runs. We'd have mid-air refueling, which allowed us to fly two days at a time.

Captain Reedy—I tried to get an apartment on the base before I got married and they wouldn't give it to me—I talked to him and he says, "John, I'll have an apartment for you when you come back. You just come on back here and we'll have an apartment when you get out here. I'll guarantee it."

I said, Captain Reedy, "I hope you do, because we won't have any place to stay."

He says, "You'll stay at our house." He had a wife and small children. He said, "You'll just stay with us. We'll have a place for you."

So we had an apartment right at the end of the runway. My wife would sit out in the afternoon. We'd be flying all day and we'd come in and land. And she knew when I came home. She could see the tail of each airplane as it came in, the number of it. I think it was 54 was our

plane. So when we'd come over, she said she relaxed and went in the house and read a book or something. So she knew I was safe.

So when did you get married? And tell us your wife's name.

I got married in—I have to get this right.

Yes, she's just in the other room.

Okay. I got married May the third, 1952. I still remember. Her name is Reitha Lee Crowe.

Crow, like the bird?

C-R-O-W-E. We had 80 dollars. I'll tell you this little story, too. We had 80 dollars in our pocket to drive back from Wynnewood, Oklahoma, which is south of Oklahoma City about, oh, I'd say 80 miles. Drive back to San Antone, Biggs, and live a month. Eighty dollars in my pocket.

Oh, wow.

So we ran out of money. At that time we couldn't call our parents for money. Today most young people can call their parents and they get help and everything. But I couldn't get any help. My parents wanted me to come back to the farm and I didn't want to come back to the farm. I had had enough of that mud and cold.

So anyway, I went to the Air Force Aid Society and I said, "I need to borrow a little money." They had an organization there that would loan money if you got in dire circumstances. So I said, "I got married and I ran out of money."

And the guy looked at me and he said, "You should've thought about that before you got married," and turned me down.

And I said, "Well, I'll never give another dime." I used to give money to the Air Force Aid Society. So I'll tell you a story about that later on, maybe. When I was at another base, they

called me up and wanted me to donate to the Air Force Aid Society. And I said, "I won't do it." There was about six of us in line.

This old sergeant said, "Well, if you don't want to do it, I'll make you wish you had done it." So he assigned me to KP ["kitchen patrol"] duty. But I never did donate anymore to the Aid Society. But anyway, that's the way it was.

I stayed on that base. My wife and I couldn't get off to go to town or anything else. So one day we were in briefing and I was at the end of the line. All the tail gunners sat—as you looked down, you could tell everyone was a tail gunner right in front of you. So right at the end they said we need a person to go to Matagorda Island out in the Gulf of Mexico and set up a unit to make targets for airplanes to shoot at, B-36s to shoot at. They had radar for the guns. The gunner didn't sit as close to the guns itself. You couldn't see the airplane. It was the first time they used radar on it. So set up a unit down there to pull targets for that. I just raised my hand. Man, I wanted to get out of there, so I raised my hand. The stage was quite a ways up front, a lot of people up there sitting around. So I went up there when the briefing was over with. So they interviewed, I think, six or eight of us, and they chose me to do it. So in about one day or two days I was on my way, my wife and I, Reitha, we were on our way to Matagorda Island to start this new secret unit for Eighth Air Force.

Now, where is that island?

Matagorda Island is right—from Victoria, Texas, is the closest town to it. I believe north of it would be Corpus Christi, Texas, I think it was.

So out of the Gulf of Mexico.

It was out in the Gulf of Mexico. I rode a barge back and forth to the island. It took an hour to get out there and an hour to get back. Five men came from other places in the United States. I

was the ranking man, so they gave me the job of setting up the whole thing. So I had experiences doing that, too.

Sounds like you had quite a varied career while you were in the Air Force.

Yes, I did. I was in charge of making these targets. We took an old B-26—well, it wasn't old; I guess it was used—and we put a bomb shackle on the back of it. I would sit up behind, and we'd take off dragging this. We made the targets from nylon, big nylon about six feet across and about probably ten feet long, and we had to pull the targets down the runway and then take off. Our job to start with was that we had to cut all the weeds. You put on a steel cable, oh, I don't know how many feet long, back behind it. Then we'd get in and we had the weeds all cut down on both ends. Then we'd give it the gas and we'd go out. I mean we'd just pull up at about a 45-degree angle and the target would slide down the runway and come up off the runway. It had a weight, an iron rod, on the front of it and a weight on it and it would turn up like this, vertical. Then we had painted a silhouette of wings, a big circle about three feet in diameter, for looking at the airplane. Then we drew, with tar or some kind of paint, wings on each side. So then we would fly out and contact the B-36 and they would shoot at it. So they were testing their radars. Then we'd come down and drop it and the men that were left on the ground would go out and pick it up. Then we'd go in and count the holes and the pilot would land.

I was flying behind the pilot and the engineer the whole time and I was scared to death. I had a ring and when it pulled up to 45 degrees to get it off the runway, if something happened and the airplane couldn't make it, it would stall out. I had to pull that ring and get that target off that airplane so we could get—and we were wondering if that happened if we could ever get back in control of it before it hit the ground. So we cut the weeds way back on each end of the runway so if we couldn't get it up in the air, the target wouldn't hit the weeds on the other end of

the runway.

But anyway, I'll end this story real fast. We had made several runs out there and we came back. And the gunners in the B-36, they were getting the radar much better. The first time they didn't hit the target at all. The second time I think we had two holes in it. We kept going and I think we were on about the eighth or tenth and we got out there and we saw the B-36 over at a distance. And the captain got on the radio and called and said, "We're ready and they could start shooting." About that time we heard it hitting the back end of the airplane. [Making machine-gun sounds] And it just sounded like something tearing up. The captain told the gunners to shut it down, shut it down. So he said, "I think we can make it back to the runway." So we did make it back to the runway, but the back end of the airplane was shot up. So the colonel that was flying the airplane said he wouldn't fly it again. It was too dangerous. He wouldn't fly it again. So they sent down another airplane and patched it all up and brought a pilot with them that flew it back.

So the next day was Sunday and my wife and I were in bed, late. We lived down there a year and a half right across from the bay. It had a big runway going out, or wooden planks going out, into the bay. So I could go out there and fish. I had a rod on the end of it. We could take a rock and throw from the cabin over and hit the bay. And it was a nice place to live.

So the next morning we heard a knock on the door and that startled us. An Air Force car was out in front of the house and a couple of officers came in. They said, "What's your plans on the Air Force?"

I said, "What do you mean?"

He says, "Well, if you could get out of the Air Force today, would you take it?"

And I said, "I sure would."

And he says, "Well, they'll send an airplane for you and you'll go into Ft. Worth and be discharged." He said, "Now, the reason we're doing this is—" (I had two years, nine months and 14 days; that's how long I had been in the Air Force; I signed up for four years, so I assumed I'd be staying in.) But he said, "The Air Force doesn't want to send you to another school, because if you want to get out of the Air Force, we'd spend money on you and you'd get out, anyway."

That makes sense.

Yeah. So we'll get you out. So, man, I got out of that thing and that was the end of my Air Force days. But I got four years at the University of Oklahoma out of it. The funny thing about that; they still gave me my flying pay. When I was down on the island and right after the airplane got shot up, they'd come down and pick me up. I had to have three hours a month. They were nice enough to come down, land, and pick me up, and we'd go deliver things around different bases, and come back. Then when I got out they gave me—I made \$160 a month. Reitha and I lived on it. We moved into—called Sooner City. It was a bunch of prefabs, blocks and blocks of prefabs. So we had moved into those prefabs with a little baby. We had one child at that time.

So you both got your degree in education from there?

Well, I'll tell you that. Reitha lacked 21 hours having her degree and I had two years of college. I was majoring in political science and minor in economics and I wanted to go into law school. So I dropped out. I talked to them about my GI Bill [G.I. Bill of Rights]. I said, "I won't lose it if I drop out a year and we get her degree so she can teach and have a little bit more money? I'll still get my four years?"

"Yes, yes, we'll guarantee you." So we dropped out and went over to Shawnee. She lacked 21 hours. She took 21 hours in one semester. I bought an old typewriter and I typed all

these—she took a lot of—what do you call it where you're going to school? I can't even remember. But I typed enough papers for her. She took them from other universities and everything to get the course. She did 21 hours in one semester.

Wow. That's impressive.

With me mopping the floor. Then finally we needed more money, so I went down and said, "Look, I've got to get a job." So I went down to a planing mill and I said, "Look, I need a job. My wife's in school. I borrowed \$1,400 from a city bank where I lived." So he gave me a job in a planing mill he was running making church furniture and school furniture. I drove a truck and loaded that truck. A tornado hit Kansas that year and I took a big load of school furniture up there. So we got through that year and she got a job teaching school in Oklahoma City. Worked out just fine.

So Norman is not far.

Norman is close. But after a while she got pregnant and she had to quit teaching. She quit teaching and I went back and got my degree down at the University of Oklahoma. I graduated midterm. We came out and went to a placement office. I think it was Southwestern State University was the teachers' college there, I think. I don't know whether that's the right college we went to. But the placement office at the University of Oklahoma sent us down there because they said they had more need at midterm for teachers than they would have up there.

So we went down there and we told them what we wanted. We wanted a place where we could teach school, but we wanted to raise a large family and we wanted to come to the highest place in the nation. We wanted the highest place in the nation to teach school. We were really enthusiastic. So he goes in and stays awhile and I think, "Man, he's not going to give us a job." He comes out and he says, "Well, we've got a couple of jobs for you, but one of them is filled.

There was a place in South Texas in the grapefruit region that was the highest place in the nation, but we've got another good one. There is an opening for your wife out in Las Vegas, Nevada."

He said, "Have you ever been there?"

And I said, "I flew over it, but I never have been there."

And he says, "Well, they're growing out there and they can use your wife. You can get a teaching certificate, but you'll have to have practice teaching in the teaching of reading." So we took the job and that's how we got here.

So the reason you came here is because there was a job for Reitha here at that time?

That's right. That's right. I walked the streets of Oklahoma City. Of course, I couldn't get a job with the degree. There was a recession, just like we've been through here, back in that time in '58. 'Fifty-eight is when I graduated, midterm of '58. And she had a job. So we came out at midterm. Well, I had a two-wheel trailer that I had in the service. We loaded up that two-wheel trailer with all we had. I think we had two children at that time. And we headed in February, headed to Las Vegas.

February of '59 or '58?

It was February of '58, I think. Well, let's see. I graduated—no, it was '58 I graduated. Fifty-nine. It had just turned '59.

Now, you mentioned two children at that time.

I think we did, yeah.

I think you have more than two children, don't you?

Well, yeah. We had six in all. Reitha taught 24 years here and they had an early out. She came to me one day and she says, "I'd just like to quit teaching; I'm tired."

I said, "Do it. You know when you want to do it." You could stay 30 years and get—

and I was going to go for 36 because I had the option—well, they changed it after I got in. But at 36 years you get 90 percent of your three highest years. So that was my goal, to go for 36. I said, “You’ve done a good job. You’ve raised those kids and gone to school.” I said, “Quit.” So she quit and she thoroughly enjoyed it.

Now, back earlier you had mentioned that she got pregnant, so she stopped teaching. Did they allow pregnant women to teach in the public schools?

Not in Oklahoma City. Then in Oklahoma City, if you started showing at all, you’d better have told the principal. Out here they let her teach, as I recall, right up to almost the time that she was going to deliver. I think they did.

Do you remember the name of the school where Reitha first taught?

Yeah, I do. Well, let me tell you how we got here. We got here and we had a two-wheel trailer.

We stopped across from that hotel that used to be out on the Boulder Highway that served shrimp dinners every Friday night or something. I can’t remember. But they tore it down. It was the Blackjack Motel. I got in there. It was late one evening we got in with that two-wheel trailer. I got out and I looked at the tires on it. I had inner tubes on the tires in those days.

You’d blow a bubble with bubble gum—the inner tube was sticking out of the tire. I had come all that way over the dam out there. It was a little two-lane from here to Kingman. And we’d come all that way in here with that tire. I’m thinking, “The good Lord was watching out.” And we didn’t have a spare. So I went into the man in the motel and I said, “Would you watch—” He had a place beside the office. I said, “We’ve got all our belongings out here.” I said, “Would you watch this if I took that trailer off and went up to see what this town is all about?” And I went up and I saw Las Vegas. I couldn’t believe it.

Now, tell me about Las Vegas at that time.

Well, at that time we would go up on Saturday nights with the children in the car because we couldn't afford anything else. To show you the salaries just a minute, later on we had moved close to a fireman that was working up at Mercury [the Nevada Test Site] and he made \$700 a week and I brought home \$700 a month.

Oh, my, what a difference between a fireman's—

There's quite a difference in the fireman—I thought, “Man, I should have been a fireman.” Of course, everything's shut down up there. He's living up in Utah now, I think, somewhere, just doing nothing, I guess. But anyway, I went down to Fremont Street. I said, “Look at that. Man, I can't believe it.” So I went back to the Blackjack Motel and I said, “Reitha, you can't believe what we've come to. I don't know whether you're going to like it or not.”

So on Saturday night we'd take the kids up there. We'd sit and watch them and they'd throw those nickel wrappers. They had the slot machines close to the front door and everybody would throw their wrappers out on the sidewalk. You'd see these guys coming down the sidewalk kicking the wrappers. If there was a nickel in one of them, they wouldn't go anywhere; they'd spin or something. He'd reach down and get a nickel out of it. If you saw somebody that had won five dollars at the jackpot on the machine, he'd come down walking on his toes. He's still looking for a nickel in the thing. If the person hadn't won, he would be looking down really discouraged and kicking the wrappers.

But then I went back to the motel. I knew I had to get out of there because we had borrowed the money to come out here. We borrowed \$1,400 to come out here. I'll tell you a story about that right now before we get any farther. This is the banker that had loaned me money for her to go back to school. So I went in and told him where I was coming. He said, “Going to Las Vegas?” I mean they thought Las Vegas was—everybody used to go to California

from that area. But Las Vegas, it was just on TV once in a while and they thought, "Boy, it was bad out there." He says, "Well, John, I don't know whether you're making the right move or not going to Las Vegas."

And I said, "Well, whether it is or not, I'm going." So I borrowed \$1,400 again. He had one teller. It was a little bitty bank. Main Street was only two blocks long. Of course, I had gone to live there my senior year.

So he says, "Mert, give John \$1,400." So I walked back there, and she had been with him a long time, I guess. So she counted out \$1,400.

And I went back in there and I sat down and I said, "Well, you got papers for me to sign, I guess."

"No, I don't have any papers."

What a different world.

What a different world, yeah. So he says, "John, I know you'll pay it back."

I says, "Well, I don't know." Wendell Andrews was his name. Can you imagine? Even though it was 50 years ago, I remember him.

That was a very big part of your life at that point. So I can understand you remembering his name.

Yeah, yeah. So he says, "No, I'll tell you what you do." He says, "You don't know when you're going to get paid for sure." He says, "Every time you get a check, you send me money and I'll write you when I get credit." So every time we got a check, I sent him money. One day we got a letter in the mail that we didn't owe anything and we had paid interest. So anyway, getting back to where we lived, we got out of the Blackjack Motel. I got the paper. Horace Heidt had a band. I don't know whether you remember Horace Heidt.

Yes, that name sounds familiar.

Well, he did some hotel gigs out here. He bought about six houses at Bonanza [Road] and First Street. It was right there at the corner of Bonanza and Main Street. It used to be Vegas Village out here.

Yes.

That intersection out there, it goes on out to Nellis [U.S. Air Force Base]. But there were white stucco houses. He had a little motel there, I think, hotel rooms or something. But he had, I think, five or six white stucco homes on First Street. That's the first street off Bonanza; they called it First Street. So we went down and looked at it. He had a Spanish woman that was running it. We rented a house. Then the next day she called me and said, "Now, Toots Shor—" I don't know whether you—

Oh, I remember that name, too.

You remember Toots Shor?

Yes.

She said, "Toots Shor came and he needed a house, and we thought maybe we'd better rent it to him since he had been a resident here."

I said, "Now look, I've got two children and I've got a wife. She's going to teach school. We're going to make good renters." And I said, "It's not right that I rented this house and given a deposit and you're going to turn around and give it—"

"Well, Mr. Page, Toots Shor wants it."

And I said, "I don't care if he wants the house or what." But I said, "You owe it to me."

She said, "Yeah, you're right." So she rented it to us.

Very good.

So we lived there for about a year, I guess. I saw an ad in the paper where—oh, I had worked for the state mental hospital. I forgot to tell that. When I was going to school at Norman, University of Oklahoma, I went out and there was a state mental hospital. Norman has one for the south and Vinita, I think it is, has one for the north. So I went out and got a job at a state mental hospital. It didn't pay much, but it paid some. So I worked there until I got out of school.

One year I went to the street department and I said, "I want a job," and they sent me out to where they were running concrete up a hill. They had rows of men and they'd throw it up to one and then the next one would throw it up to the next one. They didn't have any machinery. You did it all [by] hand. This old man was sitting in a pickup and I went up to him. He had an old straw hat that had a lot of sweat and everything on it, in it. The band was all kind of dark. I said, "I need a job, Sir." I said, "They sent me out here from the office and said you might be able to use me."

He looks at me and he says, "Have you done any common work?"

And I said, "I was raised on a farm."

He says, "You think you can do what they're doing?"

And I says, "I'll sure give it a try."

He says, "Get you some hip boots out of the back of the pickup and get you a shovel and get up there and get in line and get you a place." So I went up there.

That sounds like hard work.

It was hard work. I went to the state mental hospital at 11 o'clock and worked till the next day and then I took classes in the morning.

Not much sleep for you.

I'll tell you a little story. After we got that ditch done, I was scooping concrete for a curb. This

guy rode up on a motorcycle. There was a couple of us there working. He stopped and he said, "Boys, you ought to have a motorcycle." He said, "These motorcycles, the girls, they'll just wave at you and wink at you." He said, "If you want a girlfriend, you ought to get you a motorcycle." About that time Reitha came by in this old '51 Chevrolet, I think it was. The front fender was kind of banged up and a child was standing up in the front seat. She waved at me and all as she went by. He said, "See, what I'm talking about." He said, "Every woman that comes by here, they wave at me."

And I said, "Get off of it; that's my wife."

John, are you getting tired? Would you like to take a break?

No. I'm all right. I can go on.

All right. We were discussing when you first came and Reitha's first school. And then we'd go into where you first started your career.

Her first school, the principal's name was Mr. Bondley. It was the Washington Elementary School and it was down on [Lake Mead Boulevard]—as you go out Main Street from Bonanza and you go on down Main Street to Lake Mead [Boulevard], you turn up towards what at that time was the Westside. I think it was two or three rooms, a little green school that was sitting back there close to where that casino was that I think they just sold it or something that was on Main Street. I think it only had two rooms. That was her first job.

So did she teach more than one grade level?

She taught the second grade.

And then they built some apartments, new apartments up on, oh, just about two blocks up. Let's see. It was north, two blocks up north. We rented one of those apartments. Our neighbor was Ted Marshall. He was an attorney and we had some parties for him to get him

elected.

That name doesn't ring a bell for me.

Ted Marshall, well, that was way back in 1960, I guess. I can't remember what office he had. But he and his wife, Luana, were LDS. Luana and Reitha hit it off. So we wanted to buy a house after we lived there a year or two and I tried to get some money from my dad. He said he didn't think it was a good idea to buy in Las Vegas. [Laughing] He was still trying to get me back to farming. Ted Marshall came up. I can't believe it. He said, "John, I'll hold that note for you; I'll buy that house."

And I said, "I don't want to get in debt to you." I said, "I really appreciate it and everything, but I just don't want to take that." District attorney; that's what he was. He was elected district attorney.

Do you have any idea what the population was when you moved here?

I have no idea.

It was quite a small town, though, wasn't it?

Very small. You could park parallel on Main Street. They had the Montgomery Ward's, the old Montgomery Ward's [department] store was down there. Penney's, they had a [J. C.] Penney's [department] store on Main Street.

So that's where you could do shopping for clothing for you and the children?

Yeah. They didn't have any malls at that time. I don't remember any malls at all then.

Right. How about when you started teaching?

When I got here I had to get a reading course and I had to get—let's see, a reading and what was the other one? Oh, practice teaching. Mr. [J. Harold] Brinley was the head of hiring the teachers. He asked me if I wanted to go with a political science degree. I said, "Well, I was

going to get plenty of political science because I wanted to go to law school, but I couldn't do it financially." And I said, "I think I made more progress in school in the fifth grade than any other grade and I'd like to teach the fifth grade." He said, "Well, take your practice teaching in the elementary school and tell them you want fifth grade." So that's what I did. They sent me to Twin Lakes. I had a very good male teacher, [Lamar Terry]. Dr. [Holbert] Hendrix—was there a Dr. Hendrix that you remember?

At the university [University of Nevada, Las Vegas]?

Yeah.

Yes.

He was the one that was supervising me on my practice teaching. I always remember he gave me a B on a paper I wrote and I really thought I should have an A. Being out of the University of Oklahoma, I thought, (indiscernible). You know why he gave me a B?

No.

I misspelled "achievement" on the last page. It should be spelled A-C-H-I-E-V-E-M-E-N-T. And I left out the last E. I had an old typewriter and I was typing along. My mistake, I knew what it was.

But what a shame to not get your A when it was just a—

And I had researched that thing and made a research paper and footnoted it and the whole thing. He said, "Well, it's spelled wrong." I'm not going to argue; a B is good enough. Then I took a reading course when there was only one building out there at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas]. At the one building I took the reading class out there.

I'll tell you something. They sent me out the first day to North Ninth Street [Elementary] School. Mr. Brinley said, "Go to North Ninth Street School." And that's just off Bonanza and

Las Vegas Boulevard, a little school sitting off of Bonanza. So I sat down there. He said, "Be there at eight o'clock," and I sat there until nine thirty. There was a shade tree and I sat there till this woman, the principal, came. And she said, "What are you doing here?"

And I said, "Well, Mr. Brinley told me to come over here."

She said, "I don't need a teacher." And so she says, "Well, come on in." I don't remember who the principal was. She said, "Come on in and I'll call Mr. Brinley." I sat down in there. After she had made the call, she said, "Well, Mr. Brinley says go to West Charleston Elementary." That's how I got to West Charleston.

So I walked in there real late. Mr. Wasden was a stickler for being on time and not walking on the grass. That's two things that you wanted to do at his school, and not walk on the grass was the first. It was a beautiful school and all the flowers and everything were named. They had a little picket fence around everything. He had a beautiful school. So I walked in and I noticed that one or two teachers were crying and tears were in others. I thought, "Man, I've gone to a bad place, the first day of school and these teachers are crying." So he looked at me and he said, "What are you doing here?"

And I said, "Well, Mr. Brinley—I went to North Ninth. Mr. Brinley told me to come over here."

And he looked at me and he said, "You should have been here an hour ago."

And I said, "Well, I wish I would have been here." I said, "There's air-conditioning in here, and I was sitting down under a tree down at North Ninth School for an hour on the ground and it was pretty hot down there."

He says, "Have a seat at the table." Well, I sat down and there was a teacher. I hadn't seen her. I looked over at her and said, "Why is everyone crying? Why are there tears in

everyone's eyes?" A teacher had committed suicide right before she came to school.

Oh, how sad.

She was a kindergarten teacher. But that's how I got acquainted with West Charleston. I stayed there 27 years. I stayed in one room probably 20. The school had windows on those wings that came clear down to the ground, windows that came clear down to the ground. They had a swamp cooler up on one end, up on one door, and then on the other side they had a swamp cooler on the other side. Then when they put in air-conditioning, they said there's no way that they could fix an air-conditioning unit with those windows. So they blocked up all the windows. Some of the influential people around there went to the school board trying to get them to keep the windows the way they were because it was beautiful windows.

Now, that was an area where a lot of very influential people lived.

It was the highest socioeconomic area in Las Vegas. I had Mr. Wynn's daughter, Kevyn Wynn. I had all the influential people there and they went out of their way to help you. When I see the names of attorneys—well, just to give you an example, I started coaching a basketball team. I didn't have to. That wasn't part of my job, but I thought the kids would like it because I played basketball. So the kids came out with all kinds of shirts. So there was a man here. His son lives here. He was in my room. His son is grown now, pretty grown I guess. I saw his name in the paper the other day. It reminded me. So the father caught me after—there were 12 of us in the bleachers. He came down and he said, "Mr. Page, why don't you have uniforms for these boys?"

And I said, "Well, I went to the principal and wondered if I could buy just some matching tops or something and he said we didn't have the money for basketball."

And he says, "Oh, well, I'm going to tell you what I want you to do." He says, "What's the school colors?"

And I said, "Red and white."

And he said, "Well, what I want you to do, I want you to get the sizes and I have a friend that owns a sports shop right down here." It used to be Community Chevrolet on Charleston [Boulevard]. It was just on the other side of Community Chevrolet on the left-hand side. He said, "He's a good friend of mine. You take the sizes down there and I want you to go down there and I'll call him." And he said, "He'll fix you up."

And I said, "Well, what colors should I get?"

He said, "Well, let me see. Buy a set of white for each boy and buy a set of red for each boy, and then you'll have four sets because you can intermingle the tops and the bottoms." So I went down there and you can't believe the basketball suits we got. Oh, these people went out of their way.

The people in that area—I'll tell you what. The casinos were owned by individuals, not corporations. The one thing they wanted, they wanted to pay the teacher because they set up this deal for 36 years and you get 90 percent and that was almost unheard of then and it's unheard of now, and they wanted teachers paid good, and they wanted their children to learn. Every Christmas I would go home—you can't believe. I finally got to where I bought a little used '55 Chevrolet and I would go home with hams. I would go home with cases of jelly.

Very generous parents.

You name it, they brought that stuff to me. My kids were always at the window, seeing what I brought home. But I can tell you instances where—I had five children with one family. And the year after the last one left, he came—he had a big pecan orchard up in Utah and he'd always bring me a big sack, paper, of shelled pecans. So I thought, well, this is the year that I don't have any child; he'll be gone—I mean, I won't see him anymore, I won't see the family anymore. And

my wife baked two big pecan pies for that day; it just happened so.

So the secretary came down and said, "Mr. So-and-so is coming with pecans for you." So he came in and I said, "Now, you see what we're doing with these pecans; my wife made some pies." He said, "Well, here's a little Christmas card. Since you don't have any more of our children, here's a Christmas card." He says, "John, it's been nice knowing you and we'll keep in touch."

So I sat down and I pulled that Christmas [card] out. I had two children down at the University of Arizona at that time, out-of-state tuition. And I said, "Boy, I hope there will be a hundred-dollar bill in there." And this teacher said, "You wouldn't get—." On each faculty there's one that's always—she's not in a very good mood, and she said, "You wouldn't get a hundred-dollar bill." Well, I opened that thing up and there was a hundred-dollar bill for every child I had taught, \$500.

Oh, my goodness.

So she jumps up and she says, "You can't keep that. It's unethical; you can't keep that."

And I says, "Like hell I can't. I got two kids down at the University of Arizona and I know just where that \$500 is going."

It's not as if he was trying to influence your grades for the children.

No, the kids were all gone. He just gave me pecans and then the kids—every year the kids were gone. They were so appreciative of what you did.

When I first went over there, he came to me. He had a boy that was bothering his daughter on the way home. The daughter, finally, when she graduated, she was a presidential scholar. She was really bright, really. He was an attorney. So he came up to me and he said, "Mr. Page, there's a boy in the classroom that's really bothering my daughter."

And I said, "Well, I didn't know anything about that. She should've told me."

He says, "Well, I just wanted to come up and talk to you." He said, "We've called the principal and we've called the parents and everything."

And I said, "Well, let me take care of it." I said, "A child has the right to come to school without anybody bothering her." And I said, "I've got a girl right now," and, I said, "I'll guarantee you I'd be up at the school if somebody was bothering her."

Yes.

A child should come and feel good at that school just as they feel in their house. Nobody should bother them. I won't tell you the name of the boy. But anyway, I called him in after school and I said, "Now, we've got some problems here. You've been bothering so-and-so on the way home." I said, "Something's going to happen and you're going to be transferred, I imagine, because we can't have that." He'd step on her shoes and take her shoes off and just hit her on the back. He didn't mean to, but he liked her, I think.

Right. That often is the case.

Yeah. Coming in from the playground, he'd always bother her. So I said, "Something's going to happen." I said, "It would be best for you just to stop that right now. I know your parents have talked to you and I'm going to talk to you, but this is the last warning." And it never happened again. So they came up and really appreciated that; that a teacher would take the time to handle a problem like that.

If more teachers had done that we wouldn't have the bullying problem that we have today in school.

That's what should be done. Every child should be able to go to school and feel safe and not be tormented. I mean we wouldn't accept it as adults. I kept pretty strict discipline. I wanted the

children to learn.

I'll tell you one story. I hate to tell this because it sounds like I was really a bully. There was this great big boy and he'd always mock me. When I first started teaching, he'd mock me. And I'd say take out your geography book, turn to [page] 18, and let's study about (indiscernible) or something. He sat in the back of the room. He'd say, "Take out your geography book, turn to page 18." And everybody would laugh. So I called him. I kept him up after school, a big boy, big as I was. I said, "We just can't have that; I can't have that. I've got 30 children in here and I told their parents I was going to teach them." And I said, "I'm going to teach them and I'm not going to let you keep me from it." And I said, "So I don't want that anymore and if it does, something's going to happen."

So the next morning—and his dad was a fire chief down in Las Vegas and they lived down here at Rancho [Drive] and Charleston. They had a white house. So I said, "Take out your math book and turn to page 80," or something, I don't know. And he said, "Take out your math book—" and everybody laughed. I just put my book down and went back there and I jerked him up out of that chair. He was as big as I was. I jerked him out of that chair and I took him and kind of had his belt like this and I just took him right across there and opened that door with my other hand and threw him out on that grass out there between the wings. And I looked down and I had the sleeve of his coat in my hand. Now, you couldn't do that today. You'd be in serious trouble.

I thought, "What am I going to do?" So I go down and I called his father. I said, "Mister, I've been having a really rough time with your son." I said, "He's mocking me and he's keeping me from teaching." And I said, "I've got 30 kids in there that need to be taught." I said, "If he keeps it up, I don't know what I'm going to do. I pitched him out of the classroom today."

And, I said, "I'm very sorry about it, but I tore his coat. I have the sleeve of his coat in my hand and I want to pay for that coat and I want to go buy him a new one."

And he said, "Mr. Page, you wouldn't do anything like that." He said, "We've been having trouble with that boy for a long time." He said, "I locked him out of the house the other day because he wouldn't wear the coat to school." He says, "I just appreciate whatever you do for me." He says, "You're helping me out." And I didn't have any trouble with Charles.

But years later his little girl came in my room as a fifth grader. She says, "Do you know my daddy?"

And I says, "Well, what's his name?" And she told me his name. I thought, "Oh, God, (indiscernible)."

Well, this man came in that I threw out with his coat. He came in and he had to duck—I'm telling you, a big, broad-shouldered young man—he had to duck so his head wouldn't hit one of those deals that hold the door open, one of the iron things that hang down.

Right.

He bent down and came in. I said, "My goodness, Charles." And I'll tell you his first name. "My goodness, Charles, I never would pitch you out of the room today, would I?" He said, "Mr. Page, that was the best thing that ever happened to me."

It's nice that he appreciated it.

Yeah. Yeah, he realized what he was doing.

John, I love your stories, but I think we should take a break. So I'm going to stop right now.

[Pause in recording]

I'm continuing my interview with John Page, a teacher that taught at Wasden [Elementary

School], which was originally West Charleston [Elementary School]. My name is Lois Goodall, and we're continuing our talk. I'm going to start out by asking John about when the school became Wasden.

I don't know. I can't remember just what year it was. A new superintendent came to Las Vegas and I don't remember at what time this was. But he knew a man—let's see. Well, he knew this gentleman that taught school. He was the head of the new math program. He wanted that gentleman to be the principal of West Charleston School or Wasden School. So he changed the school name, I think, to Wasden. The parents were all for it because Mr. Wasden had kept such a beautiful school and everything. He was getting elderly. So they thought the right thing to do was to change it. But what year that was I did not know.

So Mr. Wasden had been principal there.

Yes, he had been principal ever since the school was built, when the junior high was there. The junior high was there just the year before I went there.

And then when the junior high left, what school did the kids go to for junior high?

They went to Hyde Park [Junior High School]. Yeah, Hyde Park had just opened up. Now, Vegas Verdes [Elementary School], which is just right up the street on the other side of Oakey [Boulevard] here, was being built. It opened up the same year I went to Wasden.

I'll tell you an interesting story. The secretary came down and said, "John, one of the fifth grade teachers have to move up to Vegas Verdes."

And I said, "Well, I really like it here, I like the staff, the principal, and I don't want to go."

And she says, "Well, the teacher next door, he's just like you are. He doesn't want to go; he likes the school."

And I said, "Well, how are you going to choose?"

She said, "Well, I don't know; we'll let Mr. Wasden take care of that." So about the middle of the afternoon of the same day, she came in with a notepad. She flipped it over where it was clean and she said, "John, would you just write down 'Principal Wasden' on this notepad?" So I spell it out, P-R-I-N-C-I-P-A-L, Wasden, W-A-S-D-E-N. Well, I didn't know what it was. I said, "Well, what's this all about?" She says, "Well, I can't tell you right now." So she went next door and turned the paper over so the teacher couldn't see it. How do you think he spelled principal?

With a P-L-E.

Principle, P-L-E, and Wasden. So P-R-I-N-C-I-P-L-E. So she just kind of grinned and went back. After school she says, "John, the teacher next door to you got transferred."

Yes, I can see why.

I said, "How did that happen?"

And she says, "Well, you know why I had you sign?"

"I had no idea why you had us sign that pad."

And she said, "Well, you spelled principal correctly, with an A-L and he put L-E. So Mr. Wasden made that choice." That shows a little education helps, doesn't it?

It does, yes.

A little spelling helps you.

Now, you live on the west side of town now. You mentioned you originally lived farther north.

Yes, we bought a house in North Las Vegas when Pardee-Phillips [homebuilder] was building those houses [Pardee Park Homes]. Reitha, my wife, had gotten a job at Tom Williams

Elementary [School]. It was all desert at that time except for the school. Before that time you could not use your wife's salary to qualify for a new home. So we were still living in apartments. So we drove over there and bought this Pardee home for \$14,900, I think it was. That was walking distance. It was just a block north of the school. So she could raise the children and the children would walk to school with her. So that really helped out. We needed only one car. So that really helped out. So we lived down there I think about ten years.

But our children were growing. We had six children. They were growing and we needed more room. So we started looking for a house. We found this two-story house. It was 2,500 square feet here [in the Westleigh tract]. It was owned by a track teacher at Las Vegas High School and he and his wife had a little disagreement and they were divorcing. His father really owned the house. One of the teachers, one of his cousins, taught with my wife and he told her about the house. So we came over and bought it.

Now, this is located in Ward I?

Ward I, right. We've always enjoyed it. Oakey is getting very busy. Valley View [Boulevard] is getting very busy at quitting time for the different hotels and so forth. We can't get out as easily as we used to. We have to wait. We usually go down and try to get out on Oakey if it's five o'clock in the evening or eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the morning. We use Oakey to get out.

When we bought the house, the whole area between our house and Sahara [Avenue] over here was vacant. Spanish Oaks [housing development] wasn't here. The shopping center, the Herbst filling station up there wasn't there. Right after we bought the house it snowed about a foot on the ground and we walked across the street. It was all open. We walked clear down to the hotel. What is the hotel?

The Palace Station?

Palace Station. We'd walk down. We lived across the street and we'd just walk down there. It was all open. Spanish Oaks wasn't even there. Isn't that something?

That is amazing.

This was in '73.

Tell me where your children went to school after you moved here. Were your children still little and attending elementary or junior high?

Let's see. The children were all at Hyde Park or Clark [High School] at the time we moved here.

Did you have buses at that time to pick up the kids? Because you're quite a ways from Clark, aren't you?

Yes. But no, I bought a car for the girls to drive. The girls were getting their driver's licenses at that time. So I bought a little Ford car, a Mustang, that they all wanted. It was working out real good and the car was good and everything. But my wife read where the gas tanks exploded if someone hit them from the rear. So just because of that the car had to go. So the girls were very disappointed. But we said it was just too dangerous to drive. But we bought another Dodge for them to drive. They didn't like that too well. But anyway, they had a car to drive to school.

Oh, that's good.

One of the children was still at Hyde Park and I think he walked because it's not too far.

I don't believe I ever asked you to name your children in the order of their appearance in the world.

Well, I'll tell you that reminds me. I went down here to the jewelry store one time to buy a bracelet. You know when they had the bracelets with the children's names—it had the face.

Oh, yes, the little heads with their name and birthday.

It had their name on the sterling silver bracelet. So the jeweler asked me the same thing. I need their birthday. And I said, oh, my goodness, I just want to give this to my wife for the anniversary, but I can't call her and find out.

You don't have to tell me their birthdays.

I can't. I can't tell you their birthdays. I'm sorry about that.

That's fine.

It's good that I remember my own, I'll tell you. The oldest is Ann. She was born in Ponca City, Oklahoma. She was born in '54, I believe, when we got out of the Air Force, yeah. It's a funny thing about that girl. We lived in this old farmhouse with my parents when we first got out of the Air Force. My mother was one of these kinds—in these old farmhouses there were drafts. She'd say, "Oh, Dad, there's a draft in here, there's a draft in here, turn up the furnace." They had this old furnace on the floor, butane floor, and we'd turn this up. And the daughter broke out with a rash all up and down where the diaper is and everything. So we took her to Ponca City, which was 35 miles away. There was snow about a foot on the ground, cold. We took her in and my mother went. Of course, my mother had to be there when everything was going on. She was one of these that wanted to know what everybody's business was in the waiting room. If she had to wait out there, she could tell you when got out to go home. She could explain why each one was there.

So my wife said, "Doctor, this baby has this rash."

He undid the diaper and he said, "My goodness, girl, this is heat rash. Your mother-in-law has had the house so hot." Because my dad had put this plastic over the windows like they did back to keep the draft out. And every winter he would go around and tack up all that green plastic stuff with the thread through it. And that house, you couldn't even breathe. It

caught on fire one time. He set it on fire one time smoking a pipe, a chair on fire, and there was not enough air in there to make a flame. So the house was saved. So that's how hot it was. So every time the baby would cry, my mother would say, "Let's just get another blanket; there's a draft in here." So that's the reason.

So it was your mother that was saying there was a draft.

Oh, yeah, my mother was the one. You had to have a blanket because there was a draft. We had some relatives, my wife's relatives came to visit my parents and they went outside. They said, "We just can't stay under all this heat." The snow was a foot on the ground. That's how bad it was.

But Ann grew up to be a nice young lady. I told all the children. I said, "Now, look, your mother and I work two jobs, or three jobs if it comes to it, to send you to a good university. You can work in the summertime. But I want you to make your grades. I want you to study hard and I want you to make your grades. You can work during the summers and save your money, but we'll pay for you to go to school."

So the older girl worked in a little drugstore right on the Strip just across from where the Ford Agency used to be. It's just off—it wasn't off Sahara.

White Cross Drugs?

Well, it was on this side. It was south of the White Cross Drugs. The man that was the pharmacist there was the owner of the drugstore. My daughter saw how much money there was. She worked the front and filled the stock and everything. She worked there part-time the whole while she was going to Clark. So she said, "Dad, I want to be a pharmacist." So I looked around in Albuquerque and Los Angeles, different places for a pharmacy school where we could afford. We chose [the University of Arizona]Tucson. So we took the girl [Ann] down and enrolled her

and she started in.

Of course, we bought all of our clothes from then on at a thrift store that was down by the fire station in Las Vegas. The Junior League or something had a thrift store down there had nice clothes. That's where we bought our clothes. But we got all these clothes ready for her out of the '50s and we drove up there in front of the dorm and we started unloading these clothes. And I couldn't believe how many. Boys were sitting on the steps drinking beer. First of all, that was even—my wife says, "I don't know about this."

And I said, "Times have changed, Honey. Times have changed." We carried all those clothes in there that we had bought at the thrift store, thinking that she would really need them. And the next time we went down there, in about two weeks, we were bringing them back home. They weren't the style. So we learned our lesson very fast: don't buy the children clothes from the thrift store. We could wear them. We'd have compliments at the school office. The secretary would say, "Well, that's a beautiful dress, Reitha." At first she'd say where we got it. Then she said, "Well, we found this."

Anyway, it was a five-year course, and she [Ann] got married about the fourth year. She finished and went to work. She worked her way through that last year being married, and her husband got a job in the computer field. That was about the time computers were getting going good. And so going down to see her, the children would all go with us. So they learned where the library was. They learned the campus. They learned everything. And they wanted to go to the University of Arizona because they knew it. They knew the campus. They felt at home.

So the next one that came along, [Loy Covington,] he wanted to be a dentist. So he started in and finally he said—this was just when computers were really being really used—and he said, "Dad, I want to change fields. I want to go into information services, the computer." So

I said, "Okay." Best thing he ever did in his life. He loves it. He worked for American Express and they'd send him to London. He worked up really high in the thing. Finally he just said, "You know something, I'm under so much stress." He'd have to go make these talks where he really didn't know what he was talking about because they didn't give him time to study it. So they'd send him down south in South America somewhere. So he quit them and he went to work just—a boss had hired him, so he's doing contracting. He's just getting along financially really well. He married a girl, his second wife, who is very high up in American Express. So they have a big motor home and they belong to a motor home club down in Phoenix and go around. So they're getting along just fine.

Then we had a girl that wanted to be a CPA [Certified Public Accountant]. Her name is Rebecca. The other boy, my youngest boy—we have two boys and four girls—the boy was named John Mark. Rebecca wanted to be a CPA, so she got her CPA license, took the test and everything like that, went to school down there and got that. She became the head of the taxing of the hospitals that belong to the state and the prisons. She had just a lot of accounting majors working underneath her.

So now, is this in Arizona that she—

This is Tucson.

Okay, she's still in Tucson.

She's still in Tucson. So she just really moved up. Finally they wanted to move her to Phoenix into the governor's office or something. I don't know, I don't keep up with what they do. I just hear about it. But she liked it. She was in charge of the parties and still the CPA and everything. But driving back and forth every day from there, she got tired of that. So she said, "I want a job in Tucson so I can stay with my—." [She] had two children in school. So they let her move

back to Tucson and gave her a good job in a hospital doing books and everything. I'm surprised. She says, "Dad, I'm an accountant, but what I do most of the time is just settle the disagreements between the doctors." That was her job.

I said, well, that's not in your field at all.

That's a talent, though.

I'll tell you another story about her. She came here one day for Thanksgiving. I always have cooked turkeys up through the years. Rebecca had boy and girl twins and she wanted to be very careful with their diet. So she would say, "Dad, that turkey is not done enough."

And I'd say, "I've got the meat thermometer right here; it says it."

"But I just know it's not done enough."

And I said, "All right." Well, she ruined the Thanksgiving dinner because we finally got the turkey out and it was burned. And I was kind of mad.

She says, "Well, Dad, I was worried about the children."

I said, "Let me tell you something, Rebecca. You're an educated woman. You've got a lot of intelligence. But you don't know a damn thing about baking turkeys." [Laughing] So that's how that Thanksgiving ended up. Very intelligent girl, but didn't know about turkeys.

So let's see. We had another one [Jane] that wanted to go into the computer field and she has a terrific job with Frito-Lay. She started working for Frito-Lay and her husband was in the construction and was transferred to Phoenix. So they lived in Texas and she's working for Frito-Lay. She said, "Well, I just have to resign."

And they said, "No, we don't want you to resign; we want you to work out of your house." So they helped her buy a big home there in Fountain Hills and they lived there for about eight years and she worked out of her house and worked herself up in the company working like

that. Had charge of all the orange juice out of Florida and had to go to different places. So they called her back. They said, "We want you to come back and take this job." She got this real good job. They bought her a house down there when houses weren't selling and paid—I can't believe the expense accounts. So she's doing real fine except her husband does have a rare blood disease that she's real worried about right now. But she's doing fine. Her name is Jane.

Let's see, Jane, Rebecca, and Ann, the pharmacist. And Caroline. One boy, [John Mark,] said, "Dad, "I don't want a college education."

And I went to the dean over at the North Las Vegas school—what was that?

Clark County Community College?

No. He wasn't in college. It was a high school. Where's that where they had so many riots over there that time? He was right in the middle of that. But I went to the dean there. He was a personal friend of mine. I said, "I can't believe this."

He told me, he says, "He's got the highest IQ of all your children, and he won't get his homework. He doesn't want to go to college."

I says, "Well, I don't know what to do."

He says, "You provide him a car. He parks that car"—I had a little sports car I let him drive—"he parks that car in the teacher's parking lot all the time. We have a rule here that students don't park in the parking lot."

And I said, "Call him in and find out what—."

He [the son] says, "Well, there's no cars in the parking lot; why shouldn't I park there?" He's just that kind of a person. So he didn't go to college. He dipped ice cream down at the drugstore for a long time. He says, "I'm going to own this drugstore one of these days."

And I said, "Yeah, what if you don't? What if you don't?" Well, he doesn't own it. He

finally decided to go into glasses and he's an optometrist, I think it is. I don't know exactly—he puts the lens in the glasses and fits them. He's got a good job. But now he sees he really made a mistake by looking at his brothers and sisters. The one brother that worked for American Express, he's got a big motor home like a big school bus and they go on trips. He's just got money. You fill it up and it costs \$700 with gasoline. So all of them got a college education. Ann had a five-year—oh, I've got an architect, too. Caroline became an architect. So hers was a five-year course.

Well, John, I think you did really well putting all those kids through—

My wife and I worked. I had a little pickup and I hauled—I put an ad in the Sunday newspaper saying clean-up and haul-away service. I had more work. I mean I did it very cheaply. But I'd move maybe from these rental places, from one apartment to another, just two blocks. It was \$25. Well, to me that was extra money. And I did that for several years.

Now, back to when the children were young, what kind of family activities did you do in that time?

Mount Charleston was famous for our camping grounds. We would go up there and we loved it. We would take the children up there and take our lunch. It was kind of a getaway and it was very clean. It wasn't crowded at that time. Oftentimes we'd take bedding and everything and stay overnight because I grew up on the farm and I knew what it was to get out and I wanted the children to have that.

Did you have a tent or did you sleep out in the open air?

We didn't have a tent. We would just bed down and have blankets and everything. It was during the summertime. It was warm and everything. No, we didn't use a tent because we didn't stay there long enough. But we had a wonderful time up there.

There was one real cloudy day and one of our children, our smallest one—the oldest boy, took the other one for a walk or something. The little boy said, “Well, I’m going back to the camp.” He never did show up. That just ruined it. It ruined it for the rest of the time while they were growing up because I was so afraid.

The older boy, the one that’s fixing glasses now, he said, “Well, Dad, he said he knew the way back and I let him do it.”

I said, “That’s all right; I don’t blame you; it’s just one of those things.” And we looked, and we looked, and we drove to different campsites. Pretty soon—I guess it must have been 40 minutes later—I started the car and I was going to go to the main office there or somewhere if I could find it and tell them that I had this little boy that was lost, and a man came carrying him up on his shoulders. He had come out way down the highway, down before the mountains really started. He was down in that area somewhere. Just scared us to death and that put an end to that camping.

That would be so scary.

And you don’t forget it. You just look at it and think, “Boy, how thankful I am.” It was getting really foggy and misty. You just think, “Man, I can’t—.” It was terrible. So that ended our camping. Oh, we had birthday parties.

Were there swimming pools in the area that you could go to for the children?

I don’t remember swimming too much. We bought one of these large—when we lived in North Las Vegas, I tried to keep one of these large pools. It was an aboveground pool. So we could swim in that and everything.

We always had a dog. We had a Lassie dog that raised the children. She would keep the youngest one from getting on the slide. She really watched after the youngest. It was just

beautiful to watch how she would—when she saw the youngest one waddling towards that ladder to climb up to go down the slide, she would get between the ladder and the child and just push against the ladder and wouldn't move.

So she was really taking care of him.

And the children grew up to love dogs and animals. We had some cats. We're still going through cats and dogs. My wife and I living here by ourselves still have a bill from the veterinarian all the time.

I can't remember what else we did. I mean the children usually had friendships with other children. I was so lucky that we raised them at the time that we didn't have to worry about drugs because peer pressure is so strong with some of these children. But it's that way. I guess it's that way. But we were fortunate that we didn't have any drugs. I mean they just knew Dad wouldn't stand for it.

Right. Tell me a little bit about what Wasden School was like in the early days. I mean you mentioned the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] was all in favor of renaming the school to Wasden. What other activities did they do or did you take field trips to go various places?

We would go on field trips, but not as much, I don't think, as they go today. The children, most of them had horses. The girls and boys that lived over in Rancho Circle had horses. There were some horses and all kinds of animals in the community and we'd have Animal Day and we'd tell what animal they could bring and discuss it and write about it. The children at that time, the parents really kept them occupied as to outside activities. They all had different things that they went to besides what the school offered. We didn't have—I can't remember. I was in charge of the safety patrol for years. I would try to have parties for the children. We adopted a goat one

time from Betty Honn's Animal Shelter. We wanted to do a bake sale. We couldn't do that today. We couldn't keep the goat in the Popsicle stand. We kept the goat in the Popsicle stand. I went out to get the goat with about four of the kids. *The Sun* newspaper, in the middle of it, came out and took pictures of the kids. They kept the goat in the Popsicle stand, kept it clean. We'd take the goat around to different rooms.

It was funny. A woman came up to me one day and she says, "Mr. Page, I saw the funniest thing. You were driving your nine-passenger station wagon down here on Sahara and you stopped at a stoplight. And I pulled up beside you and I looked over and I saw it was you. And I looked back and you had two or three kids in the very backseat and you had a couple in that middle seat and then you had a goat sitting in between them."

I guess we had quite a time with that goat. He ate everything. He'd pull paper out of the kids' desks and everything like that. Anyway, we had a big bake sale and made some money, took it out, and I had one of the children present it to Mrs. Honn out there. I tried to do a lot of things to keep from just making the day just work, work, work.

I know that you mentioned a basketball team. Did the other elementary schools have basketball teams?

They didn't at that time. They had one, I think, or something like that. I saw that there was a need for it. The only thing, I had so many boys that it was hard to determine at that age how to select the ones and not be prejudiced, thinking about their parents and everything. So I tried to fix a way besides just basketball. I know one time I had way too many and I had them run a race and took the first three or something. I could take ten. I would pick out ten pretty good basketball players that you could tell were coordinated and everything. Then I tried to fix some way, draw straws or something, to have some of the children participate. Some of the parents

didn't like that too well. I indicated to them I'd be glad to have some of the fathers come down and start another team and so forth, but nobody seemed to have time to do that at that time.

Did you complete your teaching career at Wasden?

After I had been there 27 years, many in the same room before they built the new building, the principal moved to [Helen Marie] Smith Elementary [School] up on the other side of Rainbow [Boulevard]. I thought I'd kind of like to get out of that area. The area changed a lot. But I wanted to get into an area where there was this feeling that the people were working people. I wanted to see what kind of children came out of that environment because teaching was getting harder every year. I guess you'd say the things that California did and gave up, well, we always followed and brought them in as the thing to do. They weren't successful in California and they weren't successful in Las Vegas.

I'll tell you. I grew up where I was taught the skills. I was taught the skills, built just like a ladder, one layer. You do a good job in the first grade. You do a good job in the second grade. You had certain skills that you teach. Over at Wasden when I started teaching, for four or five years there we were all concerned if we didn't have every child reading on the same level. And I mean reading good with comprehension and everything. And a week before school started, you stew, "What am I going to do? I've got this child reading on the fourth grade level. Now, how am I going to handle this?" And today—I've been out several years; I've been retired. But at the time I retired they didn't even believe in teaching the times tables. "Don't force a child to do anything." I asked the principal. The principal didn't agree with me calling them up to my desk and having him say the fours and maybe giving him a little trophy or something for saying their fours or who gets first through saying their nines, give them a trophy.

One year I went around and I'm a great garage-saler. I'd go around and I'd pick up these

golf trophies. You could pick those up for almost nothing. I got acquainted with a man that owned a store over there that did this kind of work, trophy work over by Clark High School. And I said, "What would you charge me if we could just put the child's name on there and leave the golf clubs and everything there, but just so I could give every child a trophy?" So I did that for about three years. I used him and I would pay him out of my teacher's salary, which I wasn't getting too much. But anyway, I got enough to eat, I guess. I didn't lose any weight. [Laughing] And I enjoyed what I was doing.

And I'm sure the kids loved getting a trophy.

That's right. They enjoyed it. I'd give them a trophy for the most advancement in spelling, everything I could, the best manners in the classroom, everything I could I would give that child. In fact, everyone got a trophy for something.

I tried to keep them enthused about school and I'd try to keep them busy. Teachers make the mistake, or did at that time, of turning on the television and sitting there for 40 minutes watching the television. You kill so much time. Every time I had in the classroom I wanted to be focused on teaching skills. And if you didn't teach it, you reteach it, and teach it again. That way time goes fast and the kids feel like they're learning something. It worked out good for me. Now today I'm sure it wouldn't be the way the environment and everything is in teaching. I don't think I could teach today. I taught in a much different manner. The philosophy is so much different today than it was then. I felt like if I didn't teach I wasn't doing any job. It's one of those things. I didn't put too much pressure, but I kept the children enthused in what they were doing.

I had an aviation unit. Some of the Collins brothers and [Jerry] Herbst owned a big airplane together. The airplane would hold so many. I'd take them, the ones that made the

highest score on the aviation test, and would take them out and take them airplane riding. John Yoxen was a fellow, a very nice man, owned a construction company here. I taught his daughter and son. He volunteered his time and there for several years took the kids that made the highest grades up in his airplane on a tour around the lake and everything. It kept them enthused if you had something going on.

I cleaned up a place off the old L.A. Highway. They had an old tennis ball machine. So I was supposed to haul off everything. I had a haul-away and clean-up service. He says, "Take that tennis ball machine to the dump." I said, "Do you mind if I take it and use it for the kids?"

He said, "No."

So I brought that old tennis ball machine in and I examined it real well so it wouldn't fly apart and hurt someone. I fixed it where it would shoot the tennis balls up in the air. And when the children did so much, did good, the whole class and everything, we'd go out for 30 minutes on a day and let them catch the tennis—the girls would go out and the first one that caught two would win. And they would come back in the shade and watch. Then the boys would go out and the first one that caught three would win the game. I kept them going. Of course, I made them stay away from that old machine because I was afraid that thing might fly apart and hurt someone. But just things like that that I thought up that kept them enthused, not working too hard.

When I talked with another teacher at Wasden, she told me about—she came much later than you were. In fact, I think she said she came the year you left to go to the other school. She said if I wanted to really know about Howard Wasden and West Charleston Elementary to talk with you about it.

Well, I had some teachers teaching there that I had taught in the fifth grade.

Is that right?

Yeah. In fact, my name appeared in one of the newspapers of this girl that was being interviewed and said that she admired me and that was really a compliment.

That is wonderful, yes.

Another thing I did that I thought was very artistic... They had this program with old country music where Minnie Pearl would sit at the piano and play the piano. I was interested in the banjo. So I got the banjo. Any children that had old instruments at home, my kids played different instruments in the band. We started a TV program every morning, a "Hee Haw" show. We had a Minnie Pearl. We had a piano moved in, a little upright. I'd tape all this. See, I had a record. I had a boy that would act like he was singing. We all dressed up in these old hats. One of them would play the banjo. We introduced the school day with that program.

So would that be on the loud speaker that went to all the classrooms?

Television. It was on the television.

Oh, you had a television by that time.

Yeah, I would tape it. We would do it and everything and we would tape it. I ran the program on the TV, where we made a big map of the United States. We had children learn where the states were and the capitals. We had a contest where we'd draw out names. I had two teachers be the judge, and they'd draw out 16. We had a pointer, a boy that would point to 16 and the child would name that state. If you had a tie, then they named the capital and spelled it. The third thing was they got it with the spelling. So that worked out real good. We ran that for about six weeks and we had a fifth grader win that. It wasn't one of my fifth graders, but she won it. She worked very hard. Just different things like that.

Did they have the Great American program at the time that you were teaching?

No, I didn't have it.

That is something I think they do in fourth or fifth grade now in the elementary schools. Not everyone can memorize the capitals and the states and all that. And then they had to memorize like the Preamble and things like that, which is a nice thing. But it's not required for everyone to do.

We would run this contest with the map every morning. It would be new. I had two teachers to judge it. It was something new every day that we ran for quite some time.

Sounds great.

Children in any classroom from the fourth grade up, fifth. It wouldn't be just for the children in my classroom. It would be for the whole school.

Do you have any mentors here in Clark County that you feel were influential in your teaching career?

No, I really don't. No, I don't. The man that I took my practice teaching under [Lamar Terry], I firmly believed in the way he taught and I tried to pattern myself after him. But he left the year that I took my—right after the school was out and went back to Utah. But I kind of patterned my teaching because I really didn't have any experience except for the fifth grade that I was in, like memorizing poems and things like this that I thought developed the mind. I still think today that they should have a curriculum where one grade level builds on the next grade level and the next grade level and the next grade level so that when they get into a certain grade in high school, the high school teachers are not trying to teach what the elementary teachers didn't. That's what happened to us. We got into getting off—one teacher over at Wasden went down and bought a bunch of business math books. Just stuff like this. Then the morale got real low because the teachers were—at a certain time there the teachers thought—the teachers kind of interacted with

the boys at the Ed Shed [Clark County School District administrative offices]. The teachers kind of got the low end of the stick. Well, corporations bought them. There wasn't money. It was the second highest place in the nation when I came here, but it wasn't too long until it was one of the lowest places. And you can't have good—. My dad always says, "You don't get anything good for nothing."

You get what you pay for.

You get what you pay for. You get these people in here that's there for—and I know the teachers are at fault in a lot of instances, but in a lot of instances it's the curriculum. You could judge the teachers. If you built you a curriculum from the kindergarten up and you taught the alphabet in kindergarten, you taught these things and you go to the first grade and you teach the number system; you go to the second grade; and finally you get to the fourth and you start teaching division. Then you go on into the fifth and you teach long division and you teach decimals. Then you could judge the teacher on what they taught. Those are the things that they should have taught and increased those children's ability. And you can do that by teaching [things] like poems and creating variety. I mean it takes paper grading. A lot of teachers don't grade the papers. Don't put a red mark on it. We went through that. "Don't put a red mark on that creative writing story." Well, how are they going to learn if you don't put a red mark? You don't want to mark the whole thing up, but you can at least mark where a paragraph should start and things like this and children learn from that.

They need to know those things.

Yeah. So I know that you can get too far into these skills. But if you built on each level, then you could test the child and see if the teacher had taught it. By the time a child got into the seventh grade, you would know if they learned what they should have learned and who was it on

the sixth grades that let down and didn't teach certain skills, that wasn't a good teacher. And that teacher should be relieved of their classroom duty. I'll say that real fast. You shouldn't have one there. I'll tell you what you have to do. First, a parent will give you good advice on who's a good teacher.

That's true.

Sure.

They talk with the parents of other students.

Sure. Some of these teachers get a request because if a teacher is sitting there not doing anything, the parents know that. Parents want their children to get a good education. Of course, they need to supervise them at a home on homework and things like this. But you don't want to load them down on homework. You want to have homework that goes along with what you're teaching in the skills. I just feel like the education system could be improved so much if they'd get back to just a little of the old-fashioned way of teaching poems and teaching this and that and not be too strict but just teaching. The children realize that's—what fun it is to learn.

Yes. Now, John, one of the things we usually ask about if the person is retired, what are you doing in your retirement?

Well, you can look in this living room.

In fact, I was just listening to the tick-tock.

When I was living in the Ozark Mountains, my dad and I went to an estate sale of a German family that lived along an old road and they had a clock in their house. And they had that mirror that's in my entryway with the owls carved on it. It's on this side there. You can't see it from where you're sitting. It's on this side over here. He bought this clock for three dollars and then he bought that mirror in there for three dollars. I loved both of them. And I told Dad, I said,

"Now, that old clock sat on—it was a kitchen clock and it sat struck and it had a pendulum. it sat on the mantel of this old farmhouse the whole time I was growing up and it never did go to the clock shop. I mean it worked. So I told Dad all through the years, "I want that clock, I want that clock." So when he passed away, the clock was given to me and I brought it out to Las Vegas. I got it out here and it wouldn't run. I mean that sucker quit. It didn't want to come to Nevada, I know.

So anyway, I sat down at the kitchen table. Didn't have enough money to put it in the clock shop. And I studied the mechanism on that clock all night long. About daylight I had it running. And I learned a lot right there. And so I just got crazy over clocks. I'd go to clock sales and clock sales. Of course, at that time the "Antiques Roadshow" [television program] was coming in. I mean it came in later, but I had these clocks and I would repair them. The "Antiques Roadshow" really helped me because they increased the value of the clocks so much. I'd go to a garage sale and I'd always say, "Do you have an old clock that runs or don't run?"

"Oh, yes, I've got one here that Aunt Bell gave us and it's up there in the attic. Dad, get the ladder and let's get up there and get that clock." It would be a nice clock.

I'd say, "What you want for it?"

"Oh, five dollars. It's just sitting up there collecting dust."

And I'd bring it home and shine it up, get the dust off of it and fix it and oil it and get it all looking nice. I'd have a garage sale and got all the traffic off Valley View and Oakey coming in here. They'd say, "Well, what's that clock?"

I'd say, "Oh, \$25."

"I'll take it, I'll take it."

I had an attorney came in here. He did his office over here on West Charleston with

clocks. He'd say, "I want that one, I want that one, I want that one, I want that one." That was when clocks were really—today antique clocks—if a person has extra money, they're going to buy food for the table or clothes for the children. They're not going to buy an antique clock. So that's why I have all these sitting around.

How many do you estimate you have?

I had 125 at one time. The girls all have their names on these, on the backs of it. I've given all the children—they picked two clocks, one a grandfather and then another from the ones that I've got back in my den and upstairs. So they've got their names on all of them. So as soon as I pass away, the clocks are going to be going out of here. [Laughing]

I notice you have quite a variety. Some are mantel clocks, some are wall clocks and some are grandfather clocks.

I have a lot of them. Now, this clock that you're looking at right here, this is one of my oldest. This was probably made in about 1820. It's called a bell ringer. It's got a big bell on top of the works. It's not running right now because I just don't have time to go around and start all of them and run them. Maybe I'll run this one next week and maybe run those on that wall that week. I do have a lot of unusual clocks.

I had a woman stop in here the other day. I bought this clock from her father 15 years ago. She came and said, "Do you still have that clock?" That's a little clock, grandmother clock, that one on this side of the one that's got this open swing there.

Right. So it's about four and a half, five...

Yeah, that one there. She lived just over on the other side of Sahara. I stopped in there one time and I bought that clock from her. I said, "Yeah, I've got it. Come here and look at it." So she walked through the house. She says, "I can't believe you've still got it."

Well, it's a wonderful hobby, isn't it?

Well, it is. My eyesight is getting bad. If I break something on my own clock, I can either throw it away or just have it not running and know that it's bad. I would never sell it without telling somebody it's not right. But I've gotten to where I don't fix any clocks for anybody else because I feel that if I break it then I'm responsible. I don't want to charge them for it. There's no charge for it. But if I break it then I feel responsible for fixing it, getting it fixed, or getting them a new one. I have people from the church and so forth wanting me to, and I just say I don't feel like I'm capable. I just don't want to take the chance of breaking it, if you can't see. My glasses don't help me too much.

I notice they're in your hand instead of on your head.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I keep these glasses all the time.

Well, John, thank you so very much for taking your time.

That's fine, Lois. I was going to write it all out, but I'm glad we got to where we could talk and do it.

I've enjoyed talking with you and I know UNLV Oral History will be happy to receive it.

I gave up all my books. I had a lot of old books that I got back when I first started, just things that I kept through the years. Some teacher wanted them. She came over to my room before I retired and I just gave them all the stuff that I had because I didn't figure I'd be needing them anymore.

Well, that was very helpful for a teacher.

The material that we used in those days would add a lot to anything that you do or say. Every child had a book and if a child tore them up, tore a page out of it, the parents paid for it. They were glad to pay for it. You kept a number on it and if the book was lost, it was paid for.

I remember when they used to keep track of which child had which book.

Oh, we did, yeah. And if the child had torn up a book and hadn't paid for it, the report card didn't go home. Of course, the parent found out about it right then. That happened to me several times. I said, "I'm sorry you don't get that report card until that bill is paid." But it makes them to be responsible that you just don't tear up something and go on. And books are so expensive today. Of course, I don't know how many teachers are using them today, but I'm a firm believer in book teaching. Everybody said, "Oh, he's from the old school." But at least I got results.

And that's the important thing.

[End of recorded interview]

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My back yard on El Cortez Ave.



My wife Reitha having some fun on my 68th birthday.



Taken in my den on my 79 birthday. My children, their spouses, and my grandchildren.



An old wall clock that had been in an attic since 1940. I restored it and it is beautiful.