

An Interview With
Gil
Cochran

*An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken*

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Nye County Commissioners
Tonopah, Nevada
89049

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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the recordings of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes—in many cases as a stranger—and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have long known and admired; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada—too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. “Bobby” Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project in 1987. Subsequently, Commissioners Richard L. Carver, Dave Hannigan, and Barbara J. Raper provided support. In this current round of interviews, Nye County Commissioners Butch Borasky, Lorinda A. Wichman, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, Fely Quitevis, and Dan Schinhofen provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave enthusiastic support and advocacy of the program within Nye County in its first years. More recently, Darrell Lacy, Director, Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Project Office, gave his strong support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy’s office, provided funds for subsequent rounds of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioners Eastley and Hollis and to Mr. Lacy for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Lacy.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Debra Ann MacEachen, Robert B. Clark, Lynn E. Riedesel, Marcella Wilkinson, and Jean Charney transcribed a number of interviews, as did Julie Lancaster, who also helped with project coordination. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Joni Eastley, Michael Haldeman, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people's names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much-deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Office, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Nye County or the U.S. DOE.

—Robert D. McCracken
2014

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly discovered mineral deposits, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while most of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region—stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County—remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890, most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be so for at least another twenty years.

The spectacular mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), Rhyolite (1904), Manhattan (1905), and Round Mountain (1906) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the early 1860s through 1900. Austin had a newspaper, the *Reese River Reveille*, starting in 1863 and the Belmont area starting with the *Silver Bend Reporter* in

1867. Ione had a paper, the *Nye County News*, for a few years in the 1860s. More information representing the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915 is available; from local newspapers after about 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously from its first year, starting with the *Tonopah Bonanza*. Goldfield had the *Goldfield News*, which began in 1904. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the *Round Mountain Nugget*, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. The *Rhyolite Herald*, longest surviving of Rhyolite/Bullfrog's three newspapers, lasted from 1905 to 1912. The *Beatty Bullfrog Miner* was in business from 1905 to 1906. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All these communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities once their own newspapers folded, although Beatty was served by the *Beatty Bulletin*, published as part of the *Goldfield News* between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 resides in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) in 1987. The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews

conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the Lied Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique—some are large, others are small—yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral histories as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories have also been archived. All oral and community histories and photographs collected under the NCTHP are available on the Internet.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impact of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a

mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by the repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for a long time and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided at the site. And in the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—RDM
2014

This Robert McCracken and Jeanne Howerton talking to Gilbert and Swainia Cochran at their home in Hot Creek, Nevada, July 26, 2011.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Gil, why don't you start by telling us when and where you were born?

GC: I was born at our home in Genoa, Nevada, on April 3, 1943. A local physician, Dr. Hand, came out to the house and brought me into the world and hit me on the butt and made me cry.

RM: What was your father's name, and when and where was he born?

GC: My father's name was Leo Francis Cochran; he was born in Framingham, Massachusetts, on the 18th of May, 1901. There was an interesting intersection of stories—Framingham is where he started; that's not where he ended up.

RM: That sounds intriguing. What was your mother's full name and when and where was she born?

GC: She was born September 27 or 28, 1906, in Tonopah. (She was never sure which day as the records burned up in a Tonopah courthouse fire.) Her name was Sophie Cecelia Barndt, B-a-r-n-d-t; they put a "t" on it. She never liked the name Sophie, so as a young lady she changed her first name to Sonia. Thereafter, except for her elder brother, Victor, she was known as Sonia, and he always called her Sophie, much to her displeasure. [Chuckles]

RM: And what was her family's background?

GC: Sonia's father, Victor Jules Barndt, came to Tybo in the mid-1890s to run the mines there; he came from the Midwest. Her mother, Elizabeth (Bessie) Williams Barndt, was born at Hot Creek Ranch August 16, 1884. She met Victor Barndt as a 16-year-old and they hit it off and married.

RM: How did her mother's family happen to wind up in Nevada?

GC: Bessie's father, Joseph Thomas (J. T.) Williams, came into central Nevada in the mid-1800s, having spent a short period of time in Virginia City chasing silver there. He wound up in the middle of the state, initially as a miner. He realized very quickly that he could make a better living providing for the miners than being a miner himself and he settled at what was, at that time, a little town called Lower Town, or later, Hot Creek; it had a stage stop, store, post office, etc.

Bessie's mother was Sophie Ernst. Sophie came into this country in the mid to late 1860s. She was brought into the country by her older brother, George Ernst, who was a surveyor and a miner. He was involved in Virginia City and the design of the Sutro Tunnel that Adam Sutro was mouthpiece for. He followed Governor Blasdel into central Nevada in the 1860s and purchased Twin Springs in the southeast corner of the valley.

When he purchased that property/stage stop, he decided it was time to send for his family and he brought his parents, Daniel and Seville Ernst, and his siblings from Iowa—his sister Sophie, his brother Johnny, sister Sarah, and one other sibling. They all settled 29 miles across the valley at Twin Springs.

SC: Sarah married Madison Locke. Sophie met J. T. Williams and they were married in, I believe, 1872 up in the White Pine county seat, which was then at Hamilton. There's some discrepancy as to the actual date. Records that I've seen said 1872 and somebody else would say 1870, but in that time period. They settled on the lower ranch. We're sitting in what was the original mine office at Upper Hot Creek, built in about 1864. The mine and mill went belly up after the mill burned.

RM: Now, what mine was that?

GC: It was the Uncle Sam Mine, the Old Dominion Mill. The mill burned, I believe, in

about 1868. I think it was a five-stamp mill. We've restored the store structure over here. It's not a new structure, it's a restoration. But anyway, J. T. Williams had settled the ranch in Lower Town.

RM: Did he pioneer the ranch himself?

GC: He pioneered the ranch; he homesteaded. The town was a mining town, it wasn't a ranch town. It was associated with the mining activities in this area. The town sits right on the edge of the property. It was on the ranch, actually.

RM: Describe the geography that would prompt him to locate a ranch there.

GC: It has good soil, open expanse in vistas. The year-round water comes from up the canyon. There's a whole series of cold springs and right outside our house are the hot springs—the Hot Creek of Hot Creek Valley is right here. That convergence of cold and hot water coming down through the meadows provided ample water for irrigation of pasture and hay, food and fodder for animals and people.

SC: Melons.

GC: Melons was one of the big crops here. One of the old newspapers, the *Tybo Times*, tells how J. T. had taken a wagonload of melons to Belmont. They'd do that on a regular basis to supply the mining towns. Anyway, Joseph had settled the properties down here in the 1860s. Then the mining disappeared and Sophie wanted to take up the mine properties that were up canyon. Joseph had no interest in doing that. Sophie's brothers, George and Johnny Ernst, purchased the mining patents and mill and mine offices, picked up on the land patents and homesteaded a piece to go with it, packaged it all, and gave the ranch land to their sister Sophie as a wedding present. That became the Upper Hot Creek Ranch. Joseph and Sophie already ran the Hot Creek Ranch. It was two separate properties but they ran it as one property.

RM: How many acres are we talking about?

GC: Combined, it was about 1,200 acres of deeded land. The lower ranch is 900 and something, the upper ranch is 280 acres.

SC: How much did Helen take, though?

GC: That includes Helen's piece—she did that later. Helen was Helen Dupont Williams, wife of J. T. Williams II, who was killed in a 1978 hunting accident. Helen homesteaded 160 acres so it would've been about 700 acres and 300 acres roughly, about 1,000. Helen had a quarter section.

SC: They built a house and ran it as a hotel for the stage lines. That's what they did in Twin Springs, too. George Ernst brought his family out so they could help him run it as a stage stop.

RM: Where did the stage run?

GC: The stage ran from Belmont over McCann Pass probably, and then it came up through Kiln Canyon and Tybo, out Tybo to the east and up north through the valley. This was a stage stop, Moores Station was a stage stop, Pritchard Station was a stage stop, and Hicks Station right on out to Eureka and back around. It made a big, big loop. One of the fellows I worked with for a number of years at the Desert Research Institute, John Fordham, his grandfather Myles drove the Belmont-Tybo stage.

RM: My gosh. Did the stage have a formal name?

GC: I don't know what the name was. I call it that because that was the route. His grandmother, Mertyl Miles, ran the museum and the historical society in Reno forever; she was quite an interesting lady. But anyway, about every 15 miles there was stage stop.

RM: Did they change horses every 15 miles?

GC: I don't remember. [Laughter] I think that the stage arrived and you'd change the

horses or give them feed and water and then run the next 15 miles.

SC: The Williams also raised horses for the stages; that was part of their income.

JH: And they had a racetrack.

SC: Yes, there was a racetrack.

RM: So there were enough people here to support a racetrack.

GC: Oh, yes. There was the old town, Tybo. Upper and Lower Hot Creek at one point had several hundred people. It was a pretty rude and crude existence, but there were several hundred people. My mother's first cousin Bobby Williams, a younger brother to J. T. III, Bobby was deep into race horses. They were well-to-do ranchers and Bobby could afford to do it. He bought and raised and traded race horses and raced them all over the world. Later, for a number of years he was the Tonopah town barber. His wife, Gloria, ran the beauty salon and had a turquoise mine west of Warm Springs.

RM: Swainia, could we now just get some of your background?

SC: I was born Swainia Truisa Jennings in San Diego, California, on August 24, 1942, and raised mostly in Southern California. My grandparents were running the inherited Jennings interest in an orange company, orange orchards, in San Bernardino County. I lived mostly along the coast.

RM: Like where?

SC: We moved all over—Del Mar, Solana Beach, Santa Monica, Van Nuys, Covina, Yucaipa, Riverside, Lakewood, La Habra, then back to Del Mar, and then we went to Long Beach. And then I went to UNR—thank God. My grandparents rescued me and paid for my schooling as a freshman up at UNR in Reno.

RM: What was your family doing at that time that you were moving a lot?

SC: I'm actually writing a memory story. I've got about 50 pages written and more

pages of notes and I've been thinking about this a lot.

RM: To me, Southern California was a paradise in the '40s and '50s.

SC: Oh, yes. There was no smog. One great-grandfather, James Edwards, of Redlands, had an orange grove and was one of the founders of the Sunkist Orange Co-op. Another, Frank Bishop, pioneered commercial avocado growing in La Habra. There were lush groves everywhere. Now most of that is endless housing tracts.

RM: And it wasn't crowded.

SC: Right. It was great. Basically, my father was in the navy during World War II and he came out of the navy and worked for a lumberyard in Solana Beach that belonged to some friends. They all got benefits after World War II and they were able to build a house in Del Mar. There was a big building boom because of all the guys coming home from the war and they did all this building.

Towards 1950 the building really tapered off and my father lost his job at the lumberyard. Then he got involved with house remodels and insulation sales—there was no insulation in the homes in Southern California in the early days. So he was always about six months ahead of us. He'd be working in a town and we'd catch up with him and then he would have to move on for whatever reason. We moved so much because he was—not itinerant, but searching for more lucrative income. He did some sales jobs, too.

RM: What is your overall take on Southern California at that time?

SC: I grew up at the beach. Actually, my grandparents had a beach house in Solana Beach, up on the bluff, from the 1930s to the 1950s.

RM: Where is Solana?

SC: It's in northern San Diego County just north of the Del Mar horse racetrack. I've got pictures of me, my sister, and my cousins there when we were babies. My

grandparents spent every summer down there because Redlands, where they lived, was so hot in the summertime, and there was humidity from all the orchards and the irrigation. Sometimes Grandfather would only be there on weekends.

Solana Beach was where my father had spent summers and had friends and connections. It was mostly little beach houses—there were some nice big houses up on the hills in Del Mar. But there were no freeways or anything, just Highway 101. We had chickens in the yard and there was a little butcher shop down in Solana Beach and we would go in there and buy meat and stuff. It was totally different than it is now.

RM: Were you part of the surfer culture at all?

SC: From the sand. [Laughs] All the kids did body surfing. The waves weren't good enough in Solana Beach for surfing—it's a pretty shallow beach. It doesn't have the big rocks out there which make the waves come up. I will say that when we went back and I went to high school there, the surfers were definitely in evidence. They were in our classes. Usually their main focus in life was surfing north of Solana. A couple of them would ask you for answers to things in class and, "Will you help me with this?" because they didn't take time to study. [Laughter]

Anyway, Southern California is where I came from and my grandparents sent me up to UNR in 1961. Gil's cousin on his father's side Janet Rhodes introduced us because she lived in the same dormitory as I did. We got married fairly young, over some objections from the family—I was 21 and he was 20. And we really settled down. I think that it benefited both of us because we both continued school.

After our two children, Sandra Jean and Alan Michael, were in elementary school, I taught kindergarten through second grade for 17 years at various schools in Reno and Sparks. While at UNR, Gil worked at the air national guard as a night watchman—two

nights swing, two nights graveyard, two nights off. He would study and snooze a little bit. And then we had part-time jobs on the weekends. We put ourselves through UNR. Our budget was \$315 a month. That was for everything including school, books, whatever. But that's when chicken was on sale for 39 cents a pound. (When I was younger, I always swore I would never start talking about what the price of food used to be.) Gil went to graduate school at UNR.

RM: What did you study in graduate school?

GC: I got a master's in civil engineering and a Ph.D. in hydrology.

RM: Where did your career take you after you got your Ph.D.?

GC: I interviewed in the oil patch in Texas. I was on the verge of accepting a position to work out of Midland-Odessa for one of the oil companies. But I'd done my master's degree work at DRI, the Desert Research Institute, and the director of the center there made me an offer I couldn't refuse. So I turned down the oil patch and went to work for DRI and while working there, completed my doctoral work.

RM: What did you do your dissertation on?

GC: Water resources in the Las Vegas Valley.

RM: I would like to see that.

GC: It's a very boring tome. [Chuckles] In the fall of '74, I took a temporary position with the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. One of the programs there was the International Hydrological Decade Program and I worked with Leo Heindle at the research council for the year closing that out. Then I moved up the street to the Department of the Interior for a little over a year, working as a staff scientist for the Federal Council on Science and Technology in the Executive Office of the President. I did that and then came back to DRI in mid-'76, spent the next half-year

commuting between Reno and Washington, D.C., then settled at DRI at the end of '76. I completed my professional career at DRI.

SC: Thirty-two years.

GC: Thirty-two years. A lot of work for various and sundry organizations. I did some work for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. We did some work related to the Department of Water and Power for the Green Basin Air Pollution Control District out of Bishop. I did that for about ten years. Then of course, I had a stint working on the Nevada Test Site.

RM: What were some of the things that you were involved in that you could talk about on the Test Site?

GC: For years I was involved with what was called the CEP, containment evaluation panel. We looked at the design for every underground nuclear test to make sure that when the device detonated, the residuum from that explosion stayed underground. It was an evaluation of the plans and the work leading up to the detonation itself, not design of the devices.

JH: Did you work on Project Faultless in the valley here?

GC: I didn't do Faultless. I was off doing things in the Las Vegas Valley and a bunch of different people did Faultless. We had a full crew out here for two or three years. I never did become involved with Faultless, even after the closure phase. It was kind of kept at arm's length because of privacy. I also worked on issues of low-level radioactive waste disposal at the Nevada Test Site.

RM: Did you have any involvement with the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository?

GC: From the state perspective, yes. I did some work on the west side of the Yucca

facility looking at moisture transport through the unsaturated soil zone. We had a couple of graduate students who did some work there; and that's about the time I decided I'd had enough of the Department of Energy, that program, and divorced myself from involvement.

RM: From the Test Site? Did you have a bad experience with DOE?

GC: DOE was a residuum from the days of the Atomic Energy Commission when that organization had a goal, a mission, to build bombs to destroy half the world. DOE lost its mission in the mid-'90s with the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; they were no longer doing testing. From that point forward they were lost—there was no mission anymore.

SC: Talk about the statewide water survey that you did.

GC: That was for part of the MX program. We did a number of surveys related to the MX proposals, looking at resources throughout the state to support the deployment of that racetrack missile system. We did the "Nevada town tours," went to basically every town in the state of Nevada. [Laughs]

RM: Were you telling them what you were going to do?

GC: No, we were finding out what the local resources were.

RM: The MX program was an amazing thing. I mean, they were going to cordon off a third of the state of Nevada or something.

SC: They had a big installation they were talking about right down below the ranches here.

RM: Luckily, they pulled the plug on it.

GC: Right. Well, the mission was accomplished; the Soviets backed off. So the MX eventually went away. And for a few years I worked with Department of Defense agencies, with the air force. I've done a lot with the air force.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: You've seen an amazing amount of the state; but I guess we'd better get back to Hot Creek. Gil and Swainia, what are your first recollections of the Hot Creek area?

When did you first come here and what meanings does it hold for your family?

GC: My first trips to Hot Creek occurred when I was too young to have sound memories. My first recollections are as a youngster of four or five years in the big stone house at Hot Creek.

RM: What's that house called?

GC: Just the stone house at Hot Creek Ranch. At that time, my father's sister Mary and her husband, Joe Williams III, my mother's first cousin, lived there with Helen Williams, Joe's mother. My father was one of six children. He had three sisters—Eleanor, who became Eleanor Cochran Rhodes—and Mary Cochran Williams and Kathleen Cochran. Kathleen worked and then died in Las Vegas in 1958 as an unmarried lady.

In the 1930s, when my father was here with the family, he brought two of his sisters, Mary and Eleanor, and his mother out here. Mary was very much enthralled with my mother's first cousin Joe Williams, and they were married in 1939 or 1940. Mary and Joe lived on the ranch until 1950. They had four children—J. T. IV (Tad), Rosalind, and twins Michael and Nancy.

We came out for a number of years to visit Mary and Joe at the ranch but we also came out during that same period to visit family in Tybo. My mother's brother, Victor Barndt, lived in Tybo with his wife, Martha, and their seven children.

SC: Where she taught school.

GC: This was from the late '40s into the early '50s—'51, '52; a period of five to eight

years. In 1950, Mary and Joe and his brother Bobby Williams and Helen sold Lower Hot Creek and the life interest they held in this place to the Grubies. Joe and Mary moved to the Carson Valley, between Gardnerville and Carson City. In the late 1950s or '60s, Cal Worthington bought both ranches.

RM: Tell us who Cal Worthington was.

GC: "Cal Worthington and his dog Spot." Cal Worthington was a car salesman/dealership owner of used and new cars from Southern California and he had TV ads all over the world. [Laughter] Cal Worthington also did automotive business in Anchorage, Alaska; the guy was all over. And his dog Spot or a lion or zebra or some other strange animal would be featured in his ads.

SC: He didn't just buy this ranch, he bought all the ranches up towards Eureka—even past Highway 50. He had a whole string of ranches; there were about five of them, as I recall.

JH: Do you remember which ones they were?

GC: Fish Creek was one of them. And I think Snowball. Basically everything north.

SC: Rex Cleary would know the names of the ranches because he was a little more involved in that. That was the first time they pulled these ranches together because after that when they sold the Lower Ranch, those ranches went with it for quite a few different sales.

GC: I'm not exactly clear on that. The lower ranch has been sold a double handful of times over the years. Some of the people lived on it longer than others, some did not live on it at all; they put managers out there. It's been a really interesting evolution of ownership. This property did not get separated again from the lower ranch until my grandmother died in September 1972. That was the expiry of her life estate on the Upper

Ranch.

RM: How did Cal Worthington happen to land here? Did he have a connection to the area?

GC: No connection. I don't know what Cal was doing. He bought this place; that's what I know.

JH: That's 1950? I have recollections of the ranch in 1953.

SC: Cal had it when Gil's grandmother died. Ellis Johnson ran it; Cal didn't buy it in '52. I think the record of deeds will show that there was a whole string of people that bought it between '50 and Cal Worthington. The Grubies bought and sold it several times in the '50s.

GC: Cal Worthington is the one who excavated the ditches; my mother took him to court over that in 1960, '61. But I'm not really qualified to talk about the ownership succession of the Hot Creek Ranch.

RM: Okay, but your family owned it when it was first taken out of public land?

GC: Yes. To reiterate, my great-grandfather built the house down there. We started this discussion with J. T. Williams and his arrival here in the mid-1860s, coming out of Virginia City, following the mining activities and realizing that he could make more money providing food and fodder to the mines and towns than being a miner. He settled through homestead and developed Hot Creek Ranch. He married Sophie Ernst, who had moved to Twin Springs with her brother George and her parents, Daniel and Seville. She and J. T. were married in 1872 in Hamilton, the county seat for White Pine County at that time, and ran a ranch here. The mining activities here failed in the late 1860s. The mill burned, I believe in 1868.

Sophie wanted to take up the properties here and J. T. had no interest in doing so.

So Sophie's brothers, Johnny and George Ernst, homesteaded a piece of land and they purchased some mine patents and whatnot and gave the land to their sister as a wedding present. So the Hot Creek Ranch went from 600 acres, 640, to almost 900; 640 would have been what J. T. had taken out. And they had a hotel at Lower Hot Creek.

RM: Is the building still there?

GC: It burned to the ground in the late 1870s. All the guests that night escaped with their lives and very few of their possessions. The hotel serviced Tybo and people moving through on the stage lines and all. J. T. undertook to reconstruct the hotel. He brought in Italian stonemasons from Austin, Nevada, and put them to work building the big stone house.

RM: So that was a hotel when it was designed?

GC: It was designed to be a hotel but it got almost completed about the time the mines failed again. So the demand for a hotel went away and it was never run as a hotel. The upper story was never finished; that was to be guest rooms and all that.

RM: When did the mines fail again?

GC: In the 1880s there was a big mining depression in Nevada. You know about Troy in Railroad Valley, the town that England built. [Laughs] That's all that same time period. There was an awful lot of investors' money and speculation and very poor profits. The Uncle Sam Mine here was barely a scratch on the ground. Some people tried to reopen the Uncle Sam in the late 1980s; they hauled material out and started to build a leach pad along the road to Keystone and they very quickly ran out of money and went away. I believe that Bob Perchetti of Tonopah owns it now.

SC: The mining problems were an investor thing.

RM: So they had a mine and they built the mill and they were just mining people's

money?

GC: Well, Old Dominion Mill here was servicing, not just the Uncle Sam Mine, it was servicing the area. And there was a second mill down the canyon.

RM: What was it called?

GC: I'm not positive on that. I've been confused as to which one was the Old Dominion.

RM: What were some of the other mines in the Hot Creek area?

GC: Tybo and all the mines in Tybo. There's a whole bunch of claims over there.

JH: Probably Keystone and Mountain View.

GC: Well, Keystone is halfway to Tybo. That was an operating mine.

RM: Could you say anything about Keystone?

GC: The only thing I know about Keystone is about Worth Wiswall. He was the caretaker there forever; he was a hermit. I met Worth as a young man and Uncle Dick used to take him groceries. Worth was a man who went to live there to escape, as my mother described it, his "failed love life." [Laughter]

SC: They mined that into the 1940s, '50s, '60s, even '70s. Someone gave us an old book outlining the minerals in the Keystone block.

GC: Einar Erickson came back in; there was a lot of activity. Somebody went back in the 1980s and developed some pivots for cyanide circulation but it was, again, speculator money. The mine produced an awful lot of silver and lead for a number of the earlier years. The mine dumps are large, but everything is gone now except for one structure.

JH: There was Mountain View.

GC: Mountain View is two miles south and you have to drive 20 miles to get to it from here. There was a tremendous effort put into Mountain View in terms of construction of

the mill and the furnaces and whatnot. The scratches on the ground are minimal. There's an old Spanish-style arrastra.

RM: What do you think of that?

GC: Somebody had time on their hands.

SC: The arrastra does not appear to ever have been in production.

RM: Was it done by the Spanish?

GC: I don't think so; it was Spanish style, but there's no wear on the stones that the millstone would have made if it had been going around on. It was something that was built. The milling stone itself is in Las Vegas.

JH: It's in Silver Springs, Nevada.

GC: Oh, is it? I know it went to Las Vegas. [Laughs]

RM: Were there any other mines in the Hot Creek area other than Tybo that were real producers?

GC: Well, the mines at Morey—again, they all date from the same time period, the late 1860s.

RM: When did they give out?

GC: The countess left about ten years after she got there. [Laughs]

GC: Morey was never a big producer; Tybo was the big producer.

JH: I do remember they were digging for gold up around Hot Creek, right up the hill.

GC: There are three current programs. One is east of Four Mile Flat back here, and south of that in Wood Canyon. They've drilled a number of holes in the last three or four years and they have some very nice shows. Right now they are making application to the Forest Service to drill three additional holes next year—Jim Greybeck is a project lead on this.

SC: You know Jim Greybeck.

JH: Yes, he's my niece's husband.

GC: Anyway, I just got a copy of Jim's draft report; he graciously sent it to me. Both Barrick and Newmont are here. They came in about two months ago and are up above Empire Canyon and south of Keystone Canyon.

RM: Where's Empire Canyon?

GC: It's between here and Tybo up on the flat to the west. Newmont is big money. They just pulled out of there last week. I have no idea what their findings were, but they were interested.

RM: Do you know anything about what the initial attraction was here?

SC: The story is Indians showed somebody a ledge of silver.

RM: It seems like there are little indications here and there that were inspiring people in their dreams.

GC: As you know, the old prospectors went everywhere looking for it. They weren't geologists.

SC: You see little digs all throughout the mountains. People went to California first and when that didn't play out for everybody, they started moving east. Virginia City sparked and then you had Belmont. They kind of flowed out of California into Nevada. Somebody would find a little something or there'd be a rumor of something and people would take off. That's how Hot Creek came about and that's how we had a town here.

GC: Two towns, Upper Town and Lower Town.

RM: They must have been doing some good mining of people's pockets or there was something here that was keeping them going to support two towns.

GC: It didn't support two towns for very long; ten years, maybe. I looked at the 1870

census and there were not a lot of people here by then.

RM: Did the two towns have different names?

SC: This one had another name.

JH: Carrollton. And there was the Carrollton Mill.

RM: So Upper Town was called Carrollton. Was it named after anybody you know of?

GC: Not that I knew of.

RM: And tell me what Carrollton consisted of.

GC: If this is Carrollton. It consisted of this building, the two stone buildings that you came by, which are going through restoration—there's a stone building just outside the door here that was restored—and there were a series of cabins over on what we call Orchard Wash, maybe half a dozen little dugouts. There was one just this side of the bridge—as you come across the bridge there was a stone cabin there. One wall that was left is now incorporated in the restoration of one of the sites. It was a good source of rock—ready sorted, standing there waiting for them. And there are a couple of buildings up the canyon here.

RM: What were there—a dozen occupied structures, maybe?

GC: I would guess ten to 20. And then at the lower town, Hot Creek, there were a couple hundred people, maybe.

RM: And what were the principal structures there that you're aware of during this period?

SC: Mostly stone. Lots of pretty rock. Some had post/beam/sod roofs and others had canvas from wagon coverings.

GC: And wooden structures. There was a grocery store, a couple of inns, a bar, stables, general merchandise—everything you have in a small town.

SC: You can still see the store/school building that's actually falling down because there was no roof on it; it's by the big corral at the lower ranch.

RM: Oh, that's a beautiful thing. [Looking at a picture.]

SC: It was a store and then it was a schoolhouse.

SC: Gil's mother and her sister Libby used to go to school down there. She talked about riding down in a buggy to go to school. In one of the floods that happen in this canyon—infrequently, but 50-year floods or 100-year floods—they couldn't cross the canyon one time. When this area fills up with floodwater we have 13 inches in the bathhouse. We had a flood come down this hill behind the house and had eight inches of water throughout the whole yard. But anyway, the sisters went to school down there.

RM: And this would have been in approximately what years?

GC: About 1912.

RM: Okay, that was a later iteration of the area.

GC: Right; the town no longer existed. There were a few people here—the Williams family at Lower Hot Creek and the Barndt family here.

SC: There would also be Indians who lived in the stone houses and wickiups up on the hill above the Hot Creek Ranch up towards Mountain View Canyon kind of on that rise. They had local Shoshones working on the ranches. His great-grandmother, Sophie, would have the women come and help her with the gardens and the chores around the place and she would feed them. Gil's mother described a great big pan she had, and she would take this big pan of eggs and whatever she'd put in it, bread and so on, and feed them every day.

RM: So your forbearers were at this ranch. How were they surviving when the population dropped?

GC: Growing crops and hauling melons to Belmont. They raised horses and cattle. My mother and aunt, after 1912, would go on trail rides. They'd go to Eureka with cattle to load them on the trains.

SC: It was a working ranch.

RM: And how long did this go on before Hot Creek had another boom, so to speak? Or did it?

GC: Hot Creek never had another mining one.

SC: It's only been a ranch.

RM: Okay. It was all over?

GC: It was all over. Well, in the 1870s Tybo was still going. The big crunch didn't happen until the 1880s. So they were servicing Tybo at the hotel and they ran a spa up here with the hot water. They'd invite the miners down to have dinner and soak in the wonderful waters.

SC: And they had dances.

GC: Yes, that was part of it. It was a ranch producing food and fodder for Tybo and Belmont and a hotel and so forth for Tybo and travelers.

RM: Were they grazing over a vast area here in the era of open range?

GC: Something on the order of at least 40,000 acres, probably close to 60,000. Our current grazing privileges are over 40,000—we still have them.

RM: Are you grazing cattle?

GC: Our owners lease our grazing privileges to our neighbor who owns the Lower Hot Creek Ranch and let him find the cows.

RM: When were Lower and Upper Hot Creek separated?

GC: They were permanently separated in November of 1972. My grandmother,

Elizabeth Williams Barndt, had entered into a life estate agreement with her sister-in-law, Helen DuPont Williams, related to my grandmother's financial difficulties in terms of keeping track of how many cows she had and whatever. She couldn't pay for mortgages on Hot Creek. She gave her sister-in-law the right to use the upper property so long as she lived.

SC: I think she mortgaged it to her, didn't she?

GC: Yes.

SC: I'm sure there was a mortgage in there. In the stock market crash of 1928, everybody was having reverses and the price of cattle probably crashed, too.

GC: And when she gave her sister-in-law the life interest in the property in about '28 or whenever it was, she moved three miles up the canyon.

RM: What's up the canyon from the Upper Ranch here?

GC: There are three things: the Uncle Sam Mine, which is right at the edge of our western boundary property line. Then there's a short stretch of BLM public land and you come to another ranch. That was the Dugan Ranch, now owned by Jeff and Andrea Kerbel.

When you leave going westward from the Kerbel property you go back onto BLM public land and you go a little further up the canyon and come to what is called the Page Place. That's another deeded property that was developed in the late 1800s. [Mrs. Page] worked in Tybo for a number of years. She had two deaf and dumb sons that ran the ranch. They ran it until the 1920s, I would guess.

There's only two structures left on the Page Ranch. There is an old wood log barn and a storage shed and it's now owned by Don and Susan Southwick, from south of Carson City. They have converted the barn into a rough but cozy living structure. In

doing so, he found one wall where the Page brothers had made notes with pencil on how many acres of hay, how much hay, etc., were put up. Don put a piece of plastic over it to protect the historical record on the wall. It's an interesting place.

There's a cold cave on the southeast Page property. The wind blows through there and I think the temperature's about 45 or 48 degrees in the middle of summer.

SC: Gil's mother told us that the Page brothers would use the cave to store their food, hang all their meat in there.

JH: Have you been to it?

SC: Yes. It took us a long time to find it.

GC: The entrance structure has largely collapsed at this point so you can't get very far back into it. But you can sit in the mouth and man, you feel that cold air rolling down there.

RM: Was it a deep cave? Did it go way into the mountain?

GC: I don't think it does.

RM: It must have some openings if the air is blowing through.

GC: There's air moving through it and it's evaporative cooling. If you've got enough water and you've got air moving past it, it's amazing. It was good refrigeration.

But those are the properties as you go up the canyon. Then you're back into BLM public land and the headwaters of Hot Creek drainage and McIntyre Summit into the north end of Stone Cabin Valley. Down a bit south thataways you make a right-hand turn and go over the other summit, McCann Pass.

RM: How far from the Clifford Ranch in Stone Cabin Valley are you?

GC: The Cliffords are about 40 miles as the crow flies.

SC: I think Manhattan's 60, something like that.

GC: Belmont's about 40, actually. You have to drive 100 miles instead of 40 via Highway 6.

SC: It's a lot shorter route to Manhattan than going down to Highway 6 and going all the way around. There's "dinosaur teeth" up that road that take out your tires. Those rocks are shaped like dinosaur teeth and let me tell you, talk about flat tires. They look like shark teeth or dinosaur teeth.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: You've got a really interesting house here. Would you discuss its history and construction?

GC: The house was constructed as the mine office in, again, the early to mid-1860s. It's made of adobe brick, locally made and manufactured. All the lumber was hauled in from wherever it came from—it was quite an endeavor. I guess some of it came from Railroad Valley because you had lumber mills in there.

JH: Yes, we had three lumber mills in Railroad Valley.

GC: All the wood and the rafters are held together by square nails an inch to six inches long. They are all hand made. I think this was much earlier than the mills in Railroad Valley.

RM: Do you think they were made here?

GC: I suspect they came in in a barrel, like everything else. [Laughs]

RM: The ceilings are very high, we might note. What is that?

SC: It's 10'6" or something like that.

RM: So it was the mine office? And when the mine closed?

GC: It was abandoned. We've got it configured now with two bedrooms, a dining room, a living room, and the kitchen, which is an add-on we all put up.

SC: We took down the old kitchen.

GC: Right, but that was an add-on itself.

SC: Yes, it was—single board on a rock wall.

RM: So it was a multi-room office. Talk about the thickness of the walls and the interior walls.

GC: At this point, all the interior walls other than this wall right here are adobe brick. This is a frame wall. The reason it's a frame wall is that when we took possession of the place in 1972, it had been unoccupied for over 40 years. It had suffered severe flood damage, the roof was gone, and there was severe damage from wind and rain and snow. This interior adobe wall was loose—you could push it and it would go back and forth. The front of the house had been collapsing and we took this interior wall down and used the bricks to rebuild the front of the house. The other interior walls are all adobe brick and they're about six inches thick. The exterior walls are double adobe brick and their wall thicknesses are roughly 15 inches, 16 inches. It's a substantial place of adobe brick.

The add-on we did is a beige-orange cinderblock slump stone to make it blend a little bit with the old adobe. We don't know what the source of the clay for the adobe was. I have looked—not extensively, but I've looked around—to see if I could find a quarry and it doesn't jump out at me. Obviously there was some good clay somewhere nearby.

JH: There was a lot of brick-making in Railroad Valley. There was a big brickworks by Crowsnest.

GC: Did they make adobe?

JH: I don't think it was adobe; it's all fired.

GC: This is unfired adobe brick.

SC: So it melts. The fireplace box was unfired adobe.

GC: Yes, it's subject to moisture damage. We've got some real serious problems at the front of the house right now that we need to address.

RM: Talk about the challenges of making the building a living space.

GC: The fireplace behind you is a good example. That's all nice fired brick, right?

Treasure hunters had come in using their devices and figured, “Oh, there’s treasure buried underneath the bricks in the fireplace” so they destroyed the fireplace. We rebuilt it.

SC: The wood is original, the trim and everything probably, and the bookcases.

GC: It’s just that unoccupied property experiences the ravages of time and weather and cattle taking shelter and the treasure hunters.

SC: And the windows were broken out.

GC: We replaced all but two of the windows. This window and this (living room) window and the four in the front are manufactured. My cousin Carl was a craftsman. He put the windows together in his shop in Genoa. They’re single-hung, with only the bottoms moving. The windows in the dining room are much older. They’re a double-hung window and are not original to the house; they came as salvage by my mother from some other place. They’ve been reglazed.

SC: Trimmed and fit. Carl was a master carpenter. He could do about anything.

GC: His name was Carl J. Flacke. Carl married my mother’s sister Libby Crouse’s daughter Hope Vassar. Hope grew up a good part of her life in this country. They lived for a year or so at Danville on the west side of Little Fish Lake Valley. They lived in Tybo, they lived pretty much all over in mining camps and Eugene, Oregon, part of the time, and Henderson for a while. Hope was a mover and a shaker, working for Nevada Child Services and a multitude of volunteer efforts. Hope’s father, Roscoe Vassar, is from the Kelsey family in Monitor Valley. I’ve got old pictures of the Kelsey family.

RM: Are they related to Little Kelsay [note different spelling] in Smoky Valley?

GC: I would not be surprised if they weren’t. But anyway, Roscoe died suddenly. He was the first baby born in Tonopah. We picked that up in the *Tonopah Times Bonanza*—

the passage of Roscoe Vassar, first born boy in Tonopah. He died in L.A. and he had a very good friend, Ralph Cruose; they were buddies forever. Ralph married Roscoe's widow to help her out and raise the kids.

As I said earlier, the ownership of Upper Hot Creek Ranch remained with my grandmother, Elizabeth Williams Barndt. But through a life estate, she transferred management responsibilities and use of the property to her sister-in-law, Helen DuPont Williams, to bail her out of financial difficulties. Helen DuPont Williams, with her two sons, Joe and Bob, ran the ranch until the 1950s—the ranch now being Upper Hot Creek and the lower Hot Creek ranches, as one entity.

The lower ranch was sold in, I'm going to say, 1950. Jeanne, you remember it as '52 but maybe you're thinking of the people who bought the ranch at that time because I'm pretty sure that Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary moved to Gardnerville in 1950.

When my grandmother died in November 1972, possession of the ranch returned to Bessie's heirs. At that time there were three heirs—my mother, her elder sister, “Libby” (Elizabeth), and her younger sister, Agnes, or “Sammie.” Their brother, Victor, also known as Dick, had sold his interest to Libby and Sonia at some point when they were involved with the lawsuit with Cal Worthington. [Laughs] Dick didn't want to have to pay for any of the lawsuit, so he sold his interest to the girls. Ownership has since stayed with another two generations of Bessie's heirs and it's never been out of the family.

JH: And then you got this ranch. How did you end up with Alice's part of the life estate?

GC: Alice never had a part of the life estate. When my grandmother died and Mother took possession of the property, the first thing she did was go across to a campground in

Carson Valley. There was a group of hippies, acquaintances from Sonia's long stint managing the Minden Episcopal Church thrift store, who were camped out there. She said, "I want you to pack up your stuff and go out to Hot Creek and camp out and take possession of the property. We need to take possession of the property." Well, from that day forward, Mom was actively in possession.

As a younger individual, I had spent a lot of time out here. Even after the Barndts were gone from Tybo and the Williamses were gone from down there, Dad and I used to come out and go hunting. We were drawn back and back and back, so I have a very strong affinity for the place. Swainia and I worked side by side with my mom, trying to get the place beat back into shape.

SC: We spent every holiday, every three-day weekend here. We spent weeks in the summertime with our two kids, Sandi and Alan. In '72, Alan was less than two years old, Sandi four. We'd come out and would just work and work and work. That was the beginning of what our pattern has been for 38 years. As our son said, we quit camping when we started coming out here; actually, we camped here for several years—we just had tents; there was no place to stay. I'd cook outside with the wind blowing through the trees. Cousin Tim Barndt would come down from Tybo where he was living near his dad and help Gil work on the roof and so on. They scavenged that plywood from the dump at Faultless.

GC: In '77, we put in a pipeline—tapped the springs up the canyon to bring water to the place. I designed the system, bought the materials, arranged for the Caterpillar, the backhoe, to dig it and got people lined up to work and all. Not long after that, my mom came and said, "I want to put the ranch in your name."

I looked at her and said, "Whoa, you don't really want to do that. You're going to

cause me all kinds of problems.” I had never had any designs on the place’s ownership.

She said, “It is my portion of the place and I’m going to do with it what I want!”

I said, “Oh, God, Mother. I’m going to pay so dearly for this.” And I have.

SC: She showed up with the papers for us to sign.

GC: My eldest brother was upset because as a kid, he had planned to someday run the ranch with Cousin “Kay,” Roscoe K. Vassar. This had been a dream that they had when they were living at the Dugan place in 1934.

My sister Alice took probably greater offense than Dave. As a young child, Alice went to live with Bessie for a couple of years and my mother had difficulty getting Alice back. Alice had two mothers, her biological mother and her grandmother. She called them both “Mother.” Alice was very much hurt and offended by Mother’s action on the deed. I had nothing to do with it. I doubt I will ever convince any of them that I had nothing to do with it.

SC: Sonia shocked us. She showed up at the trailer here and asked us to come in. She said, “I have something to show you.” She had this thing with a blue legal covering around it, unfolded it, and said, “This is the deed. Your name’s on it. I’ve already done it.”

JH: So Alice decided to buy Moores Station to be out here?

GC: No. Alice and Rex tried to buy the Dugan place after Melinda Moffatt had gone to up at Tahoe in her Glenbrook house. Her ex-husband, Les, had divested himself from the Dugan place and it went on the auction block on the Tonopah Courthouse steps.

A couple of years before, Andy and Jeff Kerbel had come through this country. They were hot spring buffs and they went to every hot spring that they could find. One of the places they’d stopped at was the Dugan place. I don’t know how they tracked the fact

that it was coming up for auction, but they showed up at the courthouse in Tonopah.

Alice and Rex were there to bid on the Dugan place. Jeff and Andy outbid them.

JH: Oh, dear.

GC: Oh, dear. That was a very traumatic loss for Alice because she had spent a couple of her young years living up there with her grandmother and family and she very much wanted it. But anyway, the Kerbels own the Dugan place. They have made marvelous improvements to it and have been good neighbors.

Alice cast about looking for a place out here—she has a strong desire to maintain her roots here. And the old Moores Station property became available from the Hot Creek ranch owner, an ex-football player. He sold them Moores Station and a piece of property there. He did not sell them the springs or any water rights—that's owned by Hot Creek. And the ponds up there are still the lower ranch's. But like I say, I suffered through, and still suffer through, a great deal of pain for my mother's action; I didn't seek it out.

SC: We just got so involved with it. And his mother watched us get so involved with restoring the buildings and working out here. My supposition is that she realized that we would probably be pretty good caretakers of the place and continue to restore buildings and so on.

GC: Another thing that hurt Alice was that Rex, God bless his soul, had put a lot of energy into the issue of grazing privileges, making sure that the property ended up with its fair share of grazing privileges.

SC: It is what it is.

JH: That's right.

SC: One thing that's been interesting is that our kids grew up coming out here all through their youth and helping out with the place and learning how to mix concrete or

mortar, lay bricks, different things that my engineer husband seems to be able to figure out how to do with ease. [Chuckles] Uncle Ralph, Elizabeth Crouse's husband, was working up at Lake Tahoe at the Huntington estate, which had a carriage house above a garage, and he remodeled that. They took this clear pine paneling out of that. Cousin Tim Barndt put the paneling up here and we had various young people, teenager types, come with us and tear down the old ceiling lathe and adobe wall plaster. We ended up getting ten-foot-long sheet rock and putting it up.

Then Sonia found this guy, D. Cook, who did odd jobs. He helped out with the reconstruction. He got a lot of the sheet rock up and helped with taping and texturing it. We just had a little white gas cook stove here in the dining room for a long time before we ever got around to making the kitchen and the bath. That took three years to build. You know, it's the concrete and then the slump stone (cinderblock) and then the roof—it just took a long time, everybody's weekends and weeks at a time.

When Gil's mother's family was coming here in the early 1900s—she was born in '06, so it would have been over probably a ten, 15-year period—they always stayed in this house when they came out in the summertime. She used to tell us stories about how they lived in Berkeley, California. They had a big mansion there because her father was still working for “mining interests” and he worked for the mines and lobbied in D.C. They spent a couple years back there but they would always end up here in the summertime.

Sonia and her siblings would be going to school and taking ballet lessons and whatever else in Berkeley or in D.C., and then in the summertimes their father would drop them all off here. He would then go to work. They would take the train from Oakland up to Reno and then another train to Tonopah and then hire a car. The car would

bring them out to Hot Creek, to this house. So she had a tremendous affinity for this house.

Gil mentioned that looters had come in and dug out the fireplace. Sonia said that when they were fixing the house up when she was a child, she and her brother threw nails in there and she figures that somebody was bringing a metal detector in and those nails made them think there was treasure.

So she had an affinity for this house. When it came back to her and her sisters, she was so adamant about saving it. The contractor cousin, Carl, could see the massive work needed to really restore it—more than he had time for because he had his own construction company in Genoa. Sonia really was the initial person to say, “No, we’re not tearing it down and starting over again.”

Gil’s cousin Hope, Carl’s wife, backed her up. She would say, “We need to save this house.” And ultimately we did. I mean, it has issues even today with the adobe not holding up, things like that. We have places where it’s melting down when moisture comes off the roof and the rocks out on the west side are starting to erode and starting to break down.

RM: Is that because of water contact?

SC: Yes, like snowmelt. So we still have some saving-the-structure issues we need to address, cracks in the walls and the foundation that need to be shored up essentially at this point on both the east and west sides. (I say that, but we’re not quite true to the compass here. The canyon takes a jog and everybody thinks it’s east and west, but it isn’t quite, really.) All old places seem to require lots of maintenance and repairs.

As I was saying, because of his being an engineer, my husband is able to figure out how to do things. He took time off of work and electrified the house a few years ago.

He set up the solar system and plumbed for the gas off the big tank out here, the rental propane tank. He's done a lot of the niceties that everybody enjoys out here now. He's put in a lot of work and we frankly have put a lot of personal money into this place in setting up those systems. It's tremendous. When you're dealing with two elderly women, there's not much extra income coming from there. They had Social Security income, and Libby had her teacher's retirement, but that was about it.

Sonia really wanted to save the house. She was just adamant. She ran a thrift store for the Episcopal Church of Gardnerville for many years and she collected a lot of stuff. She rented a U-Haul and had a friend load up all the stuff that she knew we were going to need out here. They backed it up to the house—there weren't any windows and we were still fixing it up—but she brought all this stuff out.

RM: About what year was that?

SC: Late 1970s. She also brought out the 52-foot trailer when we were living in Washington, D.C., in '75 so we didn't have to camp out and cook over a white gas stove and sleep in a tent. That was the first kitchen we had. So we shared that. We even shared it with a skunk one night that somehow got in. [Laughs] That thing is like a magnet for rodents. Gil worked really hard over the years to put different kinds of mesh wiring over every orifice from the bottom side of that trailer to keep the packrats and the mice and the skunks out.

RM: Was your encounter with the skunk traumatic?

SC: That's an interesting story, if you want to hear it.

RM: I love stories.

SC: My mother and my niece and nephew and our two kids were here. We were sleeping at the east end of the trailer and I heard this "skritch, skritch, skritch" sound. It

was bigger than a packrat sound. By then I knew what a packrat “skritch, skritch” and a mouse “skritch, skritch” sounded like in the night. This was little tappy toes, a bigger sound.

I got up and I tippytoed past sleeping bags—all the kids were asleep on the floor—down to the opposite end of the trailer and there’s this little knee-hole desk that has drawers in it and cutouts underneath the bottom drawers. I had the flashlight in my hand and I bent over and looked and I saw a black and white tail. I went tippytoe backwards, opened the sliding glass door, and went back to bed. When I got up in the morning, it was gone. I was so relieved. If that thing had let loose with the dog and the kids and my mother sleeping in there, oh, my God. It would’ve been so awful.

I have one more little skunk story. My 14-year-old granddaughter, Kailey, was here helping paint at age six, as our children in the family like to do and earn a little money. When she was little we were in the bathhouse singing in the shower and then we were singing in the hot tub. Every time we would sing—we were doing some aria kind of stuff and some scat, like Ella Fitzgerald—we’d smell a little skunk odor. We would be quiet for a while and then we’d get going again and would smell a little skunk again. I hear from other people who have a good ear that my singing’s not very good, but he was the ultimate critic. [Laughs]

RM: You had a harsh critic. Do you have a lot of skunks here?

SC: Not too many. And we’ve only seen one porcupine.

GC: One porcupine and two ringtail cats.

RM: That’s interesting. Now, you were going to give us the details on your name, which is unusual.

SC: “Swainia” was an attempt at the phonetic spelling of the Spanish word *sueña*,

from the verb *sonar*, to sleep or dream—I guess I slept a lot as an infant. But my parents decided that because there were no tildes, the little curlicue over the n, on the typewriters in the U.S., they would spell it phonetically.

RM: Did you dream?

SC: I'm not sure whether I'm a sleepyhead or a dreamer or a combination of the two.

CHAPTER FOUR

JH: Gil, you were going to tell us how your mother and father got married.

GC: I said earlier that my dad was born in Framingham, Massachusetts, and he was one of six children. His father was a naval officer, commanded a ship for a while, and wound up as naval attaché to the US Embassy in Madrid. He took the whole family with him to Spain and my dad enrolled in the University of Madrid and studied there for a couple of years. After college, because of the connection through the consulates and the attaché position and his gift for languages, my dad wound up working for the State Department and became a vice consul in Bucharest, Romania, and his dad wound up in Holland. Then my dad got a transfer out of central Europe to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and was vice consul there.

Now, as we said, my mother spent all her summers here. She never went to university and I'm not sure that she ever finished high school. She did, however, go to ballet school.

SC: She told me she didn't finish high school, though she was a voracious reader and seeker of knowledge in her later years.

GC: She studied with the Victor Koslov Ballet Company out of Los Angeles and became quite an accomplished dancer.

SC: She left the ranch at 15 to do this. They danced in silent films, on the Hollywood Bowl stage, and in opera productions.

GC: Right. She danced in L.A. with Koslov, and then Koslov took the troupe to Europe and they danced all over Europe and came back from Europe through South America. My mother never did correspond very well with her father, Victor, when she

was in L.A.. Her parents had divorced, but she was still very close to her father. She hadn't written for a while so her father wired the embassy in Buenos Aires and asked if they could check on the condition and status of his daughter. Well, the embassy sent over a young vice consul and he was my father. [Laughs] So that's where they met, in Buenos Aires.

Then, how did they get back to Hot Creek? Mother was a dancer and in those days the foreign service was pretty much a fiefdom. I mean, their employee rules and regulations were loose—you served at the pleasure of the ambassador and the civil service was not what it is today. Anyway, the ambassador, Dumbarton, took offense to my dad marrying this “dancer.”

RM: So he married her there? It must have been a quick courtship.

GC: Yes, it was. Dad was kind of drummed out of the foreign service because of his marriage to my mom.

RM: How old was she?

SC: I think she was about 23.

GC: After they were married, they had gone to Los Angeles to visit her father and meet people and I guess they were headed back to Argentina when the foreign service called Dad off and drummed him out of the corps. They wound up in New York City during the height of the Depression in 1931, '32.

SC: They were there in '28-'29 because he became a stockbroker just before the crash. And there's a story there, too. Post-stock market crash, she essentially supported the family with her dancing in New York, and she traveled to Chicago. She traveled with a ballet company and supported them during the Depression. At least two of his sisters ended up living with them in their apartment in New York and she was supporting the

whole bunch during the beginning of the Depression, after the crash.

She told me she already had a couple of babies and she was so tired with the traveling and the kids and everything that she decided she needed to come back to Nevada. She brought the kids and came back to the ranch and eventually, within some months, he followed them and that's how he ended up out here.

JH: So did he bring his two sisters, Eleanor and Mary?

GC: He didn't bring them, they came later.

GC: Mary married Joe Williams.

JH: And Eleanor married a Mr. Rhodes.

SC: Mr. Rhodes wasn't around long. You know, that's a story from another generation.

JH: I remember Janet Rhodes really well.

SC: Janet is the one who introduced us in 1962 at UNR.

GC: And Eleanor taught at Twin Springs.

RM: How many kids was she teaching there?

JH: When we used to go it was the three Fallini kids, Chi and Joe and Virginia.

GC: Didn't Tad (J. T. Williams IV) go to school there, too?

JH: He might have. I remember Joe and Chi and Virginia. And then there was Janet, and my sister Carole and I would be there. There were probably a couple other kids, too.

RM: And this was when?

JH: Oh, gosh, the early and mid-'50s.

SC: The early '50s.

JH: Yes, about '53.

SC: Going back to Gil's parents, we've always felt that somebody should write

Sonia's story because she was so unique in everything that she did. We could go on and tell stories about her all afternoon.

RM: I love stories because they capture the essence of things.

SC: Once Sonia and the kids got out here, they stayed at the lower ranch with the cousins.

GC: Were they at the lower ranch or were they at Dugan?

SC: They may have actually moved into the Dugan place shortly after.

JH: They were staying with Bessie?

GC: Yes.

SC: But they moved here and there was no source of income. She wasn't dancing, he wasn't working. Well, he buckarooed for a while, which was totally foreign to him.

Obviously he's learning on the job.

RM: How can you learn to be a buckaroo at that stage in your life?

SC: He was an athlete. He played tennis and golfed a lot and I suspect he was rather strong. But at that point Sonia made a contact in Tonopah, where the WPA had some projects going. She got him hooked up with one in Tonopah through family friends and cousins and what today we would call networking, old-fashioned networking. She introduced him to the people in Tonopah and he got a job for the WPA. He had responsibility for all the WPA Nye County road projects.

GC: He did that for three or four years I guess and he wound up in Carson City working for the bridge department; they moved there.

SC: And Sonia told me that she had a cousin who was governor for a while, Charlie Russell. Anyway, she contacted the current governor, whoever he was, in Carson City, and eased the way for Gil's dad to get a job in Carson City with the highway department.

They were living in Genoa at that point and he took a civil engineering, structural engineering, correspondence course and was able to pass all the exams and eventually became a bridge engineer for the state of Nevada.

RM: No kidding. Do you know the correspondence school he got his course through?

GC: ICS, International Correspondence Schools.

RM: That is a really interesting story; it certainly shows you the twists and turns life can take, the role chance plays in things.

GC: Yes. They went from one end of the world and country to the other. And they met in Buenos Aires. My dad was quite a linguist. He spoke seven different languages without accent. He had that hard-wired brain for it. He spoke French and German and Spanish and Italian and Romanian and a little bit of Chinese and English, too. [Laughs]

SC: And he was learning Russian in his later years.

JH: When did he die?

GC: In July '76.

SC: The family actually lived in Carson City for a while before Genoa.

GC: Right across from the governor's mansion.

JH: When was that?

SC: Before Gil was born. She was teaching ballet in Carson City so she did help out again. She ran a little ballet school out of the big house. The girls in the family all learned how to dance ballet.

RM: Gil, where did you grow up and how much time did you spend down here at Hot Creek as a child and youth?

GC: In 1940, I believe, Mom had identified a piece of property. They'd been living in Carson City for about three years. Grandmother Bessie lived in Carson City at the same

time. There were 13 acres for sale in Genoa and they just had to have it. They bought the piece of property in town and moved the five kids out here. I was born there on the property in '43 so I lived there from '43 to '51. In 1951 Mom and Dad got divorced and I wound up living with my dad and moved into one of my aunt Eleanor's houses in Genoa at first.

JH: She's his dad's teacher-sister.

GC: Then about a year later, Dad and I moved to Carson City. I would've been about ten at that point. I went to grammar school, sixth through eighth grade, in Carson City, went to Carson City High School, and graduated Carson High and from there, moved out and went to the university at UNR.

How much time did I spend here? If you added up all the days as a youth, up to about nine or ten years old, probably not more than a couple months here, a couple months in Tybo, total. We would be there a week, weekends, long weekends, bits and snapshots spread over time. Enough time to be fully comfortable with the terrain, with the people, and know the ins and outs as a youngster will at that age. We came to Hot Creek until Joe and Mary sold the place, and the next couple years we spent a lot of time in Tybo with Dick and Martha and the seven kids. We'd go over and visit for a week at a time and wander around the mine shafts, go hunting, do things we probably ought not to have done.

RM: Kids will do that.

GC: Dangerous things. Scary.

SC: I have to tell one more little story. When I met my husband, maybe the fall after we were married in 1963, he decided that I should come out and see this country because he had such a strong tie to it. Well, we dragged sleeping bags and cooking stuff and food

out here. He wanted to hunt a little bit, so it was in the fall; it was quite cool. The Dugan place was abandoned at that point. There was nobody living there and it was just open. There were these old iron beds with bedsprings. I'm grimacing—you can't see it on the tape, but I'm grimacing because we slept in that house with all those packrats and those mice running all over, all night long. And I'm still with him. I guess it was a test for Swainia, the "rodent test." Is she going to be able to handle this? I have to say I do not have an affinity for packrats or mice. [Laughter]

RM: Were they actually running around in the room?

SC: Oh, absolutely.

RM: Over your sleeping bag, maybe?

SC: Of course.

GC: Here's a Tybo story. I must have been no more than about six. We had gone up to Tybo to go hunting—Mom and Dad, Alice, me, and I think my next older brother, Bob. Alice and Vicki Jo, Dick and Martha's oldest, and I slept in the main room of the big red house—it was fixed up as a big bedroom. Dad and Bob had gone off hunting and Mom had gone with them.

I got up not much later than after first light—I don't know if it's 7:00 in the morning at that time of year. I walked out the front door and was standing on the front porch. Now, Alice and Vicki Jo are in the big double bed, sound asleep. I look over to my left and there's a series of steps and handrails. And curled up in the corner by the steps is a bobcat and it had one of the house cats.

RM: Oh, my lord. Eating it?

GC: Yes, it killed it and it's going to have breakfast. I go running back into the bedroom, "Alice, Vicki Jo, there's a bobcat outside."

“Oh, no, go away. Don’t bother us.”

I thought, “Well, did I really see one?” I went back outside and I looked again and it looked up at me and growled and snarled. I’m not liking this. I run back and say, “I’m not kidding. There is a bobcat out at the base of the stairs. You have to come look.” And I grabbed a talcum powder can and they followed me out and looked over the edge and there’s the bobcat. I threw the powder can down at the bobcat and it went under the house. [Laughs]

I went running to Uncle Dick’s house, “Uncle Dick, we’ve got a bobcat under the house.” So he came over with a flashlight and his .25-.35 rifle. He crawled under the big red house with that flashlight and rifle and we were all standing outside waiting, listening; there was nothing, just quiet. It went on that way for a long time and all of a sudden there’s a rifle shot and here comes Dick and he’s dragging this bobcat. And it was a huge, huge cat. It had killed the favorite house cat. Tim and Jim and Steven and I hung that bobcat by his feet in a tree out by the house and proceeded to officially punish it with sticks for the tragedy it had visited upon us by killing the house cat.

RM: The same thing happened to us at Reveille. A bobcat came down and killed our house cat in the winter.

SC: Did you grow up in Reveille?

RM: We spent quite a bit of time there for several summers and part of one winter.

RM: Is there anything else we should include about Hot Creek?

GC: If you haven’t read it, I suggest *Martha and the Doctor*.

RM: I have it, I haven’t read it yet.

GC: It will give you that early-day perspective.

RM: And it’s pretty reliable?

GC: Well, it's her firsthand account. It's her diaries. My great-grandmother is in it, and J. T. Williams, and the relationships that went on in town. It's really a good book. If you're going to do a story about Tybo, you really need to read it.

RM: Yes, I will. In fact, Jeanne bought it for me.

GC: There are just all kinds of stories. My mom always told stories about her days on the ranch. Swainia mentioned earlier that Shoshones worked on the ranch. They dug the ditches and built the fences. Mom always told a story about one of the young Indian ladies who worked in the kitchen for Great-grandmother. She went out to the woodpile one day to get some wood for the stove and reached out to grab a piece of wood and got hit on the finger by a rattlesnake. She very calmly walked over to the chopping block, picked up the axe, and removed her finger.

SC: Yes, she knew that otherwise she might die.

RM: What a story.

SC: There are interesting stories about how they processed the pigs from the ranch. After they killed them they brought them up and dipped them in the hot springs to get rid of the hide and the hair. It's difficult to deal with, I guess, when you're butchering a pig. There were a lot of stories like that. I guess they dunked chickens in the hot springs, too, to remove the feathers.

RM: What did they call it, scalding?

GC: This water's 196 degrees so it is definitely going to do the job.

RM: What year did she chop off the finger, would you say?

GC: I'm going to guess it would be 1890, some time in there.

RM: It's a long way to medical care if they'd even had it then.

GC: A long way in distance and time.

SC: That's a point we've made with all the nieces and nephews and cousins and their kids who come out here. We're so far from town—you saw that "warning list" on the refrigerator that shows how far it is from town. I think too often the younger people don't have a perspective for that. If you get hurt, what happens?

RM: Dial 911. That's what everybody thinks.

SC: Exactly. So far there have been very few true accidents that have caused somebody to go seek medical care.

GC: A number of years ago, on one of the sales of the ranch down below, a backer for one of the potential buyers insisted on going into the hot spring enclosure. I mean, we've got barbed wire fence around it to keep people and animals out of the springs but he insisted. It's 196-degree water. He went into the spring area and broke through the crust on the edge and went in up to the top of his thigh. Well, they airlifted him out to the hospital.

SC: He ended up going back to Texas and he was no longer the backer for . . .

GC: The Rogers family, wasn't it?

SC: Yes, the Rogers family. He was their backer; Rogers had been a judge down in west Texas or thereabouts. He withdrew his financing so the judge lost the ranch.

GC: And we've lost a lot of dogs over the years in Hot Creek.

SC: Too many.

GC: We came out with some friends a number of years ago and they brought two of their dogs. First thing I do when I get here, if someone has a dog, I take them down to Hot Creek. I make them put the dog's paw in the water. It hurts like hell.

SC: It's 160 degrees at that point.

GC: I had a work friend take his two dogs down there and dunk a paw and they didn't

like it at all. One of the dogs was an old big red Irish Setter and he had a mind of his own. Our friend was helping me on some electrical stuff back here and his wife said, “Where’s the dog?” She started calling for Dusty.

SC: She had let him loose. She thought it should have been all right after a day.

GC: But Dusty went down to the hot springs, went through the fence and went for a swim. Our friend just loved that old dog and he tried to pull Dusty out and he slipped in the spring’s crust up to just below his knee. Swainia packed his leg in ice water in a bucket and we sent him off to the Tonopah hospital.

SC: We doused him with vinegar first because it works as an astringent and it will help stop the burning, and then put his foot in the bucket and put in ice and ice water. The doctors told him that the only reason he didn’t have to have major skin grafting was because of what we did to stop the burning. Months later, he was within three weeks of having to have grafts on his shin. He was healing for five months and had multiple doctors’ visits and so forth.

We stress safety. If you don’t have absolute control over your dog, then tie it up. But it continues to happen. People get a little bit complacent. There’s a fence, but it’s not all fenced and dogs get through it. It’s a sad thing. A puppy should never, ever, be out around the hot creek because they have no sense. With a dog, it’s usually the people who don’t have control over the dog who are making the poor decision, or poor choice, of not controlling it.

RM: Did people worry about smaller children a lot?

SC: Yes. Gil’s grandparents built a stockade fence around the adobe house to keep cattle and kids out. We keep a very close eye on them. We don’t let our grandkids even go to the bathhouse alone until they get to about Kailey’s age, about 14, or if we’ve got

an older one who can take the younger ones down there. Even the hot tub can be dangerous because it's hard to adjust the temperature. We've had people say, "Oh, it's too hot." They get down there and it's too hot and they turn the hot water off and then the next person who goes down finds it totally cold.

GC: And if it's cold, if they turn only the hot on, it's 130-plus degrees.

SC: We've had that happen. One of our siblings went down and it wasn't warm enough for her so she turned off the cold water and got in and it was fine but she forgot to turn the cold water back on. I went down there and it was 120-plus degrees. We stress safety, and that's why we wrote up that list on the fridge about how far it is to get any help.

One of the cousins had an accident on one of our ATVs a couple years ago sans helmet. He face-planted on the rocks and dirt and they took him by ambulance to Tonopah and then airlifted him to Reno.

GC: The total bill was \$40,000 by the time he added in the cost of getting to Tonopah and the airlift.

SC: So it's no minor thing.

RM: Absolutely.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Now, what about Tybo? How does your family fit in there?

GC: As I indicated early in our discussion, my grandmother's husband, Victor, came to this country to run the mines at Tybo. Just up the canyon from the brick general store on the right hand side in Tybo is the big red house. It was a magnificent structure; it used to have a porch all the way around it. My grandmother and Victor lived in that house and the kids, my mom and Uncle Dick and Aunt Libby and Aunt Sammy, spent part of their time there as well.

So my recollections of Tybo are focused on that big red house because that's where Grandmother lived in Tybo. It was really unfortunate when the mines kind of fell apart at Tybo in the 1930s. The salvage people and vandals came in and they stripped the big red house of all its fine furnishings and fixtures—the stove, everything. Just unbelievable. Later, an Austin antiques dealer gradually took their old linens from a trunk in a locked shed in Tybo.

My mother maintained ownership of the red house over the years. Her sister Libby had a house just down the hill and brother Dick had the next house up the canyon so it was the three properties; sister Sammy didn't have her own place. The building deteriorated over time and when we finally got the ranch back here, there was the opportunity to spend more time up here and try and stabilize this structure. We really didn't have the time or energy to work on the Tybo house, too.

Eventually, Mother wound up giving it to Alice and letting her carry through with the major changes and repairs. So Alice maintains that now. Dick and the kids, his family, lived in the second house up the canyon from there. I can remember going to

breakfast and it was always hot porridge with canned milk. [Laughs]

RM: That's what they served then. We did the same thing at Reveille.

GC: There was no refrigeration. And we'd have dry toast or toast with butter or jam. It was pretty simple fare. Lunches would be the same—bread and butter and peanut butter. Life was pretty straightforward. Dick stuck it out for a very long time in Tybo.

When the mines ceased operating he spent a good deal of his efforts in salvage. He went through all the old mining operations salvaging copper and steel and aluminum, whatever was available. He'd take the boys with him, and I went more than one time, to different mining camps to see what we could salvage that day. He'd periodically make a run to, I guess, Ely and sell the salvage materials. He also would lease prospects to companies. This was from the late '40s until '51, '52. Dick, as a young man, had gone to West Point and he decided military life wasn't for him. He said, "I want to go back home." He came back home and was 20 or 22 years old and he never left Tybo again.

JH: Did he die up there?

GC: I think it was in Tonopah. The last few months, he lived with his son Tim and Tim's wife, Diane, at Base Camp since they worked there. Tim knows a lot of Tybo history.

JH: Is Dick buried up there?

GC: He's buried right down here at the Hot Creek Cemetery. But Tybo was his passion, his love. I'm not sure where he met Martha Dwyer but she was his second wife; Vaughn was his first. Charles and Richard were by the first marriage, so there's nine children, actually. Dick and she divorced I think in 1930-something. He met Martha Dwyer and he got married to her and she ran a self-staffed, self-kidded school. [Laughs] Their kids were Vicky Jo, Timothy, James, Steven, Peter, Christopher, and Debby.

SC: A one-room schoolhouse.

GC: All the students basically were hers.

JH: Was it the brick building?

SC: It's the first building on the right as you go up into Tybo. It's white clapboard.

RM: When would this have been?

GC: I would guess '45 to '52.

JH: The brick building they call the schoolhouse, was that a schoolhouse?

GC: That was the original Tybo schoolhouse. But it's way up canyon. That's got a protective roof over it now so it doesn't deteriorate any further.

JH: Somebody bought that.

SC: Was that Bill Wahl?

GC: Yes, Bill Wahl. He also saved old Pedro's house. When you go up the canyon, it's on the left-hand side just before you come to the schoolhouse. It's got a new roof and all that. That was Pedro's house.

JH: We visited the Barndt house and stayed overnight there. There were big beds and lots of rooms.

GC: Yes, all kinds of rooms. There had to be about ten rooms in that house. As an interesting hunting story, one of the biggest deer I've ever seen in my life I saw with my dad. I had to be seven years old. We went up Tybo Canyon and he shot a deer way up on the mountainside with a rack you wouldn't believe—there were horns all over it. He wounded it and we tracked it all day.

Finally he gave up and took me back to Tybo and he and my brother went out the next day to try to pick up the trail again and find it. They never did. Biggest deer I've ever seen. A couple of times we got up close to it as we were going through the trees and

sagebrush. On the way up, before Dad shot the deer, I came across some rocks I thought were really, really pretty so I picked up a couple and put them in my pocket. The next morning when my brother Bob and Dad went to try and track that deer down, I took this rock out of my pocket and showed it to Uncle Dick.

“Where’d you find that? Tell me where you found that.” Well, I tried my best to explain where I got it but he was all excited about this rock that I had. I was about six years old, seven years old. [Laughs]

JH: Uncle Dick was always prospecting.

SC: Always prospecting. He always had his eye out. You’d ask him if you could have a sample in his later years. He had a shed up canyon from the house with all his mining and prospecting equipment and tumblers and stuff like that. Our kids would ask him, “Well, can we have a rock?”

He’d say, “You’re going to high-grade me again. You just want to high-grade me.” [Laughter] But he’d always let the kids in there and they’d always get a pretty rock with some kind of ore in it.

SC: When we were over here trying to restore this place Dick would come down for dinner and he’d always bring his black light. He’d walk around the area and show the kids where the rocks would glow in the black light and they’d be in awe: “Oh, look at that!”

GC: For Uncle Dick, rare beef was not to be eaten. [Laughs] If there’s any moisture left in that steak it was not done enough. Dry as leather.

RM: I heard a ghost story about the Hot Creek house. And you know, everybody loves a ghost story. What is your take on that story?

GC: I keep hearing stories about people who’ve heard stories about there being ghosts

in the house, they've seen them at night.

RM: What do you make of that?

GC: I don't make much of it. I don't believe in the supernatural. There's a rational explanation for what everybody sees and a lot of what people see is in their imagination only; they're mental constructs. It doesn't mean they're any less real to them.

SC: There were some people who were essentially cowboy caretaker types working for a company that owned the ranch. For many, many years the people who owned the ranch did not live on it; they always lived somewhere else—whether it was Russell up in Idaho or Baldarelli in Auburn, California. I guess Russell's daughter lived here. Which one was the banker up in Montana?

GC: Peterson.

SC: Right. So they didn't live on the ranch. They bought it as an investment and unfortunately the equipment and the buildings were always overplayed a bit in the sale so people would get in here and they didn't have the financial backing to make up the difference between the overplay and the reality and a lot of people lost the ranch. This one couple, the gal did tell me that she thought she'd seen J. T. Williams in the turret room in the window more than once. And people talk about noises—well, the wind comes through and the house is old.

JH: And the rats.

GC: And there are rats.

RM: Do you have any juicy ghost stories from up there?

SC: No hauntings, other than the sighting of him up in that window at the lower ranch and supposedly "sounds" in the attic that might be attributed to a ghost. But it makes a good story. People like to tell that kind of story. Now, I could tell you a story about mice

and rats, mice in particular. Oh, my God. When was it?

GC: Nine or ten years ago.

SC: We had a mouse infestation.

JH: Everybody did.

SC: Cowboy Bob was caretaking down at the lower ranch at the time. It was before the Murpheys came. He kept track of how many he killed over a period of a month or so, and it was on the order of 1,500. He ended up catching a bull snake and putting it in the house to help him rid the house of the mice. We trapped in regular little mouse traps or in five-gallon plastic buckets with about four inches of water on the bottom and a smear of peanut butter around the inner edge and a little plank coming across from the table outside or off the windowsill, where they could get up. They'd reach down and lick the peanut butter and they'd just get overzealous and lose a grip on the edge and end up in the bucket. We caught 30 to 40 at a time that way.

GC: Over one ten-day period we caught 450 mice. One day I set two traps out on the table just outside the house, on the lower shelf. I came in and sat down and I heard "snap, snap." Both traps went. That's interesting. I went back out and sure enough, there were two mice. I picked up the first mouse trap and dumped the mouse out. I rebaited the trap and set it on the shelf and I reached down to pick up the second trap. I picked it up and started to remove the mouse and the first one went "snap" again. They were just all over.

JH: Everybody had them.

GC: I've never seen anything like it in my life.

RM: Is the mice and rat problem because of the lush vegetation in the valley?

SC: That year particularly there was a lot of feed. I think it had been building up to that because we were getting a lot of mice in the house over time. Our granddaughter

Kailey was here when she was five when we had this infestation. We were in the kitchen and they were up on the top of the block wall. There was a hole so they were able to run clear into the bathroom. They got into the pantry, which we thought was mouse-proof—we'd never had mice in there before. She would scream, "Eew, the mouse is coming into the kitchen again." Then off we would go, running into the kitchen trying to get it, and it would run back through the hole. "It's going the other way." It was a Keystone Cops scene. It was crazy, absolutely insane. We had to throw away almost all of the contents of the pantry because they don't eat up a whole box of something, they nibble at the corner and they contaminate everything. It was gross.

RM: How about rattlesnakes? Do you have a problem with them?

GC: Not since this morning. I shot one this morning.

SC: About one a year. We have bull snakes and somebody told us that, because they are constrictors, they tend to keep the rattlers out of the area. We always have bull snakes.

RM: And they will get the mice, right?

SC: Yes, and the baby birds. We don't get too many rattlers. A friend was out here and shot one on the patio.

GC: I shot one while sitting in a chair out on the patio. There was a log right behind me and I started to get up and I heard this [rattling noise].

SC: I've killed a couple. The best way to do it is to get a long-handled hoe, hold it down, and chop off its head with a shovel.

GC: If they're out in the brush away from the ranch, I let them go. I don't let them go here; I can't afford to. We had one dog get bit a number of years ago. One of the cowboys' horses got nailed just the other day and its leg swelled up.

RM: Will a rattlesnake bite kill a horse?

GC: It didn't kill this one. His leg swelled up.

SC: Our vet told us as far as dogs are concerned they very often die because of infection from the bite but not from the poison. If they have an allergic reaction to the poison, they will die from it and there's nothing to save them, but dogs who don't have an allergy to that usually survive if they get treatment for possible infection.

RM: I had a chilling experience with a rattler on the Navajo Reservation. At that time I used to kill them when I saw them. I saw one and I had a shovel in my car and I went out and cut off his head about that far back. That head turned around and started coming after me and I was out there in the middle of nowhere, alone on the Navajo Reservation.

[Laughs]

SC: There's probably a story at the reservation still about the bodyless snake.

JH: You've got to cut it off close to the back of the head.

RM: Now, you said you wanted to talk some more about Sonia.

SC: Yes. Sonia and her sister Libby would go on cattle drives up to Eureka as kids—they so much enjoyed horses. Very often they'd go out and do the whole camping-out thing and go with the buckaroos from the ranch. Sonia was very active in that way.

GC: And she loved to carry a gun.

SC: For snakes.

GC: And for target shooting.

SC: [Looking at a photo] Sonia and I went through some of her old pictures when she was quite elderly. She said that people would come for the weekend. They'd just show up on Friday night and they'd have dances, and they'd have an outing and a picnic and things like that. Because they had slow cars or wagons or whatever, these people didn't

just come for the day, they would come for the whole long weekend. That's how the young people met each other.

She talked about how they would ride their horses over to another ranch, like over in Railroad Valley, or go down to Twin Springs or wherever. She said, "We would arrive and we would be all smelly and sweaty and horsy and our gowns would be packed in a backpack or in saddlebags. We would get there and the girls at the ranch where they were going would all be gussied up, all pretty and in their dresses and their hair fixed." She said, "I hated arriving being all messy and smelling of horse," with hat hair and the whole thing.

RM: But they would go in and fix up?

SC: Yes, and then stay for a long weekend. That's how all the young people got to know each other.

GC: There were the Reed girls on the Reed ranch. My mother told the story of going to the Reed ranch for parties.

RM: That is so cool. What's interesting about this picture is look at them in these white dresses when they're way out in rural Nevada.

SC: Absolutely. Now, the lady sitting in the middle is Gil's great-grandmother, Sophie Ernst Williams. She was very involved in Nye County politics. She was a mover and a shaker.

GC: Right, and she served as a regent of the university at Reno. I thought she was the first woman to serve as regent but it turns out she was the second one. J. T. would have been dead by then.

RM: What a history. Thanks for spending time with me and Jeanne and talking about your fascinating home.

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