An Interview with

HOLLIS HARRIS

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
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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.

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 tapes 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;

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 Andrew Borasky, Roberta "Midge" Carver, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Peter Liakopoulos provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering 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 unwavering support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy's office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioner Eastley, Gary Hollis, and 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. Kimberley Dickey provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Jean Charney, Julie Lancaster, and Darlene Morse also transcribed a number of interviews. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Marilyn Anderson, Joni Eastley, 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. Long-time Pahrump resident Harry Ford, founder and director of the Pahrump Valley Museum, served as a consultant throughout the project; his 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
2009

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 developed lodes, 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 boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 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 since its first year. 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.

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.

—R.D.M.

Interview with Hollis Harris and Robert McCracken at Mr. Harris's office in Pahrump, Nevada November 14, 2008

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Hollis, tell me your full name as it reads on your birth certificate.

HH: Hollis Larry Harris.

RM: And when and where were you born?

HH: I was born in Tulare, California, on February 16, 1931.

RM: And what was your father's name?

HH: Herbert Elmore.

RM: And when and where was he born?

HH: He was born in California also; I can't tell you when he was born.

RM: Was he a relatively young man when you were born, or an older man?

HH: I was the last of six children in our family; there were five boys and one girl.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

HH: Vita Pearl Amber. She was born in California. My granddad, her dad, came from Tennessee originally. He had six children also, interesting.

RM: Do you remember your mother's birth date?

HH: It was October the 8th, but I don't know what year. She lived to be 83 and my dad lived to be 78.

RM: Where is Tulare?

HH: It's between Bakersfield and Fresno in the San Joaquin valley.

RM: Were your family farmers?

HH: My granddad was a farmer. My dad also was a small farmer in Bakersfield for a short time. My granddad actually grew cotton in Tulare, California, on his farm with mules. They

were used for his plowing and cleaning up. He also had five boys and one girl, and each boy had a team of mules and they did a large acreage over there. He didn't end up with a lot of acreage; like everybody else, they all went through the Depression.

RM: But they could make a living growing cotton at that time?

HH: They survived.

RM: They survived. Were they among the first to grow cotton over there?

HH: I can't answer that, Mr. McCracken. I was just a child, as you know.

RM: Now, where did you spend your growing-up years?

HH: I was born in Tulare and we moved to Bakersfield when I was six years old, and then we moved to Fresno. My dad had a wholesale butcher shop in Bakersfield. Everybody we knew went broke during the Depression and he was one of them.

RM: How did the family survive, then?

HH: My dad went into the refrigeration business and started selling refrigerators in some of the wealthier neighborhoods in Bakersfield. They used to take three or four salesman at a time out in a car and they would walk the streets.

The thing I want to tell you about my dad is that after he started making a little money, if he would see a friend of his across the street that he owed money, he would walk across the street and give him five bucks, if he had it. He paid every debt that he had from the butcher shop.

We moved to Fresno, California, when I was six years old and he went to work for the Fresno Ag Hardware selling nuts and bolts and whatever. We moved there in about 1938, and I was raised in Fresno all the way through the rest of grammar school, high school, and so on.

RM: You probably don't remember that much about Bakersfield because you were so

young.

HH: No, I don't remember too much other than that it was oil country; there were a few oil wells around.

RM: What stands out in your mind about growing up in Fresno?

HH: I guess school, survivorship. My dad had a tough time. He worked long hours, and we never went hungry. He turned into a top salesman. After Fresno Ag, he went to work for a commercial refrigeration outfit and he sold to superstores, or markets, all over the San Joaquin Valley. He designed refrigeration for them and sold them.

RM: Was that when refrigeration was really taking hold?

HH: Absolutely. I can remember in our house we had a four-door reach-in refrigerator with a compressor sitting outside. We used to buy fruit and vegetables by the case and put them in that refrigerator.

RM: It was a real luxury to have that kind of refrigerator, wasn't it?

HH: Well, it was a used one. [Chuckles]

RM: But the average family would not have had that, would they?

HH: No, hardly anybody else had a refrigerator like that, but there were a lot of us kids.

RM: I think people nowadays don't understand what it's like to live without refrigeration. We moved to Denver in 1946 and they still delivered ice. Do you have any highlights or interesting stories describing your growing up in Fresno?

HH: Well, we had lots of friends. When we moved from Bakersfield, we were pretty poor. [Laughs] We moved in a cotton trailer with five kids and a dog and a cousin—my oldest brother and cousin rode in the back of the cotton trailer. We had 110 miles to go from Bakersfield to Fresno. When it got dark we had to pull off the main road and go down side streets.

When we got into Fresno, I was just a little guy about six or seven, and I can remember going into our house and sliding on the wood floors. The next morning we got up and we were very happy. We weren't accepted very well at first—we were the Okies from Bakersfield.

But to make a long story short, within two weeks' time, every kid in the neighborhood was playing at our house. My mother was a great cook and she fed all the kids who showed up.

RM: Is that right? When your mother's family came to Bakersfield, did they come as a part of that migration during the Depression?

HH: My grandma came before that. She was a local gal in Tulare and her brothers worked in the oil fields in Taft, California, out of Bakersfield. They were an old family there.

RM: What did you do when your education was finished?

HH: I went to high school and a few months of college at Fresno State and then I joined the Air Force and ended up in Korea for a year or two.

RM: Tell me about ending up in Korea. What did you do there?

HH: That was a wonderful experience. I was not a pilot, I was an enlisted man. I worked in what they call base operations, which is a very exciting place to work—all of the pilots would file their flight plans and we would correct them or do whatever was necessary and forward them to the control people and put down when they departed and when they landed and keep track of them.

RM: And you were based in South Korea?

HH: Taegu, Korea.

RM: What stands out in your mind about the whole Korean experience?

HH: We were in the 49th fighter bomber squadron and we had a lot of fighter bombers

leave our base; it was a tough time for everybody then.

RM: Did you lose a lot of men from the squadron?

HH: We lost a few pilots, I guess. But we were in the south part of South Korea, quite a few miles from where the fighting was going on at that time. But our pilots would fly there.

RM: What years were you in Korea?

HH: In '51 and '52. I moved from there back to Tacoma, Washington, and spent the last two years in the same type of base operations at McChord Air Force Base. That's where I met my wife, Joyce. We were married just before I was discharged in 1954.

RM: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

HH: I enlisted.

RM: Why did you enlist? What was your thinking?

HH: I had a brother-in-law who was in the Air Force and he was very influential in me getting in there. I think that's probably why I went in.

RM: And what did you do after you were discharged?

HH: We came back to Fresno and moved in with my parents for a few months while we were getting established. I got into the hay-baling business. When I was a kid I worked my butt off in the fields. I used to bale hay at night, then I'd get off of the baler and start irrigating cotton. It wasn't my cotton or hay or anything, but I worked for a guy who had the hay baler.

RM: What was he paying you?

HH: It was 50 cents a ton.

RM: That's a lot of hay, isn't it?

HH: That's a lot of hay. Actually, I made a lot of money as a kid. Like I said, I got paid for baling hay. We started when the dew came in at night and finished in the morning and I got

up in the morning and went over and started irrigating cotton.

RM: When did you sleep?

HH: I slept on the bottom of the fields, sometimes. I'd start all the water and later, when it got to the end of the rows, it woke me up.

RM: Why did you bale hay at night?

HH: The dew comes in at night and alfalfa needs to have some moisture to bale it right. I had two cars when I was 15, before I was even eligible to drive.

RM: What were they?

HH: One was a 1934 Model B Ford, which belonged to our neighbor; I paid him $350 for it.

RM: That was a lot of money then, wasn't it?

HH: Well, but it was a nice one and I had a lot of money; I was rich, kind of. When I was in high school, I used to play in what they called a shack dance band and I made $7 every Saturday night.

RM: What instrument did you play?

HH: Clarinet and saxophone.

RM: Did you play swing music, dance band?

HH: It was a dance band.

RM: Sort of like Tommy Dorsey?

HH: That was exactly it.

RM: Do you still play?

HH: No, but I've still got my old saxophone hanging in the family room.

RM: Talk about those dances they had then. How many people would show up?

HH: It was a community hall in downtown Fresno, and we had teenagers from every

school. It was a very popular place to be. Everybody in high school would go there.

RM: How many people would show up at a dance?

HH: It was in the hundreds. It was like a convention center, almost.

RM: How big was the band—how many pieces?

HH: About seven—two saxophones, a trombone, two trumpet players, a bass and drums.

RM: And what were your hours, do you recall?

HH: Oh, it was about 7:00 to 10:00 or maybe 10:30. I had to catch a bus home.

RM: Fresno was pretty big then?

HH: I can remember Fresno back then was about 250,000. It was spread out, it was a farm community. When we got back to Fresno out of the service, we stayed with my dad and mom for a while and then I got my own hay-baler. I borrowed money from Dad and got it going. My wife, Joyce, and I were going all over the valley baling hay at night—she followed me in the truck while I drove the tractor.

RM: Did they bale hay at night here in Pahrump, also?

HH: Not very often. Early, early in the morning they would try to catch a little dew. There is not much dew in Pahrump. They baled it a tiny bit greener, where there is a little moisture in the skin, over here than we did in Fresno.

RM: How long did you work in the hay-baling business?

HH: About two years. We rented a home for a while then bought our first home. After that I went into the hay brokerage business with a friend of mine. We used to buy hay all over the San Joaquin Valley and ship it to dairies in southern California.

RM: How did that work?

HH: It was pretty simple. We worked on a $1 or $2 a ton commission-type thing. We coordinated the truckers and loading, collected the money, and paid the farmers.

RM: And there were a lot of dairies in Southern California?

HH: There were lots of dairies in Chino.

RM: And they were using a lot of hay and getting it in the central valley?

HH: Absolutely. They got it any place they could get it.

RM: How long did you do that?

HH: Probably two or three years at the most. We had a tough time. I eventually started looking for a job that would pay steady money. I got a job with a large farming corporation. The corporation was huge—one of the farms was 19 sections of land; that'll give you an example (a section is 640 acres, as you know). My wife and I moved out to one of the farms and lived there. I was the ranch bookkeeper and there were other farms— one in Five Points, California, one in Riverdale, California, close to Five Points, and two in Huron, California.

RM: Are they all in the central valley?

HH: They are. Beautiful farms, all irrigated.

RM: How did you learn the bookkeeping business?

HH: I went to school right after the hay project. I was always interested in the farm end, and I was fortunate to get into the ranch bookkeeping side of it.

RM: And so you lived on a farm and kept the books?

HH: Yes. I worked for that outfit for 12 years.

RM: You must have liked it.

HH: The owner, Mal Carberry, was a wonderful, wonderful man. We spent the last two of the 12 years in Pahrump. We came over here originally and filed on some Desert Land Entries.

RM: You and the owner of the farm?

HH: Correct. Mostly Mr. Carberry. I filed on some other stuff up in Caliente, but we didn't

get water up there. We drilled up there but never found water and ended up in Pahrump.

RM: What year did you come over here?

HH: The end of 1963. My boss had filed on quite a few entries over here and he had his son over here running them and I came over to help his son as a ranch bookkeeper.

RM: Can you tell me about the owner, Carberry?

HH: Everybody knew him around Fresno and Five Points. He went by the name of Air-Way Farms. He originally was a crop duster over in the San Joaquin Valley. He was very successful as a crop duster and very successful at farming. To make a long story short, I stayed as a bookkeeper over here. His son didn't want to farm and I did, and I just kind of took over and all of a sudden Mr. Carberry said, "You're the manager." I managed all of his property here for many years.

RM: So he filed on a lot of Desert Land Entry property here? Did he buy any land?

HH: He filed on it and he bought land also. He bought 650 acres on the north end.

RM: Did that property have a name?

HH: It does now. It's called Harris Farms; it's ours.

RM: Who did he buy it from?

HH: A man by the name of Norm Wolfson. He farmed here; he was from Stratford, California. At one time he was J.P. here, years and years ago.

RM: Did Wolfson file on the property himself?

HH: No. I believe, going way back, it's the old Fowler Ranch. It goes back many years before I came in. Tim Hafen would remember.

RM: Does it predate, say, when Tim came in?

HH: I think it does, a little bit. Tim has been here probably ten years longer than I have and I think that Fowler Ranch predated him. We farmed that and we farmed the north end,

the old Wilcox Ranch up there—the Dorothy Dorothy Ranch.

RM: Did you acquire that?

HH: No. We farmed the Pechstein Ranch, too. Mr. Carberry was very aggressive; a wonderful man. He passed away and at that time I had the option of going back to California and running a ranch over there, but my wife and I both elected to stay here and tough it out; and it was tough.

RM: Did you continue to farm those farms?

HH: No; it was all over. I wish we could have. Times were tough. Tim and Jackie Hafen suggested that I get a real estate license. They were real estate brokers already and at that time you didn't have to be a salesman for two or three years first; you could go directly for a broker's license.

RM: Now you can't go directly to broker?

HH: No. So I got my broker's license and spent a little bit of time with Tim in his office.

RM: What year did you get your broker's license?

HH: It was '74 or something like that. The farm went into Mr. Carberry's estate. I tried to sell it for the estate and could not find a buyer. I couldn't do it for two years and I finally went to the estate owners and said. "Look, I think I can buy that farm if you will give me permission to put it back in production." At that time the Federal Land Bank wouldn't finance anything unless it was in production. The estate allowed me to put it back in production and Federal Land Bank actually loaned me the money to buy the farm about a year later.

RM: Now, let's review those three farms out there that he had acquired. There was the 650 acres.

HH: That's the one we own now. It was called Air-Way Farms.

RM: And it had originally been the Fowler property?

HH: Down the line; then Al Wolfson, just prior to it. . . .

RM: Then you mentioned two other properties out north.

HH: We were just leasing them for Mr. Carberry. The old Dorothy Dorothy Ranch, which is now Calvada North, and the Pechstein Ranch, which is right in the heart of town. It had the biggest producing well in the valley. It produced about 3000 gallons a minute. It's was an artesian well—it flowed in the wintertime. It was and still is an excellent well.

RM: When you put the old Fowler into production, did you put it in cotton?

HH: Yes. Cotton, alfalfa, sugar beets seed. . . .

RM: Growing the seeds to grow sugar beets?

HH: Yes. In fact, that was the crop we grew at first, which helped us to get the Federal Land Bank to finance it.

RM: Where were you selling the seeds?

HH: I sold to an outfit in Arizona. In fact, Tim and I were the only two growing sugar beet seeds.

RM: At that time, was cotton really big? That was in the heyday of cotton here.

HH: It sure was.

RM: And you said Mr. Carberry also filed on land here.

HH: And so did Joyce and I. We bought several of those projects that he had originally got from the people who worked for him.

RM: Oh, he had people who worked for him file and then you later purchased those?

HH: Correct.

RM: How many acres could you file on then?

HH: Each one could file on 320 acres.

RM: And was that under the Desert Land Entry Act?

HH: Yes.

RM: And you had to prove water on it, didn't you? So you were putting wells down on these properties?

HH: Correct.

RM: How deep did you have to go for water?

HH: We went about 350 to 500 feet on each one out there.

RM: At what level did you hit water?

HH: Actually, out at that area in the valley it was about 45 or 50 feet; it was shallow. We would drill it on down further, hoping to find more water, but they were not big producing wells. The rules for the Desert Land Entry were that you had to produce 2,400 gallons of water per minute to satisfy that 320 acres. In addition to that, you had to farm one-eighth of it—about 40 acres. That's how we proved up on some of that land. That cost us, by the way, $1.25 an acre to the federal government. However, it took me, for example, four agricultural wells to drill to get that much water for one entry.

RM: And what did a well cost you back in those days?

HH: That's a tough one to remember. It was a lot of money to us. Several thousand dollars. Then electricity came in at the end of 1963, and we could use electric motors. But, for most of the Desert Land Entry parcels, though, we had diesel engines. I can remember buying, I think, three or four pumping units from Ronnie Floyd and taking him a check for 20 some odd thousand dollars, which was a heck of a lot of money back then. But what the well cost exactly, I can't remember. We had some excellent well-drillers, by the way.

RM: Was Stanley Ford still drilling at that time?

HH: He was not. We used Charlie Nyberg on most of our wells and we used Ron Floyd for

most of the pumps.

RM: Did Mr. Carberry file on some land himself, or his family?

HH: Mostly the employees did it, and family.

RM: How could he keep an employee from welshing on the deal? What is the mechanism there? I mean, "I'll file it and sell it to you." "No, I changed my mind," kind of thing.

HH: He never had that problem. All of us were very loyal to Mr. Carberry.

RM: How many acres were acquired by the employees filing like that, would you say?

HH: Approximately 1500.

RM: And where are those acres?

HH: They are mostly down Homestead Road, in that area. One of them that I have is Jocelyn Estates—that's 320 acres that we developed. Then we bought the one next door to us, which was 160 acres. Then we bought the Plantation Estates down there, which was another 160.

RM: When you acquired land like that, what were the terms people were getting? And what were you paying? I assume you weren't paying cash.

HH: On some of them I did. I lucked out. I ended up working with Mr. Carberry and during that time my salary increased. We saved every nickel we could until we were able to develop one of them and sold it and got cash and bought two or three more. We've got about four or five different subdivisions here in Pahrump. Jocelyn Estates is named after my wife, Joyce Gwendolyn (I call her Jocelyn). We have Plantation Estates and Majestic Estates out north; that's a nice area. Desert Trails out north is our last one. We are very proud of all of them.

RM: Do you want to say how many acres those total? Or maybe you don't have that on the top of your head.

HH: I don't have it. That was 320 and 310, and another 160. And, of course, the big farm is 652 acres. You want to remember we're going through 45 years of history here in this valley.

RM: Right. What is fascinating to me, and what I think is important for history, is basically that people like yourself came in here with very little and had the skills, the foresight and whatever to begin to put these things together. To me, that is what made the town and that's fascinating.

HH: That's nice of you to say. I am real proud of it.

RM: Because if you hadn't done that, there wouldn't have been any land to sell.

HH: One of our first subdivisions was the north half of Jocelyn Estates; we put that into acre-and-a-quarters, gravel roads, and so on. Then I had another one called Thousandaire

Estates, which is another 160. and then we came back to the lower half of Jocelyn.

We tried to make each one a little bit better than the one before. I am kind of proud to say that we were one of the first ones to put blacktop roads in our subdivisions. There were a few required by Calvada, but we blacktopped every bit of Jocelyn Estates No. 2, all 160 acres. I was a little bit worried about that. I had Wulfenstein Construction put the blacktop down.

If I might digress, our first subdivision was two-and-a-half acre parcels and at that time everybody coming out of Vegas wanted five acres. We went down to two-and-a-half and didn't sell much, but the first parcel that I sold (and believe it or not, it was sold by Tim and Jackie Hafen) sold for $3,000—two-and-a-half acres. At that time Calvada had come in. I think they came in '79, didn't they? Of course it was a different sales thing, but they were getting about $7,000 for an acre and a quarter. I'll never forget that because I couldn't get that much.

RM: So you were giving incredible deals relative to them?

HH: No, but I was so happy to get the $3,000, it was unbelievable.

RM: What kind of terms?

HH: I let them in for about 20 percent down, which was different from other developers. A lot of people go for 10 percent or even less, but we wanted to try to create an image where we weren't foreclosing or anything like that. Consequently, we got some pretty good buyers. I can count on one hand, of all the several hundred lots that we've had, the ones that I've had to foreclose on. I am proud that every one of the people who bought from me made money or can make money.

RM: And how did you know that your buyers were so good when they were coming in?

HH: First of all, they probably paid more down than the rest of the people at that time in

the country. In addition to that. I worked with a few of them who didn't want to pay it, but I wanted to help them to make it and they did.

RM: Did you have a way of sizing people up to see who was a flake and who wasn't?

HH: I don't think so. And I don't think any of then have ever thought I took advantage of them.

RM: At Calvada, they had a lot of foreclosures or just defaults. Calvada came in after you began, didn't they? After you got your broker's license?

HH: Yes.

RM: So when you came in here with your boss from Fresno, farming was your mission, right? You weren't thinking of real estate or creating a town or anything.

HH: We weren't thinking of that. This actually came about because of necessity. I had some pretty tough dirt to farm. Those Desert Land Entries down there are pretty heavy alkali and things didn't grow very well compared to the farm that I own; the one I own now has good dirt. I've got to admit, I don't think I am one of the better farmers in Pahrump. We struggled, times were tough, so we started developing real estate.

RM: And what year did you begin farming here?

HH: I think we started our own in '74. We were farming in '64 for Mr. Carberry.

RM: And when did Mr. Carberry die?

HH: About '71.

RM: So you were running these farming operations and you weren't looking out of the corner of your eye thinking, "Hey, maybe there are other opportunities here." Then Mr. Carberry passed away and you had to start farming on your own?

HH: No, then we went into brokerage, real estate. After he died, I didn't have the farms to farm or have a job.

RM: So the circumstances of his passing turned you to the brokerage?

HH: Absolutely; necessity.

RM: And you had no intention of going back to Fresno. That was not in your thinking.

HH: No. We had a chance to, but we didn't. I could have gone back as a farm manager or assistant manager; they wanted me to come back.

RM: Tell me some more about how you got started in the brokerage business.

HH: Like I said earlier, Tim and Jackie talked me into going back to real estate school so I studied for it.

RM: Where did you go to school?

HH: In Las Vegas.

RM: How long did it take you?

HH: Three or four months.

RM: And were Tim and Jackie already selling land?

HH: They were.

RM: And he encouraged you. He didn't think, "Hollis is going to be competition," or anything like that.

HH: Back when I was with Mr. Carberry, Tim and Bob Ruud and other farmers were subdividing and I think Tim did subdivide not too far from . . . I don't know if I was before him or not as far as breaking up the land. If you run into him, you might ask him. It doesn't matter; we never got into the competitive thing. We were both trying to support each other, more or less.

RM: That was the kind of community it was then; it was a supportive community.

HH: A wonderful community. It took everybody, then.

RM: Was Tim's suggestion about your broker's license one of those pivotal points in your

life?

HH: It really was. I've had several pivotal ones. My wife kind of wanted me to go work out at the Test Site or something—anything to bring in some money. But I chose to try and do it on our own.

RM: This is quite a success story. I always like to understand the difference between success and failure and why one guy is successful and one guy isn't.

HH: There are a lot of successful people here in Pahrump. The guy that's driving to Las Vegas and back and forth and working is successful to me.

RM: I agree. Now, how did you choose to sell your lots and get your customers?

HH: Probably more word of mouth. And I had other brokers trying to sell it and so on and was hoping that we were priced right.

RM: And Walt Williams had sold his land by the time you went in. Did you look at the Pahrump Ranch and say, "I wonder what is going to happen to that huge property?"

HH: Of course it was in my thinking, but I've got to say something positive about Calvada, even though I wasn't attracted to their sales practices. I think they did a wonderful job in getting a company that could really design a proper subdivision for this area at the time. You look at the traffic flow coming through this valley now—that's going back 20 or 30 years to Calvada. They did a pretty darn good job at that time.

RM: I certainly don't want to put Calvada down. I did an interview with Linda Sterling, who was the daughter of Leonard Rosen, the man who started Calvada. When you sit and talk with a person, you appreciate the struggles they had and what they were trying to do.

HH: They had a wonderful manager by the name of Jack Soules; I don't know if you knew him. He is the one who talked Mr. Rosen into putting in the two golf courses and so on. He and his wife were in the valley and he passed away. It's a sad thing because I really felt that

he had the heart of the valley: he wanted to do good in this valley. Over all, they did a good job to a certain extent.

After he passed away then they kind of. . . . There were some times when I thought they had gone too far and the county kept going along with them. They tried to buy my farm one time.

RM: And why did you turn them down?

HH: I was struggling pretty much but I still wanted to farm.

RM: So you subdivided and farmed at the same time?

HH: You bet. The subdivision fed the farm.

RM: Because there wasn't that much money in farming, was there?

HH: No. Like I said, I'm probably not the best farmer in Pahrump. My point is that we had some pretty tough dirt. We had some pretty good crops too. There were and are some real good farmers here—the Brady brothers, Tim Hafen, the Bowman family, who have been here forever. And Ted Blosser wasn't bad. But most of them are gone except Tim and the Bowmans.

RM: What were the challenges that a cotton farmer faced here?

HH: I can tell you very simply that it was a tough road in Pahrump because of the growing season. We're probably a month shorter in the spring. For example, we had to wait until April 15, roughly, to consider planting and over in Fresno, it is around March 15. The same way on the other end of the crop—October 19 is around our average frost date. Of course, recently it hasn't been that way, but we had a shorter growing season by about two months in cotton and it showed several times. There have been times when we've had cotton disasters. One of the first years was 1965. We had a real cold bad year in '65.

RM: At the front end or the back end?

HH: The back end. The cotton was still on the plant and it froze and there was cotton that didn't open up—the boles didn't open.

RM: So you got nothing.

HH: Virtually nothing. We tried picking it two or three times hoping that it would open on up a little bit. It was cotton, but it was a very low-grade cotton, unlike most of the cotton over here. Generally we grew good quality cotton.

RM: What is another challenge that a cotton farmer faced here that you had to deal with? Was labor a problem?

HH: Not too much. We had good Mexican labor come in. I had a Mexican irrigation foreman that I kept over here and he would come back every spring. It was completely legal. They would do good work, but it is a challenge. I used to put the kids to work in the summertime. They had to hoe weeds, chop cotton, and I liked to put the kids to work. Even though it wasn't much pay, it was something for them to do during the summer. We grew mint on one of the farms.

RM: Where were you selling your mint? Was it regular mint?

HH: It was regular mint. We distilled it and did everything. We sold it to a Spearmint factory in Oregon. My son Dan loved to drive the swather when it was time to harvest it. It smelled really good.

RM: And they make Spearmint gum? That's interesting. Is mint tough to grow?

HH: Kind of. You get shoots like you see in Bermuda grass. They cut it in Oregon and hauled it down. We had to plant it by hand, more or less. But it was a fun experiment.

RM: You didn't do it that long, then? What other crops did you experiment with or use?

HH: We had, like I said, sugar beet seed, alfalfa, cotton, wheat, barley, Sudan grass. Those are all fairly easy crops to grow. I had a lettuce company that at one time grew lettuce down

there. That was some of the prettiest lettuce in the whole country. I leased a portion to them and they grew the lettuce. It was a good experience; they got beautiful heads of lettuce.

I also bought another ranch or two. I bought the Kelly Ranch, which is a 120-acre parcel kind of in the heart of town, and sold off 40 acres of it to a group of people that put in a senior citizen mobile community with a nine-hole golf course. That's right over here on Wilson right next to the hospital.

RM: Who were the Kellys?

HH: Joe Kelly was quite a wonderful old man who used to own part of the Showboat Hotel in Las Vegas. He was kind of retired, but he didn't come out to Pahrump much. He loved the ranch.

RM: You subdivided that?

HH: Just the 40 acres.

RM: What did you do with the other?

HH: I'll be glad to tell you about that. There was a little project came along, a hospital. At that time an outfit called Banner was going to put in a hospital and they created a community board to help them research where to put the hospital. They gave them some categories—it had to have water, it had to have electricity, preferably be close to fiber optics, and so on. They researched the valley all over and my son Dan and my wife, Joyce, and I decided to offer them some land for a hospital on Harris Farms.

So we threw 35 acres into the thing, and believe it or not, the town got quite upset because it was on the north end and the people on the south end would have had about a 14-mile drive. To make a long story short, about one week before they were going to decide to go ahead, Banner backed out and ended up selling a bunch of their hospitals. So along came another group of people that wanted to build a hospital. We all decided, "Well, we're going

to stop this little bickering thing," so we offered them 25 acres right in the middle of town on the old Kelly Ranch. That is how they got started on it and they built a beautiful hospital. We donated the land.

RM: What a philanthropic, community-minded thing to do.

HH: Well, Pahrump needed a hospital. We'd been trying for ten years to get a hospital.

RM: That's wonderful.

HH: Well, we're proud of it. And in addition to that, we put quite a bit of money into it, cash-wise, to help them get it going. Right now we own 15 percent of a hospital that doesn't pay any dividends. [Laughs] It hasn't paid us a dime back, but I don't care.

RM: It's wonderful that you'd do that.

HH: We're real proud of the fact that we've got a hospital.

RM: Where do you think you got these values? I don't think of them as being typical for developers.

HH: I don't know.

RM: Did you get your values from your father and mother?

HH: I think my dad was very influential and my mother, too. She was a homemaker; she stayed home and took care of the kids. I got a lot of hopefully good knowledge from my former boss, Mr. Carberry. We'd come into an office meeting or something like that with all the foremen and then at the end of the meeting, he'd have me stay and we'd talk for hours. That guy just took me under his wing. He had two sons and all these other people, but for some reason he would talk to me by the hour. I learned a lot from that.

RM: Have you ever thought what would have happened in your life if you hadn't met him?

HH: Oh gosh. Isn't that a good question? I'd have probably gone to work for some electric company or something like that. I tried the hay-baling deal. I always wanted to be my own

boss, but sometime you can't. I don't know where I would have ended up—probably somewhere in the agriculture field: I always loved farming.

RM: Do you ever get a little homesick for the Central Valley?

HH: No. I asked my wife probably ten years ago, "Honey, if we ever sold out we could probably go any place we wanted to." When I first brought her here, she hated it. But this was a long time later and she thought and she thought and she said, "I want to go to Pahrump. I would want to be in Pahrump." She likes Pahrump and so do I.

RM: And you raised your family here?

HH: We've got one son, Daniel. He is my partner on everything we've done.

RM: That is so nice. When was he born?

HH: I joke that he was born nine months and 30 minutes after we were married. [Laughter] Actually, it was 11 months. He is 54 years old and I am 77. To make a long story short, he has been my right-hand man on all the farming. He drove swather and hay balers since he was eight or nine years old. He can do it all.

RM: How old was he when you moved here?

HH: He was about six; he was just finishing first grade or second grade. In fact, when Mr. Carberry moved me over at the end of '63, I stayed here about six months by myself until school was out over there; then Joyce and Dan moved over. He graduated in 1973, about when we got the farm, part of it. But he had been farming with me on the other farms that Mr. Carberry had.

He went to Idaho and went to work for a copy machine company as a repairman and after a couple of years they made him assistant service manager and then they made him manager. Then they made him the regional service manager of the three-state region, Idaho and Oregon and Washington. And then they took him from there to Sacramento, California,

and made him corporate service manager. He had about 250 people working for him at one time.

After I got going in Jocelyn I needed him bad and I asked him to come back and he did and he's been with us all that time.

RM: It's so nice when father and son can work together like that.

HH: We've been lucky; it's just been wonderful. In addition to Dan, we've raised two nieces from three and five years old: they went to school here and Joyce took care of them.

RM: Do they live here now?

HH: One is in Northern Nevada and the other one is in Tennessee. They're like our own. They're our nieces, but my niece calls me Uncle Dad. They've got three kids all together and they're our grandkids, same as.

RM: Can you tell me any interesting stories or experiences with people you've met and so on?

HH: I'll tell you a story about Bob Ruud. He used to farm where the dairy is today. He had 30 acres and Black Angus cows. Also, he and Tim were partners on a hay-cubing project on the Walt Williams old place, Calvada. And Bob was a county commissioner, as you know.

For years he lived in a singlewide trailer (so did we) and he tried to get a house for his wife, Jackie, and their kids, but he couldn't get financing at all. For years, nobody would finance a stick-built out here. You could get a mobile home financed, but not a stick-built. To make a long story short, Bob went to Farmer's Home Administration and tried to get a loan from them and they wouldn't do it. They said, "If you can get turned down by three banks or mortgage companies and you don't qualify, then we'll finance you."

And he did, he got the letters turning him down. So we broke ground on their house. I'll never forget the time when we broke ground—it was about 6:00 in the morning and we

all went out and had a few little shots. Bob liked scotch real well, and tequila and we celebrated their beginning of their house.

They built a nice house and he went along for a couple of years and he kept growing in his business. He got a lot more Black Angus cows. He and Tim took on the Calvada Ranch and farmed it for years. And the Farmer's Home Administration said to Bob, "Mr. Ruud, you don't qualify for us anymore. you've got too much money."

Bob Ruud said, "I don't have that much money."

They said, "We're concerned about you complying because your loan requires that you don't have much money."

So Bob sent them a check and it bounced and he said, "That'll teach those sons of bitches." I'll never forget that story. There are a dozen other stories, probably.

RM: Tell some of them. I love stories.

HH: Tim and Jackie Hafen have been one of our best friends forever. We've been on a lot of trips with them over to Asia and Ireland and so on.

And here's a story about Ronnie Floyd. Ronnie Floyd came here a year before me; the first of '63. He owned Ace Hardware and he owned a well-drilling business. The story about Ronnie Floyd is the fact that he's the hardest-working man I've ever seen. He did not know what Sunday was. If he had a pump to put in he was there, or drilling. Charlie Nyberg is the same way. Ronnie's having a little tough time right now; he's worked too hard and he's getting up there.

RM: Did you know Walt Williams at all?

HH: Yes. And I knew his foreman, Frank Woner. Frank is no longer with us, but I'll never forget when we moved over. We were the new guys on the block in farming, but we were growing cotton and we needed to have some choppers, somebody to chop cotton. And

believe it or not, we got a busload of choppers from California. My boss got that all arranged and Frank Woner had a bunkhouse on the old Pahrump Ranch and Walt Williams . . . of course, I knew him because of Frank.

RM: What do you recall about Walt?

HH: He was aggressive, a pretty good farmer, but he didn't live here.

RM: Right, he lived in Vegas. I interviewed him years ago.

HH: He had so much land that little things like Bill Mankins' corner on the corner of 372 and 160—they had the old service station there. He let Bill have that property for nothing. Bill Mankins was here when I came, too.

RM: What do you recall about him?

HH: Oh, a great guy; great golfer. I used to play golf a lot with him. He taught me an awful lot about golf. He had a service station and a little restaurant. When we came here you couldn't get anything to eat or buy. We couldn't buy a milkshake or a hamburger anyplace in town unless Mankins opened up, and he opened up only when he wanted to. He was a good man; he was in the oil business—gasoline and so on. Bill was a good friend.

Button Ford's a good man. I've know him for a long time. He was on the county road department. He was in charge of all the roads in Pahrump. He did a good job and was another hard worker.

RM: Did he run the graders?

HH: He did everything at one time or another. He's got a nice family. Mary is also nice; they're nice people. Of course, his dad, Stan, was a well-driller.

RM: Did you know Roland Wiley?

HH: Roland Wiley and I became friends off and on. I first met him at an equipment auction in Ash Meadows, believe it or not. He rode a great big old John Deere tractor and we made sure he got it home okay; we followed him home in the dark.

RM: He drove it home?

HH: No, his man did. He took it down to the Hidden Hills Ranch and we became friends because of that.

RM: Did you see each other much?

HH: Not too much, but we used to go over and see the canyon and always talked to him. I almost bought some land from him at one time. He was very gracious in his little community down there.

RM: He was trying to develop down there, wasn't he? It didn't seem to go as well as it did in Pahrump. What do you think the reason was?

HH: The lack of good wells. He had 16,000 or 17,000 acres of land between California and Nevada; only about 1,400 in Nevada and the rest in California. He drilled wells all over that place and there wasn't much capacity. He really didn't want to farm; he wanted to lease it out to anybody that would farm it.

RM: Was it farmable if water was so questionable?

HH: He always thought that they'd find the big one. There was a group of California people that came and drilled a bunch of wells over there.

RM: Why do you think he bought so much land over there when the water was not proven?

HH: I don't know the answer. He used to be the district attorney of Clark County and I

don't know how he acquired that land. He had it before we came in.

RM: I don't know how he got the vast portion of land and I didn't have sense enough to ask him.

HH: I am surprised—you asked me everything. [Laughter]

RM: Roland was one of the first people I talked to about Pahrump back in the late '80s. The more you know, the more questions you can ask. If you don't know too much, it's hard to ask questions sometimes.

HH: I read your articles all the time. I think you've done a good job.

RM: Well, thank you. I really appreciate that.

HH: Let me ask you—how did you get started?

RM: I am an anthropologist by training and anthropology is the study of humans, people. I've interviewed miners and ranchers and farmers and hillbillies and have had a lot of experience working with Native Americans. I am just interested in people and how they see the world. I had an opportunity, beginning back in about 1987, to do some interviews, some oral histories like I am doing with you with some of the old-timers in Nye County. We created a program called the Nye County Town History Project. I worked the interviews into some books and we basically did histories of all of the towns in Nye County except Gabbs and Belmont.

Recently, the county commissioners supported us in completing the two books we didn't get to finish in the first go-round, Manhattan and Round Mountain. The commissioners and I also thought, "We really didn't do enough oral history interviews in Pahrump," because Pahrump is where most of the people in Nye County live.

HH: But I thought you had.

RM: I did about 12 or 14 probably 15 years ago—Tim Hafen and Blosser and others.

HH: Oh, I am glad you got Blosser.

RM: And people thought it was a good idea to interview people like yourself.

HH: Well, thank you for that. You got Button Ford, of course.

RM: Yes. I did Button years ago.

HH: He is very important to this community.

RM: Oh absolutely—and the museum he was so much a part of creating and maintaining is a wonderful thing.

HH: Isn't it though? I agree.

RM: And he is providing the guidance for me on this project. A person like myself will never know as much about Pahrump history as he does.

HH: Isn't that the truth.

RM: I think the oral histories we're doing now are really, really good because I am picking up all kinds of good information and I'm picking up information about the human part of life and everything. To me, that's where it's at. It's not what some politician did or something like that. It's down at the heart of the community; that's what I like.

Do you have any other thoughts on Roland?

HH: No, I don't. I've dealt with his relatives, his daughter or something, and with his attorney on a few real estate things.

RM: Is his attorney still active on his estate?

HH: Yes.

RM: He was going to put up an animatronic statue of Christ in Cathedral Canyon. My brother Mike worked for Disney at the time and he made a model for an animated 10-foot Christ statue. I want to do a book on Cathedral Canyon.

HH: I am just sick with the way it turned out. Going there was such a wonderful

experience.

RM: It was. Tell me about when you first saw it or what you remember about it.

HH: I guess I already have told you about it. It told a lot about Roland, as far as I am concerned. I took my sister there and we walked all through it. She loved it.

RM: People did love it, didn't they? To me, Cathedral Canyon was Roland's canvas that he painted his vision on. And as you say, it is terrible to see it now. There is nothing left there—the buildings and everything are gone.

Roland and I had talked about doing a book on Cathedral Canyon with pictures and I have some good pictures of it, but not enough for a book. I hope to get pictures from people in the community.

HH: I don't think we have any pictures. I met one of the caretakers; did he have one arm missing?

RM: That was Al Carpenter.

HH: I liked Al.

RM: What were some of the problems you had to solve in order to be successful in farming? What about the weather?

HH: Of course, the weather was always something. And the water rights were a challenge. Ever since we came here we've been involved with the state engineer with water rights and well permits and so on. It's the same way with subdividing—you have to give up so much water rights, etc. We've always been under the timeframe of proving up our water rights and a few things like that and when you're really strapped for money, sometimes you can't do it when you need it but you still have a timeline that you have to comply with for the state engineer.

RM: You have to use the water every five years, is that the rule?

HH: You have a year or two to start your development and another year to complete it and you have to spend so much money and tell them how much money and then you have up to five years to put the water to beneficial use. And sometimes the well isn't big enough to fit the whole thing in so you file for an application for another well on another place in the farm and you have to drill that and start it. Over time, water has been a real conflict. In fact, I don't know of any farmer here that hasn't gone through this, but it's worth it. If you really want to farm, it's worth it.

RM: And can a farmer get enough water for his farm or are there just some cases where he may have good land but he just can't get the water?

HH: Or he may have some of the Desert Land Entries, which aren't much good for farming, and can't get the water but he still wants to produce something. Water is the key to this valley, as you know.

RM: How do you see the future of water here?

HH: Well, over the years, we've tried to progress on each development. The last development that we had, we put our own water and sewer treatment company in. On an acre-and-a-quarter lot here, all these people have got water rights to 1,850 gallons of water a day. That is much more than they'll probably ever use. And when we put our utility in, water and sewer and everything else, we proved to the state engineer that our people are not using anywhere near that—it was around 400 or 450 at the most.

To answer your question about what I think the future is for Pahrump, I think we need to go with more utilities and conserve water. But there are 10,000 domestic wells out there on each acre-and-a-quarter lot around all the valley. And I am just as guilty as any of them because when I sold them that's what we did—we put a well on every acre-and-a-quarter. I think the state engineer is using this figure of 1,850 gallons a day in his analysis and he is

saying that we are over-appropriated. but he'd got a heck of a cushion there. But he can't do anything else—the water is allocated for that acre-and-a-quarter and it's theirs.

If we ever get into the position where we have something like our own Southern Nevada Water Authority, then they would have the authority to—I hate to say this, but—stop those people from irrigating on their acre-and-a-quarters and get into the utility and conserve water just like everybody else does. Conserving water is done by having water cost more. I think we're going to have problems down the line. We're over-appropriated and the water table is dropping in certain areas.

RM: Has it dropped a lot?

HH: It hasn't on our farm, for example. When we quit farming, our water table actually came back up. We're in good shape down there.

RM: Farming is a heavy use of water isn't it?

HH: You bet. But the long-term thing for Pahrump—and I won't be around—is that we're going to, I feel, have to go into a utility-type of thing. I don't think the people who live on an acre-and-a-quarter are going to want to give up their well and I don't blame them, but it probably is needed.

RM: Do you see a time when the wells in the valley might be capped?

HH: Or we might get to the point that we had a Southern Nevada Water Authority and forced them to cap them and hook onto another system. Someday we're going to need to either have everybody under one utility or two or three utilities or we're going to have to import water to this valley. And that's not impossible, either.

RM: Yes, that's my thought.

HH: We've got some excellent wells around the Test Site and we could import the water from there as long as they're in Nye County.

When the Hoover Dam was built, Nevada was allocated 300,000 acre feet of water and other states around got that allocation, but our senator at that time said, "Oh, we'll never need that much water."

RM: How wrong he was.

HH: It was allocated for Southern Nevada anyway. Years ago, I was on the Board of Directors of Valley Electric and they said, "What do you want to do here?"

I said, "Well, to be honest with you, I was glad to be on this board because as a utility, I think you should be in the water business too, not only the electric." I said, "If I might, since you asked me, I'd like to tell you something that I think we ought to pursue. First of all, Southern Nevada was allocated 300,000 acre feet of water. As Pahrump, aren't we considered Southern Nevada?"

And they said, "Yes."

I said, as an example, "Why don't we try and get 50,000 acre feet of water out of the Colorado? We are Southern Nevada and it was allocated for Southern Nevada. We'll pump it over the hill and pump it downhill—and it's all downhill—so we can create enough electricity to pay for the pumping bill on the other side. Then we'll put it along up here on the [alluvial] fan and create a reservoir where we will have maybe a 40- or 50-acre reservoir, which would be a good recreational thing for Pahrump. In addition (I was a farmer then), we could run pipelines down to the farms all along this thing as we come down—it's all downhill and it creates pressure—and we could run sprinklers, which uses less water than flood irrigation." Anyway, my mouth went crazy. I talked too much and everybody laughed at me.

RM: They laughed?

HH: Oh, yes. They said, "Oh, we can't do that." To make a long story short, that's what I

envisioned for Pahrump; this was 30 years ago probably, or 20. But I think that we're going to need to import it.

RM: I would agree with that. Here are a couple of scenarios I have. California has got the big straw in the Colorado River and they've got 3 or 4 million acre feet. And California's on the coast so California needs to go to desalinization, and a lot of that water is going to the Imperial Valley—the Imperial Valley has to be taking it all for agriculture. You would know more about this than I do, but maybe we could buy Imperial Valley water rights...

Or Long Beach, L.A., and the other cities on the coast could they go to desalinization. California should be taken off of the Colorado River because they can desalinate, and Nevada could pay for their desalinization plants and provide the energy and then we'd take their water and bring the water, as you say, over the mountain.

HH: Absolutely.

RM: And let's say that global warming really gets bad. Let's say the Colorado River dries up. We desalinate in California and pump the water back up here—bring it up the Colorado River channel—and then get our water. It'll be expensive. The days of cheap water are going to be behind us pretty soon and people are going to have to learn to live with less, but we don't have to give up the idea of cities and so on in this part of the country.

HH: This valley is as big as the Vegas Valley; did you know that? We've got a lot of room. I made that proposal 30 years ago and I haven't given up on it yet. The next one is that we need to tie into the northern Nevada water line and bring a pipeline over here. After all, I think that we should be entitled to a bunch of water out of the Colorado. And if we're not entitled to that, we should be entitled to hook onto this one.

RM: Those are good ideas and I think that eventually they'll come to pass. Not in our lifetime, but eventually they will because you've got to have water.

HH: How old are you, Mr. McCracken?

RM: I am 71.

HH: You're a young guy.

RM: You really look young. I admire your lack of any signs of aging.

HH: I hope you're right. I do feel it, though. That's okay. I love life. My wife says, "Why don't you retire or something?" I am never going to retire. (I like people, too.)

RM: I agree. Do you have any more thoughts on the challenges that the farmer faced, the weather and other problems that you had to solve in order to make a go of it?

HH: On the farming end of it was a lack of money. Even though I didn't admire all of those developers, I became one; I had to. It was economics.

RM: Did you disparage them a little bit in the beginning?

HH: Absolutely. I didn't voice it too much, but I was not in favor of a lot of development. I wanted it to stay a farm; I wanted everything to stay a farm if it was a farm.

RM: Had you seen the same thing in the Central Valley by the time you left?

HH: What's really unusual in the Central Valley is that economically, they've got the third richest agricultural valley in the world, the San Joaquin Valley. They've solved the problem of water, mostly. But they've been smart in that they took communities and built a city and didn't go out in the country and get the farms. Did you know the land prices in that farming area of California are less than they are here?

RM: Right now?

HH: Yes; I don't mean L.A. prices. In the San Joaquin Valley a couple of years ago you could buy agriculture land for from $3,000 to $6,000 per acre. We've got subdivision land over here from $40,000 to $100,000 per acre.

RM: But that's not priced on doing agriculture; that is thinking city.

HH: That's been one of my biggest disappointments. I'm happy with it here because we're sitting in a very good spot but I was always disappointed in those poor farmers in California who produce a tremendous amount of food, and the value of their land was still not what it should be.

Going back to farming, I think the fact that cotton prices dropped drastically—most farm crops are that. Fortunately, I took only one agricultural subsidy in all the years that I've been farming. I took $700 and I took it because it was survival. I don't believe in subsidies. The man that I worked for for years went two or three years without taking it because he didn't believe in it, either. It's like a handout. He felt like he should be able to compete with the other farmers all along, and subsidies are not the way to go.

RM: In a way, subsidies have distorted American farming in general.

HH: Very much so.

RM: What were the challenges that you had to deal with in terms of making a go of it in the real estate business?

HH: Well, when we first started it was to get enough money to develop it, number 1.Number 2 was to find people that would finance a home for the people we sold to. We only sold raw land, we didn't build houses. For years, as I alluded to before, you could not get a bank to come to Pahrump and build a stick-built home but there was financing all over the place for the mobile home people.

RM: And that included modulars, right?

HH: That included modulars. Consequently, our first subdivisions were all modular homes only.

RM: Would Pahrump have gone stick earlier if the financing were available?

HH: A large percentage of it would have been stick-built, sure, if financing was available.

When Calvada came in there was hardly any financing for stick-built homes. And they were very successful in selling mobile home, modular home, sites. They sold them just as fast as they could have sold stick-built sites.

RM: Looking back, what was the price differential between a modular and a stick-built, putting it on one of your parcels?

HH: To be honest with you, it wasn't that much difference because the mobile home industry found an area where they would be accepted readily, easily, and they moved in with their homes and financing. That's why you still see so many mobile homes around the community. Unfortunately, they don't hold up as well. But there are some very nice ones. Joyce and I lived in a mobile home for many years before we got our own stick-built.

RM: What other basic challenges did you have to face or solve in order to make a go of it?

HH: We had to comply, of course, with the state water engineer.

RM: Was that tough, working with them?

HH: No, it wasn't really tough except that you had to go through their procedures. At that time we had to give up 2.02 acre feet of water rights for each parcel that we developed. That was not too hard for us because we had lots of water rights.

RM: How much water rights came with a parcel when you did it under Desert Land Entry?

HH: It depends on how much you proved up on it. For example, on each 40 acres the division allows you to get five acre feet per acre per year. When we proved up for beneficial use, Southern Nevada was five acre feet per acre per year and Northern Nevada was four acre feet per acre per year—there is a shorter growing season there. So for each acre of land we had five acre feet of water and we converted that to 2.02 acre feet when we subdivided for each acre-and-a-quarter. We had plenty of water; water wasn't expensive and water rights were not expensive at that time. But it was a challenge, we had to do that.

We had to go through the county, of course, and show them our plan and tell them what we wanted to do and get permission and so forth. It was a lot easier back then.

RM: Is it harder now?

HH: Oh, yes, it takes a lot longer. This county got pretty excited and kind of out of control when all the big developers came to Pahrump and bought up land. They bought up Tim's, they bought up everybody's and everything else. The county got pretty excited about it and put on impact fees for the school—building permits, real estate, development agreements, and they made them put all blacktop roads in, which is okay. But now they're going to put in sidewalks and they've got to put in street lights. And they've got to help share into a signal light, maybe. It's just unbelievable.

RM: So if you put in a two-acre parcel now, you've got to put sidewalks in?

HH: No, you don't have to if you're in a regular subdivision. We didn't have to do it and we didn't have to do it at Desert Trails, but. . . .

RM: Was there ever a time when you took a look at the obstacles you had to solve and thought, "Oh man, I am going back to California to farm?"

HH: At my age, I am not going back to farming. But I honestly never thought we would go back to California. We don't want to leave Pahrump.

RM: I just wonder how frustrating the obstacles that you had to negotiate were.

HH: It didn't matter. We've always had our little obstacles, that's part of it. We tried to comply with every one of those obstacles. A good friend, Ted Blosser, for example, was a cowboy attorney and he wanted to fight everybody. [Laughs] And I so loved him for it. My point is that it's so much easier to do what you think they want to do. Plus in most cases, it's an improvement and it's what I want to do also. I wanted to make each subdivision better than the last one—that was our goal. I told my family that all the time.

RM: That's a wonderful attitude, it really is.

HH: Well, we live here. We're not going to move. We want to be able to look people in the eye. I think they like the Harrises and we like them.

RM: Can you think of any other good stories? I collect stories that illustrate life.

HH: I can tell you a story about one time when I was on the town board and we had the community center down there. One day we got together as a community and planted all those trees all the way around it. Ron Floyd went over to California and brought back a whole big truckload of bare-rooted mulberry trees and the community got together and designed a curve around there where the ballparks come up and did all that.

I can remember when the first people started moving in from Indian Springs. We got six families that moved to Pahrump and they moved into a subdivision called Lawrence Subdivision. They had to go down Basin Road, which was dirt then, and those poor people—that dirt turned into powder and then more powder. I can remember the community got together and built two or three miles of road so those six people could travel back and forth. Tim Hafen brought his own tractor and 'dozer and dozed out a path through the mesquites and all the way down there. If you needed anything, or needed to borrow a tractor, you could count on someone helping you out.

RM: So they were just going through the. . . ?

HH: Through the desert. And they were kind of horsy people. The community needed them and they all turned out to be wonderful supporters of the community. They were involved with the horse people and the gymkhanas, stuff like that. Art and Elenore Woods were one of those families from Indian Springs. They ended up moving next door to us in Bolling's Green Acres subdivision. I remember using our John Deere tractor to help them move. Their son Bobby and Dan were best friends. We didn't have a high school in Pahrump

back then and the kids had to travel to Shoshone to go to school. They played all the sports back then and when there was a football game or basketball game there would be a string of cars going to Shoshone to watch. Elenore and Joyce would pack up a basket of food and we all would travel to the away games together, too. Art and Elenore were great friends for Joyce and me. I remember watching Danny play baseball on a gravel field, no grass or even dirt, just rocks. The field was north of Mankin's corner, which would be just behind the vet's office now. They would go through a couple of baseballs every practice. We would play Beatty once up there and they would come here for one game. That was before we built the ballpark on Basin.

When I first got here, the first year I was here they put me on as a co-chairman of the Pahrump Harvest Festival. There were three of us and we brought in a portable arena. It was kind of a makeshift old fence—chain link. We had a gymkhana and we worked that one out.

I don't know if it was that year or the next year, but we decided to try and raise some money. So we had a raffle and Bob Owens had 40 acres out on Basin Road. (It's hard for me to visualize it now because it was dirt but it was on Basin, not too far from our hospital.) Anyway, Bob Owens had a few head of cattle, but he also had a little range up here on the side.

RM: Up here on the mountains?

HH: On this side. Bob Owens and Atha Connelly and all of them. To make a long story short, we were going to raffle off one of Bob's baby burros and the winner had the choice of taking that baby burro or $50. We all sold raffle tickets and believe it or not, I sold the winning ticket to my barber. When it came time to collect the prize, he said, "I'll take the $50."

And we said, "No. We need the $50, you take the burro. [Laughter] And he did. He

kept that burro for two or three years; his kids just loved it. He lived in Vegas. Anyway, we made him take the burro. That was a fun one. He never let me live that down; he is still alive.

RM: Did he practice here in Pahrump or that was in Las Vegas?

HH: In Las Vegas. I remember another time when someone called a meeting of the Big 5. I guess the Big 5 were supposed to be five of the most influential people in the valley. Anyway the joke is that 50 people showed up for the meeting of the Big 5.

RM: What businesses were here when you first arrived?

HH: There was Blevin's Equipment Company; he had a trailer park. We lived there in a single-wide for a while. And Mankin's Texaco Station and Café, when it was open, [laughter] and a few other little ones. The Trading Post—that's where the school district now has their office . . . That was one little grocery store, and we could get a little meat there and other supplies. The first time I ever came to Pahrump, we bought some stuff and made sandwiches on the hood of a pickup. The Cottin Pickin' Saloon was here. Shirley would cook you up a hamburger or maybe a steak for dinner. The menu was limited. I remember one time we were having dinner there and a plane kept buzzing the place and it was getting dark outside. Someone finally figured out the guy was in trouble and we all got in our trucks and drove over to the old landing strip, which was across from Mankins' Corner and we all shined our lights on the landing strip to show the guy where the airport was. The guy sure was happy he finally landed that plane.

Another story I remember was when our sheriff, Ed Siri, called up a bunch of us guys to help with a motorcycle gang, I think it was the Hell's Angels, that was coming into Pahrump. We all got our rifles and met them out by the state line, there at the old Fred's Bar, it's gone now, and convinced them they were not welcome in Pahrump.

RM: Great story. What did you think when you came over the hill and first saw Pahrump?

You came up through Shoshone, right?

HH: We did. Do you know what I saw when I first came in from Shoshone? I saw some signs made out of wood—people were trying to sell lots even back then in 1963. There was nothing there, just the highway and nobody living there, but they were still trying to sell some lots out there.

I wasn't impressed until we got into town and then we started doing our research and we had our maps for where we were going to try and find this land that we had filed on. We went down by the Homestead Road and 160, and there was a cotton field there and that was Walt Williams' cotton, one of his fields. Mr. Carberry and his son and I got out of the car and went over and walked that field. Mr. Carberry was very sharp and he could analyze the cotton. He counted the boles on the plant and he started shaking his head, he said, "This is where we're going to end up." And we did!

RM: He knew just by looking at that field.

HH: He knew that cotton could grow. He grew a lot of cotton in California and he knew.

RM: And he could tell by the number of boles on the plant?

HH: Absolutely—how it was growing and everything. That was really one of the deciding factors when we came here.

RM: And what did you think when he said that and it started becoming a reality that you were going to live here?

HH: Well, first of all, all my life I've wanted to own land, and I was going to do something to make it happen. I was excited because I was just a young man; I was about 30 years old.

RM: And you saw this as your chance?

HH: I wanted to farm and I wanted to work for him and I wanted land. We'd filed on some

of our own land. We couldn't afford it but we did anyway.

RM: But you had it surveyed and filed without seeing it?

HH: We saw it beforehand but we had to go back and find it because they were scattered all over. And only one of them was mine at the time, that 320 acres.

RM: What did Joyce think when you said "Honey, we're going to be moving to Pahrump?"

HH: The first time, she hated it. I drove her from Five Points, where we had lived on the farm, through Bakersfield, Tehachapi, and we went to Las Vegas because we needed to get some groceries. We drove out here and it was night and I moved her into a single-wide trailer on the old Dorothy Dorothy. We'd farmed that one, too, for Mr. Carberry.

I got up real early in the morning to get the guys going because I'd been gone a couple of days to pick her up, and the wind was blowing and I didn't come home at lunch, [laughing] and that wind just blew, and it kept blowing all day. I walked in about 6:00 that night and the first thing she said was, "I hate it." There was dust coming in the windowsills and our little single-wide was full of dust. But, after six weeks, she loved it. She just started to really love Pahrump.

RM: What was it that turned her?

HH: One of the things that turned her was Tim Hafen's wife, Jackie. Jackie made her feel comfortable. She really made my wife participate with some other friends.

RM: Oh, so she had a network of friends?

HH: Jackie was loved by everybody. She had friends like Atha Connolly, who is no longer with us—she had horses and she taught my wife how to ride a little bit; a few things like that.

RM: Did your family get into horses?

HH: I've always been into horses. As a kid I had my own horses and I used to ride and

rope cattle and team rope, calf roping.

RM: Did you do it over here?

HH: I helped Tim brand a little bit.

RM: Did your son or your wife get into it?

HH: No. Not too much. Dan would ride his horse all over the valley when he was a kid. It was his transportation. We did have 100 head of Black Angus momma cows at our farm. It took us a couple of years. We sold them. You won't believe this. I sold them for, I think, $44,000 and two weeks later the market dropped terribly.

RM: Good timing?

HH: Got lucky. I needed to sell them because I owed a lot of money to Production Credit and the payment was due.

RM: I think what you've done is wonderful, I really do.

HH: Well, I am not trying to blow my own horn. I love Pahrump.

RM: No, I can see that. But you've given me a lot of really good historical information and everything. Thank you so much.

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