An Interview with
CELESTA LISLE LOWE

An Oral History conducted and edited by
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Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
1988

Celesta Lisle Lowe
1934

Celestia Johnson Fairbanks and Ralph Jacobis "Dad" Fairbanks
circa 1930

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 incoherency. 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.

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 known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern 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. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have

become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Alice Levine, Jodie Hanson, Mike Green, and Cynthia Tremblay. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Jodie Hanson shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tom King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end 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 much 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 for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) 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, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

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. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored 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). 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 James R. Dickinson

Library at the University of Nevada, 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 interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts 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 a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. 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.

Robert McCracken interviewing Celesta Lowe at her home in Goodsprings, Nevada - March 29 and April 2, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Celesta, could you tell me when and where you were born?

CL: I was born at Ludlow, California on October 26, 1917. Except for fate, I would've been a native Nevadan, which I've always been sorry for. My folks were living at Shoshone at the time, and since there was, of course, no doctor there, my mother got on the train and went to Ludlow for me to be born. And when I was 3 weeks old we came back. At that time my father worked at Death Valley Junction on the little railroad.

RM: Who were your mother and father?

CL: John Quincy Lisle was my father. He was born in northern California. His family came there during the gold rush. And my mother was Celesta Fairbanks Lisle, but all her life she was known by the nickname "Betty." She was born in Provo, Utah. Her folks came to Fairbanks Springs in Ash Meadows when she was 16. Her father had a freighting outfit. He had helped build the Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad from Las Vegas to Beatty or Goldfield; I can't exactly remember.

RM: Did he grade with horses?

CL: With mule teams. He started to help with building what is now the Union Pacific - at that time it was called the Clark Line - to connect Salt Lake with Los Angeles. He had a contract for grading the roadbed from Milford, Utah, to Las Vegas. He had about 100 mules, I understand, and big wagons. Then in - I think it was 1905 - he finished that contract. And just at that time Borax Smith was starting the T&T railroad which was supposed to go from Las Vegas, but because of some political difficulties, it didn't. He moved on to Crucero, in California, and built the Tonopah

and Tidewater.

RM: When Borax Smith switched . . .

CL: Grandpa didn't go with him. I don't know for sure who the developers of the Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad were, but Grandpa had already started building the roadbed for Borax Smith. And they had gotten several miles out of Las Vegas. I think it was Clark. Anyway, Grandpa and his sons went right on and built the roadbed out of Las Vegas to Beatty. He had 5 sons who worked with him at various times, some of them at one time, and some at another. And then of course he hired a lot of people, too.

And he had an opportunity to buy the land and the spring in Ash Meadows while he was working on the roadbed, and they used it to get their water. It was about 4 or 5 miles from Johnnie Siding. Then when the LV&T was built, he went right on with his freighting business. He hauled supplies to all of the mining camps.

RM: He still had his mules and all, so he just went on?

CL: He went right on hauling freight.

RM: Where would he haul it from?

CL: Usually from the railhead at Johnnie Siding. They'd bring things in on the railroad, and then he'd haul them to - I think Greenwater had started by then. That was in California, on the edge of Death Valley. Until the railroad got into Rhyolite, they hauled into Rhyolite. And then he hauled ore from the mines, wherever there was one. There was one called Lee Siding just off the T&T Railroad, opposite the T&T Ranch. There was a fairly good sized mine there that he hauled for. It was on the eastern side of the Funerals.

I don't think he ever worked for the T&T. As a matter of fact, the T&T sort of put him out of business, because it paralleled the . . .

RM: Right. It came up, skirting Death Valley, and cut across the Amargosa there. So when the T&T got up into the Amargosa, there went his business.

CL: There went his business. This was about 1907. Greenwater had been a thriving little mining camp up on the eastern edge of the Funeral Mountains of Death Valley. So my grandfather closed up his business. It was all in tents anyway, so it wasn't much of a job to take them down and move them from Fairbanks Springs to Greenwater. He moved his general merchandise store up there, where he sold the same kind of things - all sorts of groceries, feed for the animals, and mining supplies.

RM: When had he gone into Fairbanks Springs?

CL: It was about in 1904.

RM: When he was doing this freighting business, in the valley, after they finished the LV&T, he was headquartered at Fairbanks Springs.

CL: Right.

RM: What was happening at Fairbanks Springs at that time?

CL: Because of the tremendously good water supply, travelers going through the country camped there, and he sold hay, and grain, and feed, and all kinds of mining supplies - dynamite and picks and shovels and everything a miner would need. So it was just a trading post, you might say. I think his own family were the only people who lived right there. But [there were always] people coming through.

For instance, one famous traveler was Diamondtooth Lil and her troupe of girls. They came on the train to Johnnie Siding, which was 4 miles east of Fairbanks Springs. They were on their way to Greenwater, to set up their show and other things they had, so they stayed overnight at Fairbanks Springs. They had a tent, with beds - one where women could stay, and one where men could stay. And my mother tells about this. She was 16 years

old at the time, and these girls had beautiful dresses: bright colors in taffeta and satin. My mother's best dress was gingham, I'm sure. She tells about this as a very exciting event, although Grandpa wouldn't let his daughters (Stella, Vonola, and Celesta) even come in the dining room because of Diamondtooth Lil's bad reputation.

RM: Were they prostitutes, or were they just entertainers?

CL: Supposedly they were. [chuckles] But they entertained, too, in whatever way they could. As you can see from this, there were all kinds of travelers who stayed over there. And he got acquainted - well acquainted - with Diamondfield Jack, who later got into a famous court case called the Johnson County War in Idaho, where the sheep and cattlemen were having a war and killed each other. Diamondfield Jack was sentenced to death, but he was subsequently released and came back to the desert. These were the kind of people they knew.

RM: Fairbanks Springs was on the route to Greenwater. Was it also on the route to other places?

CL: Death Valley Junction.

RM: Was it going by then?

CL: Yes. And as you drive by on the highway going from Lathrop Wells to Death Valley Junction you can see, about 3 miles off, a little mesa-like hill. That big spring was right at the foot of the hill, and it's there now. A beautiful, big spring. It was full of pupfish. One of my aunts said her favorite pastime was catching the pupfish in a net and feeding them to her cat. [laughter] I'm sure the environmentalists would've had a fit about that now. [laughs]

RM: Did your grandmother work in the store?

CL: She cooked. They had boarding houses, always; that was her function,

and the girls'. They did the cooking and served the meals.

RM: Did he raise any crops there, like hay or anything?

CL: No, I don't think so. They had a a big pasture where they could turn the animals in to graze. But I don't think he did.

RM: Did he raise cattle or anything?

CL: No. He was strictly a merchant. That was his trade, always. He was not even a miner. I think he financed a lot of prospectors, grubstaked them, but he never worked as a miner, or got into that.

RM: By this time, how old was he, would you say?

CL: He was born in 1857, so he would've been just about 50 years old.

RM: Where was he born?

CL: He was born in Payson, Utah.

RM: Was he a Mormon?

CL: He was. However, he had been excommunicated. He and his brother got into a controversy. When Grandpa and Grandma were very first married - they were just a young couple - they were sent with a big group by Brigham Young down to the Sevier River in southern Utah to colonize for the church. They lived in the little town of Annabella, which was just 3 miles from Richfield. Each man took up a homestead, in his own name, and they were subsequently supposed to give this back to the church in this community after they got title.

Well, my grandfather declined to do that. His homestead was almost in the middle of town - the edge of it. And it was a beautiful pasture, right on the edge of the Sevier River. All of the townspeople pastured their cows and their horses in there, so after a few years had gone by, he told them to move their stock; if they didn't he was going to confiscate it. So that's what he did. He and my uncle Brooks rounded up all the horses, and

drove them to the railhead at Monroe, I think it was, and shipped them to St. Louis. This was a terrible deed, and he was excommunicated for that.

RM: Was his wife Mormon, too?

CL: Oh, yes. And she remained a Mormon 'till she died. She was horribly horrified at Grandpa's actions over this. But by then I think he had become disillusioned with the church, somewhat. He found that the restrictions were too tight. So he didn't care. He didn't want to be a Mormon. But my grandmother - even when, later on, not long before her death, one of her sons became a Mason (Vern joined the Masonic lodge, and of course the Masons were bitter enemies to the Mormons since the days of Navoo) it just broke her heart, to think that one of her sons would do this kind of thing.

RM: So, actually, two of her sons broke away, didn't they?

CL: Yes they did. I think all of her children left the church with the exception of her son Ralph Jacobis, Junior. He was a dedicated Mormon, and wore his garments and went to church, and did everything until the day he died. And she loved him so much because he did that.

RM: Where did your grandfather's folks come from?

CL: They came from Dedham, Massachusetts. It's a few miles outside Boston. The old Fairbanks home, which was built in 1636, is still standing. It's a State Historical Park now, but until it was given to the state, it had never gone out of ownership of the Fairbanks family. And it had never had a mortgage. It is on a 12-acre parcel of ground.

RM: How did they happen to join the Mormon Church?

CL: David Fairbanks and his wife, my grandfather's parents, were converted by some Mormon missionaries who came to Massachusetts. They sold all their property. They were quite well-to-do; they had always had mercantile

businesses. They sold everything and left for Utah. They weren't at Navoo. They didn't get to Utah until 1846. The first wave of immigrants came, I think, in about 1840.

RM: So they were fairly early.

CL: Yes, they were. But Salt Lake had been established. They were a little later. Joseph Smith, I think, had already died by then. I think he died in 1845 or '46, something like that.

RM: Your grandfather, then, was excommunicated as a relatively young man.

CL: Yes. This was well before my mother was born; she was born in 1888 - I would say it was in the 1870s.

RM: What did he do after he confiscated the stock? Did he stay on, or did he leave?

CL: The family lived there; they had built a home. But he was a freighter. He would go up into the mountains and get firewood, and fenceposts, and building logs, and haul them to the towns around: Richfield and Annabella. He did that for a number of years. Then when the railroad started building around 1900 that's when he got into bigger jobs. Up until then, he freighted anything that people wanted hauled. He had big wagons and teams.

There's a favorite story that my mother tells: One of Grandpa's brothers, whose name was Joseph, lived in Annabella. He was a very good Mormon and a devoted family man - he loved all of his family very much, and he just sort of looked after my mother's family. Grandpa would be gone - sometimes weeks and weeks - on these freighting trips. In one instance, Grandpa came down to southern Nevada. In 1898, he and his brother Brooks hauled 2 or 3 wagonloads of goods to San Bernardino and they were gone all winter. On the way back, they made a side trip up through Death Valley and

Beatty, and then back to Las Vegas. The story goes that he was looking for a place even then.

He was a businessman. In Utah, at that time, everybody had plenty to eat, and they could have a good home, but there was no way to make any money. And Grandpa sort of took a dim view of this. He was looking for a more prosperous life. So then it was only just a few more years 'till he actually did come down to Southern Nevada.

RM: Then he worked on the LV&T, and when that was done he had his freighting business out of Fairbanks Springs. And how long was he at Fairbanks Springs?

CL: Actually, he was only there about 3 or 4 years. Not very long. Then the boom at Greenwater happened, and he moved up there with his wife and family. But it didn't last. The Greenwater boom - by 1910 there was nothing left.

RM: It was a flash in the pan, wasn't it?

CL: Yes. So he stayed there until 1910, and then moved to Shoshone.

RM: Did he come to Fairbanks Springs with his family directly from Annabella?

CL: No. He had been in southern Nevada for 3 or 4 years. Part of the family stayed on the farm. Then [the rest of them, including my mother] came to Las Vegas and on to Fairbanks Springs.

RM: That must've been a big switch for her, wasn't it?

CL: It was. Particularly since she was terribly in love with a young man in Annabella. But Grandpa said, "No way. You can't. [laughs] You're going with the family." The farm in Annabella is still in the family. It was owned by one of his sons, Vern Fairbanks, who is dead now, but he never did sell out, because it's been in the family all these years. Now Vern's

great-grandchildren are farming it.

RM: Did they go with the church?

CL: The womenfolk did, but Vern did not. When he died, his funeral services were conducted by the Masonic Lodge. I don't think he ever just out-and-out quit the church, but he became a Mason. Vern was the second son. They had 8 children. My mother was the sixth child. They had 5 boys. The oldest one was David Philo, and then Vern. Then Lee, Ralph, and Lester, and Celesta, Stella and Vonola.

RM: So they had boys, and then the girls.

CL: Then 3 girls. There were 3 other children who died in infancy, and I don't remember their names. I know my grandmother had 11 children all told.

RM: What year did your grandfather go to Greenwater?

CL: In 1907. And he was there 'till 1910. During those years he had a mercantile store. That's what he always called his stores: The Fairbanks Mercantile. [chuckles] That was the name of them. And he even had signs that he'd carry around from place to place . . .

RM: I have one question to fill in on Fairbanks Springs. Was he the first one there?

CL: No; bought it. The book Loafing Along Death Valley Trails by William Carruthers has the name of the man who owned it. Apparently he had homesteaded it, because there were 160 acres of land.

RM: Was it one of the first homesteads in the area?

CL: I'm sure it was.

RM: Do you know anything about Aaron and Rosie Winters?

CL: I only know what I've read in the books: that they lived there.

RM: Do you remember your grandfather talking about them?

CL: Just vaguely; that he knew them.

RM: So your grandfather moved to Greenwater and had essentially the same kind of operation?

CL: The same kind. There was a good deal of mining all over and of course in the Death Valley area, too. His was one of the few supply places where you could get groceries, and feed for the horses, and mining supplies and all that. So he was there until finally the town just vanished. The newspaper folded up and moved away, and all the people left, but there were a lot of buildings there, and people just walked off and left them. So he moved to Shoshone to start a boarding house and store.

RM: Was Shoshone a community at that time?

CL: No, it wasn't. There were some Paiute Indians who lived there because of the water. I think some of the Panamint Shoshonis went back and forth, but the permanent people were Paiutes. They were more connected to southern Nevada. The Moapa Reservation is where they belonged, and a lot of them now live there. Oh, Phi Lee had a cabin there.

Deke Lowe: Cub Lee. He built that stone cabin up there by the swimming pool.

CL: OK. Cub Lee. Cub and Phi were brothers.

My grandparents came to Shoshone in 1910. They moved many of the buildings from Greenwater to Shoshone, and he started the same kind of a business. But this time instead of tents he had buildings, because there were some good ones available. There was a union hall at Greenwater that is still in Shoshone. It's a museum now, but it was his store for many years in Shoshone. And they moved a lot of cabins. Their main business there was a boarding house, and they fed the passengers on the train. The T&T stopped in Shoshone for meals since the train didn't carry dining cars.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Was your grandfather doing freighting business in Shoshone?

CL: No, by then the railroad was hauling all the freight and people were beginning to get cars and trucks. I don't think he ever had a freighting business again. They made the most of their money from the people off the trains who stopped to eat. By then, you see, Death Valley was in its very vague beginnings as a vacation place, and people were coming in on the trains. Shoshone was my grandparents' permanent home until 1927. They built up the store, and built a lot of cabins that they rented. They had an interesting little complex under the mesquite trees. There was one big room that was called the Snake Room, and that's where the miners and tourists gathered in the evenings to play poker or visit. All around it, attached to it, were rooms that were for rent. There are some very funny stories. Shorty Harris lived in one of the rooms, and he snored so loudly that the poker players would get up and go poke him and wake him up. [laughs]

Deke Lowe: I slept next door to him.

CL: Their business really thrived in Shoshone. They hired an old woman named May to cook for them, so Grandma didn't have to do all the cooking, although of course she helped. Shoshone is located in a grove of nice mesquite trees. They had a nice home there. In 1920, daughter Stella's husband, Charlie Brown, became a partner and the business became known as Fairbanks and Brown.

RM: Did he let him in as a partner, or did Brown buy in?

CL: He bought in. They wanted to expand. They wanted to build a new restaurant and motel. Charlie'd been working in Tonopah and this was a good opportunity. From then on the business really did thrive, because of the increased highway traffic. They had Standard Oil distributing by then (the service station, of course), and Charlie was a very good auto mechanic. At first, that was his main job.

RM: Where did Brown come from originally?

CL: He was from Georgia. As a young man he had left Georgia to come to the Goldfield and Tonopah booms, and Stella met him at Greenwater. He worked for the Borax Company for quite a few years at the Lila C Mine and other mines of the company's. By the time they moved to Shoshone, they had 4 children. They married in 1910. Anyway, he became a partner with Grandpa Fairbanks, and then he ran for county supervisor and was elected. This was in Inyo County, and he served 5 terms as a supervisor. Later he was elected to the California Senate.

The hotel at Death Valley Junction was built in the early '20s, then Furnace Creek Inn was built, so travel to these places became their main source of revenue. In 1927 Grandpa was 70 years old, and a new opportunity came up. That was at Baker.

RM: How did he find out about that?

CL: Some years earlier he had bought a section of land that is now the place in Baker. He had owned this for some time. Then when they built the Arrowhead Trail through from Salt Lake to Los Angeles - the first highway (91) - it presented a good opportunity. He and Charlie Brown were still partners but Grandpa went to Baker to start the new business.

RM: Was Brown partners in the Baker business, too?

CL: No, it was a new venture.

RM: Did he buy that Baker land with the knowledge that this was going to happen?

CL: I think so. You see, Uncle Charlie knew through his political connections that the highway was going to be built, so they bought the land.

RM: By then your mother had married.

CL: Oh, yes. I was 12 years old when we moved to Baker.

RM: How long did your grandfather stay at Baker, and what did he do?

CL: The usual - Fairbanks Mercantile. [chuckles] He called it the "Big Blue" and everything was painted blue. Once again, instead of building new buildings he bought a lot of old buildings at Silver Lake, which was 9 miles north of Baker. He moved them to Baker to build a motel. And the service station. And the restaurant.

RM: Was the road paved then?

CL: It was paved just after he got there.

RM: Was it a trail before that?

CL: It was. They called it the Arrowhead Trail. It went through Silver Lake instead of Baker.

Deke Lowe: That's an entirely new road.

CL: Yes; they rerouted it all the way. The earlier one had gone through Goodsprings, as a matter of fact. And it had been an automobile road, too.

RM: But it wasn't ever paved.

CL: No. In her book Shadow of the Arrow, Margaret Long and her friend Anne Martin tell about going over the Arrowhead Trail. It crossed the Muddy River somewhere in Moapa Valley, went through the Valley of Fire, and through Las Vegas, then came over Potosi Mountain, and through Goodsprings and Sandy Valley.

RM: Is that on the east side of Potosi?

CL: Yes. Through where those stone quarries are, now. But when it was rebuilt - in 1928 and '29, wasn't it, Deke, that they rebuilt and rerouted it?

Deke Lowe: Well, no, it was before your dad went to Baker.

CL: It wasn't paved, anyway.

Deke Lowe: I think it was about 1926 when they built it.

RM: It was called 91.

Deke Lowe: Then I think they paved it somewhere about 1928 or '9.

RM: That gave Las Vegas a big lift, too, didn't it?

CL: Oh, yes, it did. Because by then, people could get in their car and drive easily from Los Angeles to Las Vegas.

RM: So your grandfather stayed there until he died.

CL: No. His last 3 years were spent in Santa Paula, California, with his youngest daughter, Vonola. My grandmother had gone blind from diabetes and she couldn't live in Baker very well - there was nobody there to look after her. So Vonola took her to Santa Paula, California, where she and Alex lived, and Grandpa went there just to visit occasionally. By then he was in the late 80s, and he was quite feeble, so finally he just didn't come back. We have some letters that my mother gave me before she died that he wrote back to Baker, wanting to know all the details of what was going on. [chuckles]

RM: So both your grandmother and grandfather spent their last years in Santa Paula. Did your grandmother outlive your grandfather?

CL: No, she died several months before. She died in 1942, and he died in 1943. They're both buried in Santa Paula.

RM: He was the founder of at least 2 towns, wasn't he?

CL: Well, let's see. You could say he was one of the founders of Annabella, Utah. Because he and the other Mormons were in what was called the United Order. It fell apart pretty soon after that, but that's what it was.

RM: So he was one of the founders of Annabella, and in a way he was a founder of the, quote, town, of Fairbanks Springs . . .

CL: Fairbanks Springs. What we now know as Ash Meadows and subsequently as Amargosa Valley.

Deke Lowe: And Shoshone.

RM: Shoshone, and then Baker.

Deke Lowe: He was about the third one into Baker. There were 2 others ahead of him who had service stations.

RM: Oh, he didn't have the first service station.

CL: No, there was a man, O.J. Failling, who had one.

Deke Lowe: No, not really, Celesta. Failling bought out Jack Nickerson. Jack Nickerson, then a fellow named Coberly. (They had 2 service stations.) And then Failling bought out Jack Nickerson, who they called Death Valley Jack. That was his nickname.

RM: Let's pick up with your mother, now - her life, and how she met your father, and . . .

CL: As I said, she was born in Payson, Utah, January 19, 1888. The family lived in Annabella, but my grandmother had this habit - she always went back to Payson to have her babies. So my mother was born in Payson. But she grew up in Annabella, and loved it. Annabella is a beautiful little village on the edge of the Sevier River, with big trees, and green grass, and flowers, surrounded by high mountains. But when she was 16 (she had finished the eighth grade, and that's as far as she went to school),

Grandpa sent for them to come to Southern Nevada. Of course she was excited about it, but she was very much in love with a boy. But, as Grandpa told all 3 of his daughters, they couldn't get married until they were 18, so she had to move with the family.

Someone took them in a wagon from Annabella across the Sevier Valley and a mountain range to Cove Fort, Utah, where they got on the train. It was the first time she'd ever seen a train and it was very exciting. They rode on the train, then, to Las Vegas, where they stayed at the Overland Hotel. It was a big tent - a huge tent.

RM: Was that the one Pop Squires operated?

CL: Yes, I believe he did. And the partitions were just pieces of canvas hung between . . . They stayed all night in this tent hotel, and then the next day they got on the LV&T. The railroad wasn't finished so they had to ride on a work train. They rode on a flat car . . .

RM: What year was this, again?

CL: It was 1905 when my grandmother and my mother came here. The Salt Lake Railroad got to Las Vegas in 1905.

RM: They had the Las Vegas land auction in May of 1905.

CL: Yes. And this was sometime in the summer.

Deke Lowe: I think they were in Vegas in 1904 with the LV&T Railroad. They started building the T&T out of Las Vegas, then they abandoned it, and the LV&T picked it up and went on in 1904.

CL: Well anyway, it was 1905 when my mother with her 2 little sisters and her mother came to Las Vegas. They got on a flatcar . . . We have a picture of them sitting on it, with their legs hanging over the edge. [chuckles]

RM: Oh, that'd be a nice picture to have in the book.

CL: It's a wonderful picture. They went on to Johnnie Siding, and my mother says that the farther they got into the desert, the bleaker it became. She said Grandpa had sent his son, Dave, with the wagon from Fairbanks Springs to the siding to meet them. It was probably the bleakest spot on the face of the earth. [chuckles] Just desert as far as you could see - and it was on a dusty day. She said my grandmother didn't say a word the whole trip. She didn't complain, but she didn't say anything. Fairbanks Springs looked a little better, because it did have some trees - mesquite trees - and some grass and water. And Grandpa already had the tents up, and the business was going by then. That's where my mother lived until she married my father in 1907.

RM: How did she meet your father?

CL: He had come from California following the mining booms. He was about 25, I think, or 26, about this time. He was fascinated by mining, and the excitement of the possibilities of finding a rich claim. He worked on railroads, too. But he had come to Greenwater when it was first located. As a matter of fact, he located a claim there, and he was developing it. On one occasion he started down the hill to Fairbanks Springs with his burros, probably to get supplies, and he was camped in a dry wash for the night. A flash flood came down the wash, and he just barely got out in time, but it washed away his bedroll, all of his clothes, and his burros ran off. There he was in his long-handled underwear, out on the edge of the wash. He walked into Fairbanks Springs (which was just a few miles) and that's when my mother first saw him. This man with red hair and a long red beard, in his underwear. [laughs] That's how they met. Well, he worked his claim for another 2 years, and then he sold it.

I think he got $80,000, which in those days was a <u>lot</u> of money. Then

he and my mother went to Las Vegas [with] her brother Lee and his wife Daisy, to get married. They went on to Los Angeles, where they were married on March 7, 1907.

RM: When and where was your father born?

CL: He was born in Sutter City, California, in 1880.

RM: Would that be Sutter's Mill?

CL: I'm not certain of the geography but it is now part of Yuba City - north of Sacramento - and there's no Sutter City anymore.

They were married in 1907 in Los Angeles. And for their honeymoon, they went back to northern California, to Sutter City. It was the first time she met his parents. His mother was a - perhaps self-styled - very elegant type lady, and they stayed with them. Grandma Lisle was planning a party to introduce all of her friends to this pretty young girl [the wife of] her only son (she had 8 daughters and one son). When my mother told her she was a Mormon, Grandma Lisle said, "Well, but just, please, don't tell them you're a Mormon." [laughs]

RM: She was a practising Mormon.

CL: Yes, she was. She was always a a Mormon. She didn't go to church after she came to southern Nevada, because there were no churches. But she stayed a Mormon all of her life.

RM: What was your father's name, again?

CL: John Quincy Lisle. He was commonly called Jack Lisle, so everyone knows him by that.

RM: And he had red hair?

CL: Dark red, and a fair complection.

RM: Let's back up a moment. Could you describe your grandfather a bit?

CL: Grandpa Fairbanks was tall. He was 6'2", and as thin as a rail. I

don't think he ever weighed more than 170, maybe, '65 to '70. As he got older, he got thinner, and more wrinkled. He was just a spare type man. He had blue eyes - [chuckles] very blue eyes. And kind of light brown hair. He was a very stern man, in my recollections of him. Now maybe some other people know him differently. But I remember him as very stern. He loved to play poker. He was famous for all-night poker sessions and he drank some, but not to excess. One of the things I remember about him: every morning, in his coffee, he had a little dollop of whiskey. [chuckles] That was to wake up with. And he ate very sparingly . . . My grandmother would make a gruel from corn meal for his breakfast - with milk and sugar. And at noon, he'd eat a little something. But at dinner he'd have the gruel again.

Deke Lowe: Of course, he was a pretty old man by then.

CL: Yes, he was. By the time I knew him, he was getting old. And he was all business. I worked for him in the cafe, off and on, from the time I can remember. He hired all of his grandchildren, children and great-grandchildren to work. Paid us miserably poor wages. When I was in high school (there was no school in Baker so I had to go away to school) we'd work in the summers and he'd pay us, like, $20 a month, and our board and room. And then every so often he'd tell you, "Well, you're not even worth that." [chuckles] Which I'm sure might've been right.

RM: Was he what you'd describe as a critical person, or supportive, or . . .?

CL: I think critical. I felt he was always too preoccupied to pay attention to the little things that people did. He was a businessman. He was worrying about the business, and making money, and keeping the thing afloat. [chuckles] You think of a kindly old grandfather who dangles his

grandchild on his knee; well, he was wasn't that type. But if you ever needed anything, if you needed some money, or you needed help, that was who you always went to, because he would always help. I think he probably, looking back, had a pretty tough time. Because he had 36 grandchildren, and he usually hired a lot of them. For instance, he had a chef in the restaurant. Pete Flouri, a German chef, who was just about as tough as my grandfather was to work for. But then all the rest of us were grandchildren. So it was a family affair. And it helped us get through school, and we appreciated this. My mother ran the motel in Baker. She managed it until she was 84 years old.

RM: OK, let's jump back, now, to your mother and father.

CL: To my mother. Let's see. They were just married, and after a short honeymoon in northern California, they went back to Tonopah. My father worked in the mines there, but not for very long. He still had the money from Greenwater. He loved farming, although he had worked in the mines and railroads for a number of years. They went back to Hayward, California, and he bought 12 acres of apricots with a beautiful big 3-story house on it. Just a lovely home. I've had pictures of it. They just were all settled, and my older sister - who was their first child - was born there - when there was a tremendous bank failure.

RM: Was that the bank failure of . . .

Deke Lowe: 1907 . . .

RM: Right after the earthquake. It just wiped them out. Fortunately Dad had paid cash for this property, but that was all they had. He had counted on having the money to develop it, and that was going to be his career. Anyway, they had a guest house in the back, where he had a couple who worked on the ranch.

He left my mother there, and he went to Ely, Nevada, to work on the railroad. My mother was, by then, 19, and she thought the house was haunted. She wouldn't live in it. She had lived in tents, and little places, with a big family all around her, and here she was all alone, with a tiny baby, in this huge big house. So Grandma Fairbanks came up from Greenwater to visit her, and stayed with her through one summer that my father was gone. He was sending money back, and she was supposed to go on running the ranch. But she didn't. She moved the couple out and she and Grandma moved out of the big house into the little cottage in the back because she said she heard noises all over that big place.

Then my father had a very bad accident in Ely. He had part of one foot cut off in a train accident. He was in the hospital for months. It got infected, and he had a very bad time for awhile. Of course there were no compensations at that time. There was nothing. When he recovered he had a choice of a lifetime job as a switchman, or he could take a settlement of a certain amount of money. So he took the settlement. They sold the apricot orchard at Hayward and took up a homestead in Fernley, Nevada. At that time there was a big water project - one of our senators started it . . .

Deke Lowe: Newlands Project.

CL: They built a cabin on their homestead, but unfortunately it was 5 years before they got water, so my father still couldn't make a living on the ranch. They moved to Fernley in 1910.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: OK, Celesta, we talked about how your father had homesteaded in the Fernley area.

CL: Right. That was in 1910, I believe was the date. And I say that he got caught in this trap of the Newlands Irrigation Project, because he - there must've been 100 people - homesteaded in the area between Fernley and Hazen. There was to be a big canal (which is there now, and there's water in it). They were there 5 years before they had irrigation water. They had 2 children when they went to Fernley - my sister Glenn and brother John.

RM: You weren't born.

CL: I wasn't born yet, but my brother Ralph was born in 1915. They built a very nice little house and dug a well, so they had domestic water. But my father, then, was forced economically to go somewhere else to work, because there were no jobs at Fernley. He would come to Ash Meadows and work at the Clay Camp, usually in the winter then, and send his money home, and my mother kept the [ranch in Fernley].

This started in 1910. I think probably the first year he had some money because he had received a settlement for the injury and had sold the property in Hayward. One of his feet had been severed just below the ankle.

RM: So they finally did cut his foot off?

CL: Yes, they did. At first it was just crushed, and they tried to save it, and it didn't heal, and through the rest of his life he had an artificial piece in his shoe. Of course, now he would've probably gotten a pension forever, and SSI, and all this, but at that time there was nothing. But he did have enough money to build the house, and have the well dug, and by that time of course they had a car. My mother didn't like Fernley. It was probably the coldest spot on earth in the winter - just bitterly cold. It's a flat, high desert. And the growing season was so short in the summer that they could barely raise anything and get it to ripen before it

was cold again in the fall. But they lived there until 1927 - 17 years.

I feel a little bitter about it, because I've read several books about this Newlands Project. It was a big political scam. The builders of the project got rich, undoubtedly, but by the time they got water from the Truckee River down to the farming area, it cost so much money to get that they had to pay high rates for the water.

RM: It went to the farming area where?

CL: There's a big canal that goes from the Truckee River above Wadsworth, through Fernley to Hazen and ends up in a kind of a big swamp near Yerington.

It was a losing proposition right from the first. They tried raising cattle, they having a dairy. In fact, this sustained them. They sold the cream, and the milk. Then of course they had a garden, and chickens, and all this. I was not born there. My mother went to Shoshone to stay with her mother, and subsequently on down to Ludlow where there was a doctor, where I was born. But my 2 brothers, Ralph and Phillip, were both born on the ranch in Fernley.

RM: Now what year were you born, again?

CL: It was 1917.

RM: 1917. So they'd been living there about 7 years.

CL: Yes. Seven years. And my father had, much earlier, located some claims for clay in the Ash Meadows area and sold them to - I believe it was the Shell Oil Company. This would've been probably just about when they were married - in 1907.

RM: When did he sell them?

CL: I couldn't pin down the date at all, but it would've had to be between 1907 and 1910, because they were still living in this area. They had gone

- as we said earlier - to Hayward, but that was a short-lived project. [chuckles] He lost all of his money in that venture.

That was before Ely. And some time during that time these claims were sold. He went back to Ash Meadows then, and worked every winter for a number of years. He would come back to Fernley in the summers. What they really wanted to do was raise alfalfa hay. Of course, by the time I can remember, I was 9 years old. The whole place was fenced, and there were big trees, and it was a comfortable home. But completely uneconomical, because there was just no way they could make a living on it.

RM: Did your mother stay in Fernley when he went to the camp?

CL: She did a lot of the time, but not all the time.

RM: Sometimes she went with him?

CL: Yes. We lived in the Clay Camp the year I was 6 years old, in 1923, because I went to school here all that winter.

RM: OK, let's talk about the Clay Camp, now.

CL: As I remember, where we lived - of course, in relation to the roads that are there now things are completely different - there was a road that went to Death Valley Junction, and that's where we bought our groceries and did our shopping; things like that. We lived mostly in tents. We usually had a wood floor and halfway up it was wood. "Tent house" we called it. And some of them were fairly good sized. There was one I remember that was not very far from us (and I don't have any idea who lived in it). It was long and narrow, and it was divided in the middle by a cloth partition, like curtains hanging down, and the beds were on one side, and the living area on the other.

We had a tent that some of the family slept in because there were 5 of us. My sister didn't come with us. She was going to college in Reno at

that time. And then one of my brothers who was older was working on the railroad, but the 3 younger ones - Ralph, Phillip and Celesta - were living there in Ash Meadows. My mother found a great number of 5-gallon cans somewhere, and we all worked diligently and filled them with dirt, and my 2 brothers stacked them up, and braced them by burying boards around, and put a canvas roof on it, and we had a nice great big room.

RM: Was it a dirt floor?

CL: No. I don't know where she found them, but she had boards and the boys put them down for the floor. And it had one window in the back. The houses were built kind of in a row along this marshy place - Ash Meadows is just a bog, almost; it's marshy everywhere. But then just on the other side of the road that went in front of our house there was a very big pond, and I imagine that was one of the ponds that are there even now, where they dug out the clay, and then the water was so close to the surface that it filled it up.

RM: Where do you think that would be now?

CL: The people who have lived there a long long time, Pete Peterson is one, said where the houses were is under the Crystal Lake. And so I really can't remember exactly, because Ash Meadows doesn't look much different, one end of it from the other. And after all, this has been over 60 years. I've been back to Ash Meadows lots of times in between, but I don't remember where we lived. We did have a little school house.

RM: How many houses were there there?

CL: I would say 10 in this row, and then at the end of the row there was a big wooden kind of a warehouse-like house, and that's where the offices for the mining operation were. And that's where the railroad came up; right up beside it there. There were a couple of big ore bins there. Apparently

they scooped it out with scoop shovels or something, I don't know, and filled these bins and then it was loaded into ore cars and taken to the Bradford Siding.

There was no store, and the school was actually one of the houses in the row, only it was a wooden one room, and not very big, with a tar paper roof, and windows, and all that. As I remember, it was maybe 12 by 12 or 12 by 14; a small room. I've been in it since - it's in Pahrump now, on the old Pahrump Ranch, which is now owned by the big Preferred Equities Corporation. They've moved in several old buildings: an old grocery store from somewhere, and this old school, and several things, and they have one little street there that's kind of a historical street - that's where the school house is.

RM: About how many children were in school there?

CL: I can't say, except the room was full. I think there must've been 12, 15 students, ranging from first grade through eighth, and one teacher. Later on, that school was abandoned, and the children were taken to Death Valley Junction. But of course that was in California, so they had to make special arrangements to do this.

RM: Did the teacher live there in the camp?

CL: Yes. It was a lady, as I remember, a very pretty young woman. I'm not good at remembering things 'way back in the past like Deke is, and sometimes I wonder, "Am I remembering this, or is it something somebody told me?" [laughs]

RM: Did all the workers live there, or did some of them live somewhere else?

CL: There must've been a lot more who lived on the ranches around there. There were quite a lot of ranches. As I remember, we would go places where

they'd have fresh eggs, and another one would - maybe we'd get milk - and things like this. And then of course Ash Meadows' main claim to fame was a lot of bootlegging. [chuckles]

RM: This was during Prohibition, wasn't it?

CL: Yes, it was.

RM: Does the name Bloody Gulch - a bootleggers' hangout there - mean anything?

CL: No, it doesn't. I've never heard that.

RM: Norine Rooker was telling me that there was a place called Bloody Gulch where the bootleggers used to stash their booze.

CL: [laughs] That's not one that I ever heard of. I know there was a family - the Tubbs - I think Deke mentioned them.

RM: That name has come up, yes.

CL: They were bootleggers. And it was really no secret. Nobody seemed to pay much attention. I guess they were so far from the law, that . . .

RM: Where did they sell it, and who did they sell it to?

CL: I think people came there and got it. They'd drive in there from Beatty, and Death Valley Junction, and Shoshone, and Death Valley, Furnace Creek, even as far away as Las Vegas.

RM: Do you think they came out as far as from Vegas?

CL: I'm sure they must have. And the bootleggers may have taken it into Las Vegas, too. There's a famous book written about the prohibition days in Clark County called Liberty's Last Stand, and there was one particular day when a nasty, terrible turncoat arranged to have all the bootleggers at a sort of a convention and the pro-hi's arrested 75 of them in one swoop. I imagine that some of those bootleggers must have come from as far as Ash Meadows.

RM: I wonder if the people there grew their own grain?

CL: They probably did. I know there were lovely gardens. I remember one person - and I think this was the Indian family - Mary Scott's family - raised corn. And they'd bring this nice, fresh corn over to the Clay Camp when it was in season, and other fresh vegetables. So I imagine they probably grew whatever they needed to make it out of.

RM: Were there children in the school from the farms?

CL: Yes, because there was one boy, Danny Tubbs, who was just my age, and he lived on one of the farms somewhere. And there was another family and I have been friends with that woman right up to today. She lives in Las Vegas, and she grew up there. She was in the school when I was. The family's name was Isaacs - the father was Ben Isaacs - and they just had one daughter, and she still lives in Las Vegas. Her name is Elena Schneehagen.

I don't know why we stayed friends with this family for so long, I guess because their child was my age, but just a few days before he died, the Southern Nevada Historical Society had a party at our ranch in Las Vegas, and Mrs. Schneehagen brought her father, Ben Isaccs, who was very very old - he was up in the 90s - and so was my mother at that time. And they had such a good time. They both were deaf, so they had to shout, and they visited and told stories of the old days. In Ash Meadows on Sundays everybody would gather somewhere for a picnic, and everybody would bring food, and we'd swim in the big Crystal Pool. Ben died just a few days after the Historical Society Party.

RM: Was he a farmer?

CL: I really don't know. I think he was a farmer. A lot of those people had cattle. They ran cattle in the pastures there. And some of them had

goats and pigs. They raised a lot of pigs, and then they'd ship them somewhere to the slaughter houses.

RM: Were there other activities?

CL: I hesitate to say this, because I'm not sure, but I think there were even houses of prostitution out there then. I don't know who they were, but I heard rumors of it. There was a kind of a little settlement about 3 miles south of the Clay Camp, and I can remember going there. It was still in Ash Meadows. But there was no grocery store or service station, nothing like that, it was just kind of a group of houses. And I have an idea that's where that was. There was a big spring there, and the water ran in a stream down through the mesquite trees.

RM: And you think there might have been a house of prostitution there?

CL: I think there was, because even a little kid, while their parents are trying to speak in hushed tones so you don't hear this kind of thing, but you sort of get the idea.

RM: But the little kid is all ears when they do that.

CL: [laughter] Yes. But that's about all I can tell you about that.

RM: Do you know the name of the little settlement that was on the south?

CL: Just Ash Meadows. That may have been what you were referring to as Bloody Gulch, because it was back against the clay hills that are on the east side of the valley. And I know as the stream ran down this way, we would wade in it, and then just on the edge of it was this clay hill. It was not very high.

RM: You don't remember the spring by any chance, do you?

CL: I don't. It may have had a name, and as you've guessed by now, I have to run get my books. I have a book - a water survey report done in 1904 - of the Amargosa and Death Valley area. [sound of pages turning] "Over by

Mr. Tubbs' ranch, and over . . ."

RM: That's how they described things.

CL: Yes. Or, "Over by Bradfords' ranch" . . . that was the main legal way.

RM: What was the company that your father worked for when he was mining clay?

CL: I don't remember, but the clay was used in oil, or oil drilling, as I understood it, and have heard since.

RM: How much clay did they take out, and how often do you think the train came in?

CL: It came every day, but I probably wouldn't even notice how much [clay].

RM: Were the homes comfortable in the winter?

CL: Winters there were very mild. My mother would go down there in the winter from Fernley when it was so bitterly cold, and my father of course was very unhappy about it, because she was supposed to be home taking care of the cows, and the pigs, and the chickens, and the kids.

RM: Who did take care of the cows and all that?

CL: We had a young man who lived on the ranch and helped out. He would stay there. His name is Victor MacPartland. He's now married to one of my aunts. He sort of made his home with us, and he would stay there and look after things, and we would go on the train. This is why I have such fond memories of the Goldfield Hotel. I'm not certain of what route we took, but we would leave Fernley and we'd always stay overnight in Goldfield at the big hotel. It was so ornate! After living in a little cabin on a ranch, these big stairways with the beautiful banisters, and the carpeting, and the whole place was a fascinating thing. My brother, who is just 2

years younger, and I talk about it frequently. Now that it's being restored, we want to go to the grand opening. We'd stay overnight there, and I guess it took us 2 or 3 days to get from Fernley to Shoshone, because we had to keep changing around on different railroads to get there.

My family lived in Fernley until 1927, and my father - I'm not sure why he wasn't working at the Clay Camp anymore, but he wasn't. He was working on the little railroad that went from Death Valley Junction to Ryan.

RM: You only lived there intermittently, didn't you?

CL: Yes.

RM: Summers in Fernley, and winters at Ash Meadows?

CL: Sometimes I went to school in Fernley. My mother would sometimes stay there, but as my sister got older - I remember one winter, she was about 17 or 18, because she had finished high school - she stayed there with Ralph and me. Mother took Phillip, the baby of the family, with her. And then my mother did stay in Fernley some winters, too. I remember one winter her sister, who lived at China Ranch, down below Tecopa, had a terrible tragedy. Their 5-year-old boy was burned to death in a building. My aunt had a sort of a nervous breakdown after that, and my mother went that winter and stayed at China Ranch with her sister during the winter, and my older sister then took care of us, and we stayed at Fernley. And there were 2 or 3 winters when my father didn't leave. I know when they were building Lahontan Dam on the Truckee River between Reno and Pyramid Lake, he worked on that. He drove teams, scraping the dirt for it; it's a big earthen dam. And I know he worked there all winter or maybe over a year. So it was the sort of thing where if the family got broke, and needed money, he'd go somewhere to work.

RM: Do you know what a day's pay was down in the clay camps?

CL: I think it was maybe 3 or 4 dollars a day. That was about standard for miners everywhere. My father's particular expertise was dynamite.

RM: Did they have to blast the clay?

CL: I think they did, because they dug these deep holes, and they had jackhammers. They dredged it out after they loosened it up, but it was dry, and very hard. I remember that my father knew how to tell if it was the kind of clay they wanted. He would taste it. He'd rub some on his tongue, and taste it, and say, "Yes, that's it."

RM: I wonder what it was that he was tasting.

CL: I don't know. It was a very sticky mud, I know that. In the summertime when it was real dry there'd be just clouds of dust coming up out of these pits where they were digging. It was a typical open-pit operation. There was a tunnel about half a mile from our house along the Death Valley Junction road (that would be to the west) where they had dug a deep pit and then put a dirt roof over it, and that was the powder magazine. My mother would always be so worried about my father, because he'd have to be down in there getting the powder and handling it. But that happened to be the thing that he could do.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Could you tell us more about the social life in the Clay Camp?

CL: Well, in my particular family we didn't have to go outside the family much, because there were so many of us at the Clay Camp and in the vicinity: Shoshone, and Beatty, and . . . I had 5 uncles who all had big families, and some of them worked at the Clay Camp. I remember one uncle, Lester, who lived there with his family, and they had children about our

age. It was very common for everybody to bring their supper to one person's house and all eat together. My mother played the mandolin, and my father liked to sing, so practically every evening (the evenings were warm) we'd all sit out in front of somebody's house, and that was the favorite thing: Mother would play the mandolin, and different ones would sing.

It was common to go to Shoshone, which was quite a long ways - it must've been about 40 miles. We had a car and we'd drive to Shoshone on Saturday evening, and stay overnight and come back Sunday, and of course that's where my grandparents and one of my aunts, with her children, lived. And usually one or two of the other uncles or aunts working for the Fairbanks and Brown Company would be there. And Shoshone has a marvelous big swimming pool where we would swim year 'round. You'd swim 12 months of the year in that. In fact, I got to be such a good swimmer that when I started to high school (I had to go away to boarding school) without even knowing I was a good swimmer, I won the blue ribbon the first meet I was in. [laughs] Because we just grew up swimming.

RM: Where did you go away to boarding school?

CL: In this case I was going to a school in El Monte, California, near L.A. My father apparently had some money right then. By then we had left the ranch in Fernley. I graduated from the eighth grade in Shoshone, living with my aunt and uncle to finish the term. My parents were in Baker, and there was no school there.

Let me back up a little bit. We left the Fernley ranch in 1927. My father had mortgaged it heavily to buy a lot of cattle, and he was going to go into the cattle business. But of course they had to mature, and it took time - you can't do this immediately. So he had gone back to Death Valley Junction, where he was working on the Death Valley Railroad, which ran from

Death Valley Junction to Ryan. The winter was cold, and my mother (I was 9 years old, and I can remember this very well) said she'd had enough of that ranch, and the cattle, and everything. She went to the bank, and gave them back the cattle, let them repossess them, and she packed up our things - one of my uncles happened to be there visiting and he had a car - so she loaded all of us into it with what possessions we could take along, and that was the last we ever saw of the ranch at Fernley.

RM: So you basically lost the ranch.

CL: She just walked away. Seventeen years of the very prime years of their life, down the drain. My father was terribly unhappy, because he thought she should have stayed there, but I sympathize with her. They really lived in poverty, and it just went on and on and on. And there seemed to be no end in sight. As a matter of fact, within a few years the Depression began. It probably would've been worse.

So she came to Death Valley Junction and we went on to Shoshone and lived there. We lived in Shoshone, then, for a year or so. My grandparents moved to Baker that year, 1927, and my folks helped them move. My father was always prospecting and he found a sodium sulfate deposit in Moapa Valley close to the Colorado River (at the bottom of Moapa Valley). Later we moved over there. We lived in St. Thomas, which is now underwater, under Lake Mead. He worked that for about 3 or 4 years and I started high school in Moapa. But by '29 and '30 the government was buying up all of that land, so once again my mother packed us all up and she went to Baker. By then my grandfather and grandmother had gone from Shoshone to Baker, so they needed her to help them anyway. There was no school in Baker, so my younger brother and I didn't . . .

RM: What year did you go to Baker?

CL: This was 1930.

RM: You were there 3 or 4 years while he worked this sodium sulfate?

CL: My father was. The rest of the family was in Baker part of the time.

Sodium sulfate is a peculiar kind of salt. There are big salt mines down in that area, too. It's a white powdery stuff that looks just like salt. And they shipped it out in cars, on the railroad, which came to St. Thomas.

RM: And all this time was your mother still involved in the Mormon church?

CL: Yes. And of course, this was good for her. She liked living in the Mormon areas. We all went to the Mormon church in spite of my father's caustic remarks about "Old Brig." [laughter] He was a Methodist, and quite a religious man himself, but he couldn't . . . I don't think he ever went to a Mormon church in his life, but he didn't object to the family going.

RM: Did you kids go?

CL: Oh yes, we belonged to the young people's group. It was a good life, and I think my mother enjoyed living there very much, but she spent a lot of time in Baker with her parents.

RM: I wanted to ask you if there was any church activity at the Ash Meadows community?

CL: There was was no organized church or building, but we always had church, even if it was just in our own home. My mother would get all the neighborhood kids together for Sunday School, and we'd sing the Mormon hymns. She had a little portable organ that she took with her everyplace. I still have it. It doesn't work, but I still have it. And she would pump the little organ, and play, and we'd sing. Of course, in the Mormon church you don't have a minister, anyway. Everybody just gets up and tells their story.

RM: So she sort of held a little service.

CL: Yes; she did. I never thought of her as being a religious person, but she really lived the Mormon teachings. They are so devoted to their families, and this was my mother's thing. I often though that if you were not one of her family, she would let you starve to death without a second thought, but if you belonged to her family, then she would take care of you. Maybe that's a little overstated, but . . . [chuckles]

RM: So they bought you out at Moapa.

CL: That was in 1930, because that's the year I started to high school. I had just barely started - it was in the fall - when we moved to Baker. My younger brother and I went to a school in El Monte. There was a teacher there who had taught in Shoshone, I remember, called Sudie Hughes, and I expect that's how they found out about it. But by Christmas, when we came home, we didn't go back. We went back to Moapa Valley with our father, where we finished out the year. In the fall we went to live with my sister, who was living up at Big Bear Lake. She took my brother and me, and we lived with her through high school. We lived at Big Bear for a year.

RM: That's up in the mountains out of L.A.?

CL: Up in the mountains. They had a fox farm there. After we were there a year, they moved to the Los Angeles area - one of the suburbs - Alhambra. I finished high school that way.

We're still talking about my mother, really, aren't we? She lived in Baker, and my father went down to the Colorado River, and he had heard that there are some very old, fabulously rich gold mines in El Dorado Canyon, although none of them have worked for many years. He found one that he thought had possibilities, and he built a mill on the Colorado River, down

below El Dorado Canyon. It was a flop, apparently, because he didn't stay there very long. He came back to Las Vegas and took up a homestead in 1933, just before the Homestead Act was rescinded in 1934. He hadn't had time to prove up, so the government gave him 5 acres. By then they had started the 5-acre tract plan.

RM: I'm not familiar with the 5-acre tract plan.

CL: Well, you could buy a 5-acre tract at $10 an acre from the government. But you had to put up a livable dwelling, and have water (either drill a well or get it from somewhere) and a septic tank (approved by the health department) and then you could buy this 5 acres for $50.

RM: Where was his homestead in Las Vegas?

CL: I know it was officially in Section 13, Township 21, because we still own part of it. It is on Topaz Street, just 2 blocks off Desert Inn Road and 2 blocks east of Eastern Avenue.

RM: How much did he originally stake out?

CL: He originally staked out 40 acres. That was all he was entitled to, because he had used most of his homestead rights in Fernley. The original homestead ran from what is now Desert Inn Road south to Twain Avenue, and Eastern Avenue east not quite to Mohave Road. It is almost all developed now with apartments, town houses and 2 shopping malls.

RM: But it was in the country, then.

CL: Oh, yes. In order to get to it we went out the Boulder highway to Four-Mile, and then drove on a little dirt trail back in the desert. This was in the '30s. There was nothing out here. The highway was just a 2 lane paved road. That was Highway 91. We were approximately 3 miles from Highway 91.

RM: That was the L.A. road, then?

CL: The L.A. - Salt Lake road. And everyone thought it was absolutely insane that he'd go out there in this godforsaken spot of desert. But my mother liked it. She was very happy with it. Of course, this was right in the very deepest part of the Depression, and my older brother, who had been working in Death Valley driving trucks at one of the mines, was unemployed, so he came over there with my father and helped him, and they built a very nice little 2-bedroom house. They had a well drilled, which turned out to be a marvelous artesian well. It was drilled in 1931, and it was the third largest flowing well in the Las Vegas Valley. We've sold the property now, but it's still there. When it was uncapped, the pressure was such that a big stream of water shot for about 20 feet, over into a pond. It was a marvelous thing. By then there were tractors and all that, but my father didn't have one; he had a team of horses he used to clear the land and he planted about 30 acres of it into alfalfa. He was doing very well, but my mother still worked in Baker. As I said, my oldest brother came there and helped him build a house. And my brother Ralph, who is now in Beatty, was not married at that time and he stayed there. I had graduated from high school by the time they got the house built - I graduated in 1934 - but my younger brother Phillip lived there and went to high school in Las Vegas. And my mother was making plans to move over from Baker, but she was working and they really needed the money to help develop the place.

And time went along, and in 1940 my father had a stroke.

RM: Did your mother ever leave Baker and live on the property?

CL: She didn't ever leave Baker permanently. She'd drive over there on weekends and vacations and things, but she stayed in Baker. Her parents were getting very very old, and they needed looking after, too. So she actually didn't ever get moved over there. She was almost 90 years old

before she had an opportunity to live on the Las Vegas ranch. I moved with her down there, so that we could live in the house she had helped build so long ago.

RM: Your father had a stroke in 1940?

CL: He had a stroke and he lived until 1946. For about 3 years my brother and his wife took care of him, but he never walked again. His last 3 years he lived at the county hospital, which is now University Medical Center. They had a big wing out in the back for elderly people, although he wasn't that old; he died when he was 67. He finally died there of pneumonia. He had emphysema very badly and he had oxygen and everything. So he didn't really get to reap the benefits of the ranch, but, bless his heart, we're all reaping it now.

RM: He started with 40 acres, and then they cut him back to 5?

CL: No, they cut him back to 25, because he and my mother each had 5 and then my 3 brothers, who were there, each had 5, and then Deke and I filed on one. That wasn't part of his, but he got all the descriptions for us, and we still own the property. We got it for $60, and we've had offers for such fantastic prices you wouldn't believe it.

They built another road from the old Las Vegas City dump, which used to be at the corner of St. Louis and what is now Eastern. There's a park there now. Eastern was not built yet. There was no street, but a little trail wound out there. So anyone who came to see my dad had to drive through the dump, through that little trail, and on out to the ranch. But we've sold it now and there are condominiums on part of it and the rest of it's being developed. But we still have almost 5 acres. About 3 of it is right in the bottom of Flamingo Wash. Flamingo Wash used to be just a little narrow wash, maybe 20 feet wide, but they diverted everything into

it, and it has deepened and widened. We think the county is going to have to buy it from us eventually. They say they won't, and we have an attorney who would love to sue them, but we've decided not to do that. We'll just wait, and eventually they'll have to have it. And we know all about the right of eminent domain: you have to sell, but they have to pay. [chuckles] But we do have an acre and a quarter on the south side of Twain where we have 2 houses that we rent, and one that we lived in for 35 years.

RM: Your father passed away in 1946, and what did your mother do?

CL: She stayed in Baker. By that time there were 2 houses on the ranch. And then my 3 brothers had sold their 5 acres each, so it was narrowed down to 10 acres.

RM: By this time had your grandmother and grandfather left Baker?

CL: Yes they had, and they both had died.

After my father's stroke, I think my mother just gave up plans to move to Las Vegas, because she had a very good business - she was part-owner of the Baker business. She also operated the motel and trailer park until she was 85 years old. My sister Glenda lived there and was the postmistress at Baker for many years. She lived right beside my mother, and none of us realized how much Glenn took care of her. Then Glenn, unfortunately, died. And my mother just kind of fell apart. I was working in Las Vegas at the library at that time, so I took 2 months' leave of absence to stay with Mother while my sister was very ill, and then died. When I had to go home I just took her with me. The motel was leased to my sister's daughter, Lois Clark, who still has it.

RM: What's the name of the motel?

CL: It was Brown's Motel, but now it's the Clark Mobile Home Park. There's no motel anymore. They tore down all of the cabins. These were

old, old cabins that my grandfather moved in from various mining camps. And by the middle 1970s they were just uninhabitable shacks. So my niece Lois (Clark) had them all torn down and now it's all mobile home park. A nice one, too. They're building a swimming pool. She invited the whole family to Baker last Thanksgiving for a family reunion. There were 140 of us, and they have built a nice big park right in the middle of the mobile home section, and her son and another nephew put up a big monument and dedicated it to Betty Lisle. The Betty Lisle Park. We were so proud of that.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Celesta, how would you summarize your Grandmother Fairbanks' character?

CL: My feeling about her is that she was a very gentle, very devoted type person. On the surface, and to strangers seeing her, she was a very meek little lady, but she really was not. She had a very tough character. And she endured many things that less strong people would have quivered under. They had a very nice ranch in Annabella, Utah. I've been there many times since, and it's still owned by an heir of their son Vern Fairbanks. There was green grass and a river and trees, and then she came to Ash Meadows, which was barren, with a tent for a house, and nothing but swearing, cussing miners for people to talk to. No women at all except her 3 daughters. But she was faithful to her husband - she loved him very much and she went along with him. I don't think she endured it in silence, either. I'm sure she scolded frequently about the dust - this was one of

her favorite gripes: "Oh, the dust. It's so dusty!"

She was, of course, born a Mormon, and grew up in that faith, and never forgot it. She read the Book of Mormon faithfully, and she subscribed to the Deseret News. I can always remember the Deseret News being in her home, and she would read it. It must've been the Sunday edition, or an issue that would tell all about what was going on in the church, and all that. I'm sure she never went to church again after she left Annabella. She was probably 40 years old then. She went home to visit occasionally, but it wasn't an easy trip, and she didn't stay long.

As with all Mormon women (we've said this before), their families come first, and their children. When they finally went to Shoshone, my grandfather was partners with his son-in-law, Charlie Brown. It was called Fairbanks and Brown Mercantile. One of the favorite stories is that one winter, one of her sons was having a kind of hard time on his ranch in Utah, so she stole 3 denim jackets for the boys out of the store, and mailed them off. [chuckles] I'm not sure that's true, even, but it might've been. In another instance, another uncle said that he took off his clothes and left them somewhere to be washed, and my grandmother thought he'd abandoned them, and she gathered them up and mailed them to Utah to a poor family. [laughter]

I guess she and my grandfather had a good marriage - I never heard them quarrel, ever - but when she wanted money . . . When we lived in Baker, and I was probably 12 or 14 years old, there was no place to buy anything except the Sears Roebuck catalogue. If my grandmother needed clothing or new shoes or something, she would have me make out the order. I think she was very nearly illiterate - I know she went to school some, but she just didn't write. I would make out the order to the Sears Roebuck

catalogue, and Grandma would wait until Grandpa was asleep in bed, and then she would sneak into the bedroom, and take the money out of his wallet, and then the next day I'd get a money order and send it.

RM: Was he tight with money?

CL: Oh, yes. I don't think she ever had a penny, except that. She probably could've asked him for it, but it was simpler to just go take it when she . . . [chuckles] Sometimes I think that he knew she was doing that.

RM: It sounds like he probably knew how much money he had all the time.

CL: [chuckles] We would probably call him a male chauvinist now, but it was male orneriness then. And he would not say anything, but he knew where it went. But Grandma would do this very happily, and she'd smile, "Here's the money," and it would be $20 or something. But I feel that he was not fair to her, because in Baker the summers are long. It's hot from about the first of April until the end of September. And my grandmother cooked on a wood stove all this time. Some say that she could've had an electric or a gas stove. Well, they made their own electricity up until recent years, but the truth is she didn't have one. She cooked on a wood stove and usually had to go up to the back of the restaurant where there would be crates and things like this, and scrounge up wood to burn in it.

She made soap. She'd have the cooks from the restaurant put all the bacon grease and other grease into big buckets, and she made soap over a tub outdoors. She'd have this caldron boiling - it was terrible looking stuff, and horrible soap. [chuckles] It got things clean, because there was so much lye in it. [laughter]

She tried so hard to make Baker an attractive place to live, and they planted athol trees. My grandfather's brother, Brooks, was very old by

the time he even went to Baker. He lived with them all the time and she would always have Uncle Brooks out there digging holes, planting trees, and watering things. By now, there are lovely big trees all over Baker at this motel. And I wonder if anybody remembers that she and Uncle Brooks were out there planting these things. It's been 60 years since they went there.

They lived a very frugal life. My grandfather had absolutely nothing in the way of luxuries. He wore the same clothes - he had 2 sets, and he never dressed up. They didn't own a car (there were several pickup trucks they had for the business) and he never learned to drive.

RM: Did your grandmother drive?

CL: No, she never learned to drive either. In fact, she didn't even like to ride in cars very much. She loved to go places on the train, and she would ride in a car some, but she didn't enjoy it much, since she suffered from motion sickness.

RM: Now, could you describe the character of your mother?

CL: My mother was a much more independent woman than my grandmother. She took a real dim view of hardships. She worked hard all of her life, but she was ambitious. She wanted nicer things. I have pictures of her where she had a big hoop skirt, and a tall, fancy hat. My father was a very handsome man, too, and he liked to dress up. I think it was a big disappointment to my mother, in her life, that she never really had a very nice home.

One thing she did, she got her children educated, and she did without constantly, to see that we - all of us, except one - had finished high school. This was a hardship. We all worked, too, and helped ourselves some, but . . . And she made a big deal about it: "If you don't have an

education, you're going to be a dummy." And: "You've got to go to school." So even in places where we lived where there was no school she would pack up the family and go someplace where there was one or send us to live with somebody. And my father went along with this pretty much. I think both my mother and father finished the eighth grade, and at that time that was fairly adequate. My father was a great reader, and loved to recite poetry. He could recite Hamlet, and Shakespeare, and he loved to read the classics - he read classics and American early classics: Longfellow, and Wordsworth, and poets. He loved to read those.

RM: Do you have any interesting anecdotes about your mother?

CL: By the time I married (I was 18 when Deke and I were married) the Depression was over, and she was running the business herself, and she did have more money, and she had a very comfortable apartment in the motel, where she lived, with the office in the front. She had a car. And so she began spending her money on real fun things. She would take all of the children to Los Angeles to see the Ice Follies, and they'd stay overnight in a hotel. And when Disneyland opened. . . My own children adored their grandmother, because she would take them places. They'd go for a weekend - maybe just go to Los Angeles and stay at a nice hotel - and go see the La Brea Tar Pits [or something]. [laughs] They talk about this.

She started her own little tradition known as "Betty's Birthday Party." On her birthday, she would come to Las Vegas and rent several hotel rooms, or suites. Of course, I stayed in my own house, except I was at the hotel all the time with everybody else. All of my brothers and sisters and their wives would come from wherever they were, and we'd have dinner, and see a show. She loved the floor shows, with the beautiful dancing girls - this was so glittering, and she just loved it. Every year

on her birthday for many years we did that. And sometimes, when times weren't too good; we were building a house and our kids were in school, and Mother would spend $600 on a party, you know how it is, you think there are so many places to put that money. [Laughs] But she did it, and she loved it.

When my sister died, my mother was 85. Up until that time, she was still doing things. Deke and I spent a winter in Mexico at Mazatlan and she came down on the train and stayed with us. And oh, she loved it. She just thought it was fun. Another time she and her sister and one of her brothers drove to Alaska on the Al-Can Highway. They took one of the grandsons with them to drive the car since they were all pretty old when they did that. By the time they got to that age, most of them were very well off. They were hard workers. They had invested in land, and different things that they could sell, and they enjoyed their money. They spent it.

She was so devoted to her family. When every one of my 4 children was born, she came and stayed with me before the baby was born and for 2 weeks after, to look after the kids - the babies. My own children could hardly wait for school to be out so they could go to Baker and stay with Grandma. Sometimes I think it must've been a trial for her, but she never complained. [chuckles] She said it was great. My children now think back about Baker and there were always lots of cousins, and uncles and aunts.

RM: A family network, wasn't there?

CL: Yes. Old, old people, and little babies, the whole works. Some of them were good, and some of them were bad. They had one cousin who was always getting in trouble, but they liked him anyway. They thought he was very exciting.

RM: What about your father's character?

CL: My father was kind of unfortunate. He worked away from home a lot of the time, so I didn't know him very well when I was a child. It seems like he just sort of came and went. When he was a young man, he was working in a mine in Goldfield - this is before he met my mother - and the mine shaft collapsed. One of his eyes was put out. So he was blind in one eye. Then he was just in his late '20s when he lost his foot, so he was crippled. And for a man who earned his living as a miner this was a bad handicap. He had a real flair for promoting. He would locate mining claims and sell them; he didn't often work on them himself. He managed to make 3 or 4 small fortunes during his life, and then he worked in-between on whatever jobs came along.

But he aimed high. In fact, I think he aimed a little too high, because his goals were not realistic. They were sometimes unattainable. He would daydream . . . he'd locate a mine, and he could see masses of money - fortunes - in it, but he'd fool himself sometimes.

The best-acquainted I was with him was in the last years when he was in the nursing home, crippled by a stroke. We lived here in Goodsprings at that time - that last year that he lived. So I saw him 2 or 3 times a week. In fact, I sat right there with him when he died. There were 3 men in this ward, and his bed was surrounded with boxes of books, and his typewriter, and typing paper. He could sit on the side of the bed - he couldn't walk - and he'd type away. He loved to write letters to the editor. He'd get mad at things that he read in the paper, and he would fire off a letter to the senator. I have letters in my file now that he got from Pat McCarran. He knew the Senator in Goldfield when they were young men. And he'd send off a letter: "Dear

Pat, Do you know this . . .!" [chuckles]

RM: And then McCarran would respond?

CL: Yes, he'd answer in the same way, starting "Dear Jack . . ." My father was a socialist at heart because in the early years, when he was a very young man, working for the railroads, he was very much involved in the labor movement. He always thought that the capitalists were the dirty dogs - "sucking the life out of the workers." [laughter] I suppose that he lived a good life, however. He was so interested in everything that was going on; he wanted to get out and do it; work on it. But unfortunately, he was handicapped.

RM: Did it really hold him back?

CL: I think it did, because he was limited in the kind of work he could do.

RM: He couldn't really do hard labor.

CL: No, he couldn't. And yet he was not really trained for anything except that. And then of course with just one eye, that was another handicap. It didn't seem to bother him too much. He read anyway, but . . .

He and my mother had some great arguments. Because she would put her foot down about: "You are not going do this or that! You can't put our money into some crazy mining scheme." I grew up thinking that mining was just the most horrible occupation that could ever be, because I can just hear my mother: "That damn mine! He's out there dumping our money into that again!" [laughter] But he did make his living in mining his whole life.

He died in 1946. I don't think he had ever paid into Social Security. When he got to the point where he wasn't able to take care of himself (my

brother and his wife took care of him for awhile, but they couldn't do that either) he had absolutely nothing. And my mother didn't make enough at that time to care for him, so he ended up living in the county hospital the last year of his life. My youngest brother, who was in the Navy, got home from the South Pacific (he'd been home just one day) when my father died. Phillip insists that my father lived until he got home, and then he gave up. [chuckles]

RM: Let's pick up now on the time you got out of high school. Where did you graduate from high school?

CL: I graduated from high school in 1934 in El Monte, California. Then I went back to Baker and went to work for my grandfather as a waitress in the cafe, and Deke was there. He was the agent for the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad at Silver Lake, and he was almost 20. It wasn't very long until I was happy to be in Baker. The next year we were married.

We had a very interesting wedding; I like to tell about that. The whole family, everybody from Baker and Shoshone and Beatty, were going to Las Vegas because there was going to be a tremendous big celebration called Helldorado. It was the first one; this was in 1935. So, since Deke and I'd been planning to get married anyway, we said, "Well, why not do it then? Then all the family'll be there, and . . . good!" My mother contacted the Mormon bishop, who was Byron Bunker. (There was a picture of him in last Sunday's paper.)

RM: I saw it; yes.

CL: We were to be married at the Mormon church, and I had a beautiful wedding gown, and we all went to Las Vegas for the event. It was April 25th, in 1935. But the Helldorado committee had a couple who had been married 50 years, Mr. and Mrs. Pauff. They were celebrating their golden

wedding anniversary on this particular day, and they said, "Well, wouldn't it be nice if you were married on the platform after the golden wedding." So Mr. Bunker and all of us went out to the Hell village, which was at the corner of Sixth and Fremont. There's a big building there now, but it was out of town then. And that's where we were married. The parade came down Fremont Street, with Death Valley Scotty as the marshall. He was really in his cups that afternoon, and somebody had to walk along beside his horse to hold him on. [laughter] But anyway, that afternoon we were married, and we did have the Mormon bishop, but I wore Mrs. Pauff's wedding gown. I never did wear my wedding gown, but I still have it; it's packed away. There was a great long bar, planks set on sawhorses, and they were serving beer in tin cups. (It's a wonder everybody didn't get ptomaine poisoning from those tin cups, but they didn't.) And the Helldorado band played "Here Comes the Bride" in ragtime. It was a very exciting thing. Then the whole family went up on Fremont Street to what they called the Silver Cafe - it was a Chinese restaurant. And that's where we had our wedding supper, with everybody there. So that's when Deke and I were married. We went back to Silver Lake after a few days in Las Vegas. We finished out the celebration.

We lived in Silver Lake until the fall of 1936. It was just before our oldest son, David Junior, was born. We transferred to Shoshone, where Deke took the agent's job. That's where Deke voted for the first time. He was 21. He voted for Franklin D. Roosevelt. [chuckles] We lived in a boxcar at Shoshone. The agent's office was in the front half of the boxcar, and we lived in the back half. I was fortunate because my aunt and uncle, Charlie and Stella Brown, lived right beside us. She had a washing machine, and she helped me take care of the babies. Our second child,

Lisle, was born in 1938 while we lived in Shoshone. My aunt was very sweet. We lived in Shoshone until they were threatening to abandon the railroad, in late 1939. It was abandoned in 1940.

We moved to northern California in 1938, where we lived in Santa Rosa for a couple of years, then we moved back to San Bernardino. Our daughter Janet was born in Santa Rosa. In San Bernardino, Deke was a train dispatcher for the Santa Fe Railroad. We really thought that was going to be our permanent home. We bought a really nice house in San Bernardino, and settled down, and our fourth child, Dale, was born there. We lived there until 1945, when Deke's health was very bad. Besides, he hated that congested city.

So he went on a little trip out through the desert, and he happened to come to Goodsprings, where he saw the old Goodsprings Hotel was for sale. So we traded the equity in our house, which wasn't very much, because we hadn't lived there very long, for the hotel, clear. I had never seen it, but I didn't really care. I kind of thought it was an adventure. We arrived on the Fourth of July, 1945, at Goodsprings.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: You'd just come to Goodsprings.

CL: We arrived on the Fourth of July. We bought the hotel with the understanding that there were about 40 men living in it. It had a cook, and all these people were going to stay right on. But there was not a soul around when we went into the lobby. Our kids' eyes got big, and they were amazed when they looked at it. It was a beautiful hotel with a big stairway going up in the middle of the lobby like a movie set and a big dining room on one side, with living quarters for the family on the other side. So we went in, and the person we had bought it from - a lady - was all ready to go. She threw her suitcase in her car and took off. We moved in and got our things settled and then in the night the men started coming home: tramping up the stairs, singing and yelling, all of them drunk. They'd all been out celebrating the Fourth of July. So we knew we had a live place; it wasn't a ghost town.

It was a good experience. The first year we were there it was very good. We worked hard, but it was the kind of job where I could work and still take care of the children. And in that first year Deke bought the grocery store across the street - the old Yellow Pine Store - and things were really going great for us. But then World War II ended and the mines closed down. Everybody moved out except one old man - Mr. Alan Campbell - who owned nearly all the property in Goodsprings. He was a very wealthy old man, but kind of helpless. He stayed on with us. He lived with us all the while we ran the hotel, almost 7 years.

We still had the store in 1946, but it wasn't much good to us, because all the people were gone. So we moved the store into half of the dining

room of the hotel. We let the cook go and made ends meet. Deke got a mail contract to haul the mail from Jean out through Sandy Valley, and this sort of . . . you know, we lived. We did fine. We were there 4 years, then Deke went back to work for the railroad - the Union Pacific - and drove into Las Vegas. Of course it was better then. I drove the mail and by then our children were all in school, so I could do that.

In 1951 our 2 older boys were in high school and they had to ride a school bus from Goodsprings to Las Vegas. They liked to play football and they were in different clubs and school activities, so it was really not very good. My father had passed away, and his house on the ranch in Las Vegas was vacant, so we moved into it. We owned 5 acres right beside his property, so we decided we'd move into Las Vegas and build a new house on our own property. In the meantime we lived in my father's old house. It was too small for a family of 6, but we managed. We lived there 2 years while we built our home that we're so proud of now. It's still there, on the south side of Twain Avenue. A 2-story, 4-bedroom, 2-bath house. Very nice. We rent it now, because it is really too big for Deke and me.

This was 1951, and our kids were growing up. Deke was working for the railroad and making a very good salary, and I had begun to write stories by then.

RM: Fiction or non-fiction?

CL: I started out with fiction. I had several children's stories published and one short story. But I began to get interested in history, and historical writing; in fact, it was easier to sell at that time. Before we left San Bernardino I had been taking college courses in creative writing in my spare time (with 4 kids you don't have much). As a matter of fact, writing is a good hobby for a mother with little kids, because while

they're taking their naps you can create, and while you're changing their diapers you can think about things. [chuckles] So I had begun selling. I had sold a series of Death Valley stories to the old Westways magazines, and these were made into radio scripts for the "Death Valley Days" radio show - you know, the Old Ranger and his yarns.

RM: Yes, sure.

CL: There was a series of 9 of them. This was all earlier; before we came to Goodsprings. Then while we lived in Goodsprings I went on taking courses. I found I was a terrible speller, so I took correspondence courses from the University of California and the University of Utah. I began to find out that I loved to write stories - and I still do; it's just great. So when we got into Las Vegas, I began to think that I'd go to work somewhere. I worked for Ed Von Tobel as a secretary for a couple of years (while we were building our house, as a matter of fact, because we got a 10 percent discount on all the lumber and such). The pay was terrible. I loved the Von Tobel family, and they were good to work for, but I don't think I ever got more than a dollar and a quarter an hour, or something like that. I was doing all their advertising, and lots of other things, but I quit.

I didn't work for a little while, and then I took the State Examinations. I had taken courses in Library Science, so I took the state tests for a library technician and passed it. There was one little library - one small room on the courthouse lawn - which was the only library in Las Vegas. But we knew that what is now UNLV was to be built. This was 1954, and I applied for the job. I passed the test, and I was on the list of eligible people when I was hired by Dr. James R. Dickinson. The library at UNLV is named for him.

We were in the second floor of the high school auditorium at that time (Las Vegas High School at Eighth and Lewis). There was no library, no books, and 25 students. I worked in the office typing letters, and answering phones. A woman had been hired as Registrar - Muriel Parks - who came to work shortly after I did. Before she came, though, there was just Dr. Dickinson and me in the office.

RM: You were the library . . .?

CL: And everything. We were the office staff. He was the director of the school.

RM: You 2 were the beginnings of UNLV.

CL: [laughs] We were it. He had been sent down from Reno to start the university. He needed a secretary. He'd had a woman working part-time for him, just 3 hours a day, and my very first week I made the boo-boo of my life and I'm lucky I didn't get fired. She had worked just a very short time, and they sent his paycheck and hers addressed to her. She moved with her husband to South America, and I was hired full time to take her place. The first week I was there, this envelope came addressed to her, so I forwarded it. And it was our paychecks! [laughs] But Dr. Dickinson had a marvelous sense of humor. He thought it was funny and he got on the phone to Reno and got us another one.

There were only 25 students that year, and we had 3 or 4 high school teachers who had masters degrees - I think we only taught about 4 subjects. One of them was Nevada history, because people who wanted to get a teaching certificate had to qualify by doing that. I would take my notebook and we'd tell everybody to go to a certain classroom. There were 3 classrooms up in the top of the high school auditorium. We'd tell them, "Go to such and such a classroom," and then I would go and register them right there in

the classroom.

In 1957 we moved out to where the campus is now on Maryland Parkway. And really, this is the high point of my life. I'm so proud of having seen how a university grows. Of course, Dr. Dickinson's big job then was to get land and the architectural plans for the buildings. The President at that time was Dr. Maynard Stout. [chuckles] We had a couple of freestanding bookcases where we would put whatever books we had in a little sort of a storeroom beside the office. And Dr. Stout came in and walked back in this little room to see what our books were. He leaned against one of the bookcases, and it fell over. [laughs] Him with it. [laughter] Dr. Dickinson stifled a laugh and went in and helped him up. [laughter]

The next year we had quite a few more classes. We had Public Speaking, Freshman English, History, Political Science . . . They were all freshman and sophomore classes because there was no thought of a degree at that time.

RM: What did they call it then?

CL: They called it Nevada Southern, and I wish they'd have kept that name. I thought it was very nice.

I treasure the memories of the people I met. For instance, Barton Jacka, who is now the head of the Gaming Commission, was one of our freshmen. And Bart is still a good friend. Roy Woofter was one of our students - he's North Las Vegas City Attorney. He's been in the news lately because he's been having some problems. Congressman James Bilbray was a student then, also. And a number of the women and men that I meet in the grocery stores, or wherever I go, are still my very close friends.

RM: What were some of the early problems that you overcame?

CL: I think the biggest thing those first 2 years was building that first

building on the campus, out on Maryland Parkway. Frazier Hall was the first one. By the end of the 2 years they had hired a head librarian, Jerry Dye. They had Muriel Parks as Registrar, and a woman, Jewel Reynolds, as Director of Admissions. I was the assistant to the head librarian. By the time we moved to the new campus there was one building completed, and it was much the same as it is now. It hasn't been added on to very much. One room was the library, one room was the office, and there were 2 rooms at the end of the hall that were used as classrooms. The building was named for Maud Frazier, an early day Nevada educator.

RM: How did they select the site for the University?

CL: It was donated by a local couple, and one of the buildings is named for them - Estelle Wilton, I think was her name. She had 80 acres out there, but she did not have a clear title to it. So she offered to donate half of it - 40 acres - if the university would buy the other half - at a substantial amount. And also if the legislature would pass a resolution clearing the title. They did that, and cleared the title.

RM: What about the people who allegedly had an interest?

CL: I don't know. I think that the amount of money that she was paid for the other half . . . It was in a big family estate of some sort that had to be cleared up. Then she got this amount of money and she handled the other details. We had a fund drive to raise this money, which I think was 40 acres for something like $60,000, which wasn't too much. All the little school kids went door to door, and we had a 24-hour telethon to raise money. We got a lot of money. For instance, the Von Tobel family donated a substantial amount, as did the Ronzones, the Cashman family, and other businesspeople. Anyway, in 24 hours we raised $60,000.

RM: And how did you fund the first building?

CL: The state legislature voted the money for that and they started building on it right away. I have a picture of me standing on the foundation.

RM: That should be a valuable picture.

CL: Yes, I like it. Somewhere there is a huge scrapbook with the names of all the donors from that first fund drive. The book got lost and I never saw it after we moved to the new campus. By the fall of 1957 we were ready to move out there, and then I moved out of the office into the library. I finally got to use the studies I'd made all those years. Dr. Dickinson's health had begun to fail very badly, so he stepped down as the director of the school. We didn't call him the president at that time - he was the director.

RM: What was his background?

CL: He was an English professor from Florida who had been teaching at Reno. He was a brilliant man, and a fine person. His wife, Marjorie, was a music teacher in one of the high schools. They were a nice couple, and I loved working with them.

RM: What did you do for a faculty beyond the high school teachers with advanced degrees?

CL: By the time we were ready to move to the campus we had Dr. Effie Mona Mack for the history department. She came down from Reno, and was there for 2 semesters. We found her an apartment. She was there before we moved out to the campus. She was there one semester and a summer session and a semester on the campus. She was old and crotchety, and you know who babied her and hauled her around and talked her into staying when conditions were not to her liking. But I loved it that I knew her. I have all of her books now, autographed. She was so opinionated. For instance, she thought

prostitution was just ghastly, and the word is never mentioned in any of her history books. She just ignored it [chuckles], on the theory that if you ignore it it doesn't exist.

Then we had another English professor, Dr. Loren Brink, who was a good friend. Let's see, we had about 6 or 7 professors: Dr. John Wright - one of the buildings is named for him. He was retired from a university in Illinois, I think it was, so he came to teach history for us. Others on the full-time staff were Dr. Sigrid Moe, who taught English. Hugh Smithwick came from Reno with the title of Athletic Director, and taught PE classes. Alice D'Amico (now Alice Mason) was also a PE teacher. Dr. Fred Ryser taught biology; Eleanor Bushnell, political science; and Dr. Holbert Hendrix was the Education Department. There were also classes at Las Vegas High School and Rancho High, with qualified people from the community or local schools in charge. With just those 2 classrooms in Frazier Hall they had to use any facility available. There was a big patio where we sometimes held lectures or seminars for larger groups.

RM: And your students were the local people.

CL: Yes, mostly. I think by 1960 there were about 100 students. The classes were almost all lower division essentials with very few classes in major studies. Students in the College of Education were able to complete the third year, but most of the classes were for freshmen and sophomores in general studies. It was difficult for many of the local students. For instance, I remember Barton Jacka, who recently resigned as head of the Gaming Control Board. He was majoring in political science and stayed at Nevada Southern through his third year. Since he couldn't afford to go to Reno for his senior year, he was forced to quit school for a while. He did eventually get a degree and has had a fine career in various positions in

Nevada government.

RM: The kids who did want to get degrees had to go somewhere else; probably to Reno?

CL: Most of them did go to Reno, because all of the credits transferred. None of my own children started out at Nevada Southern, mostly because they wanted to get away from home, I expect. Our oldest son, David Jr., went to Reno in 1954, and earned a degree in journalism from UNR. Lisle went to Fresno State, and has a degree in Secondary Education. Janet went to Reno for 2 years, then came back to Las Vegas where she graduated in business administration. Our youngest son, Dale, went to a small college in Oregon for a while, but dropped out to go into the army. Later he went to UNR for a year, then transferred to San Francisco State where he graduated in business administration. He had another 2 years of law school there, too. I'm very proud of our children because, mostly, they worked their way through college. We helped them some, but they did most of it on their own. Janet had the Fleischmann Scholarship, which paid all of her tuition, and David had a scholarship from the Las Vegas Sun during his freshman year. He was also in ROTC, which paid a small wage, but they all worked as waiters, typists, gardeners - almost any jobs you can name, usually on campus.

RM: When did you give your first degrees?

CL: I believe it was 1967. Janet was in the first graduating class, and I'm not sure how many graduates there were, but well over 100.

RM: When did they build the new library?

CL: About 1960. It was the third building on campus. Grant Hall, named for one of our city fathers, Archie Grant, and a member of the Board of Regents, was the second building. When it was complete the library moved

into what is now the art gallery in Grant Hall. We had a little more space, but it was still very crowded.

CL: And then the third building, the library, just north of the tower, was the third building. It had just one floor to begin with. Our library moved, then, from Frazer Hall over into Grant Hall when it was done (what is now the art gallery was our library). The library was built with the right foundation to go up when the time came.

In 1960 I decided I wanted to go back to college, too, so I went on part-time, and took classes full-time for 2 semesters. Jerry Dye was the Head Librarian then, and he gave me an opportunity I enjoyed. I moved to an office in the State Building downtown and worked for what was to become the County Library system. The Nevada State Library furnished a car and supervision, and I went to all the counties in Southern Nevada to talk to the commissioners and civic groups about a new county library system for Nevada. There were no county libraries at that time, but most of the towns had a small library supported by a little tax money and donations. I did this, as a part-time job, for 4 months, then went back to the library on campus. I felt that I was not very successful, since the counties had to put up matching funds to get the government grant to build the libraries. None of them had any money, they said, but they really did like the idea. My brother, Ralph Lisle, was a Nye County Commissioner at that time, and when I went to one of their meetings in Tonopah he told me quite bluntly that if they had any extra money they would pave some roads or build some new schools, but he didn't think they could afford money for libraries. But the seed was planted in their minds, I guess, because it wasn't long until we did have a county library system, with bookmobiles and new buildings.

The next summer Deke and I had another great adventure. We joined the Peace Corps! In the summer of 1961 we took all the tests and were accepted, and since I couldn't get a 2-year leave of absence, I quit my job at Nevada Southern. We were to go to South America, but first were to spend 6 weeks in North Carolina for a training period. We rented our house, and even had our airline tickets when Mr. Shriver called from Washington, D.C., to say that the project we were to be on was cancelled. We had a choice of going to the Philippines or to Africa, or we could wait a few months until the South American project was revived. We chose to wait. Since we didn't have a house or jobs, we decided to go to Mexico for a while. We had a travel trailer, so we packed it up and went to Mazatlan, where we waited for 8 months, but were never called for the project. After a while we felt that we really didn't want to be in the Peace Corps anyway. We rented a beautiful apartment on the beach and had a wonderful time.

We finally had our fill of loafing on the beach and decided to go home. I wrote to Mr. Dye to ask if I could have a job, and he wrote back "Yes." So in the spring of 1962 I was back at work in the library, but it was in the new building. They had moved while I was away. Only the first floor had been completed, but the contractors were working on the second floor.

RM: Meanwhile, where was the special collections librarian?

CL: It had not been established yet. We had a reference department, and had become a depository for federal documents. About that time the cataloguing system was changed from Dewey Decimal to Library of Congress, so the catalogue cards for all the existing collection had to be changed. Everyone in the library typed cards in their spare time. My job, however, was order clerk. I worked with instructors making up lists of books they

needed for their classes, ordered the books, unpacked boxes, kept an accession record of all new material, and sent the invoices to the accounting department in Reno for payment. The university began to grow rapidly about then. The dormitory and gymnasium were built - the Atomic Energy Commission built a large facility on land at the back of the library, and plans were being made to change our name to University of Nevada Las Vegas. The school was finally getting the autonomy they had wanted for so long.

RM: Now, let's get back to special collections.

CL: It was 1963, I believe, when the second floor of the library was completed that the special collections was started. Jerry Dye was gone and Hal Erickson was the Head Librarian. Elmer Curley was Reference Librarian, and it was decided to put the special collections in 2 rooms on the second floor.

RM: What kinds of things did you look for in special collections?

CL: Mr. Erickson was especially interested in building a collection of gambling books and material related to the history of gambling in Nevada. He put a substantial amount of money in the budget for that, and we contacted book dealers all over the world. We spent some money on rare books, but since we didn't have the proper facilities for storing them we only had a few rare items. Now that they have temperature controlled rooms and other facilities, he tells me they have obtained many more.

I expect the decision was made to move me from the order department into special collections because I was president of the Southern Nevada Historical Society for 2 years about that time, and was also writing articles on western history and folklore for a number of national and regional magazines. I worked under Elmer Curley in the reference

department, but Hal was getting acquainted with the community and the rich history it had. Since I was an old-timer among other old-timers, he and I began visiting people who had material we thought would be valuable in our collection. We went to see Vera Krupp, who owned what is now the Spring Mountain State Park. It wasn't her we were after, but she gave us some very valuable German language books.

RM: That she had brought from Germany.

CL: Yes. Hal read German, and he was thrilled with the gift. We also saw Tweed Wilson, an old Indian man whose family had owned the ranch since the 1870s. I had known Tweed's son Buster since I was a little kid living in Ash Meadows.

RM: Oh, you mean Buster Wilson lived around Ash Meadows?

CL: Well, he used to come and go a lot. An Indian woman named Mary Scott was a kind of surrogate mother for all the Indian kids from Death Valley, Shoshone, Pahrump, and other places in Southern Nevada. Buster stayed with her.

RM: Oh, I see. He'd come out to visit.

CL: Yes. He rode his horse all the way. In later years Buster told me that his father, Tweed, had a box full of books and pictures and letters and dating back to the time the ranch was settled, right after the end of the Civil War. We made arrangements to see Tweed, and we got those papers - they are just fantastic. The original deed to the ranch was in the box.

The story of the Wilson Ranch is so interesting. The material we were given by Tweed and his son Buster (real name Lloyd Wilson) were the basis for the research done by the state historian who wrote the history of Spring Mountain State Park.

RM: You moved into the new library on the third floor, and by then you were special collections.

CL: Right. I was the only full-time employee, but I did have student help who tended the desk, did filing, and things like this. And we began collecting. The first thing that happened was that the Southern Nevada Historical Society made an arrangement with the university that it would be their depository for all of their materials - picture collections and printed materials: books, manuscripts, and so forth. They moved a sizeable amount of material right when we started. We have all the Squires papers. That came from the historical society. And the Rockwell Collection came with them.

RM: So you were instrumental in obtaining these collections.

CL: Yes, with Mr. Erickson. He was very very much interested. He loved to go out and talk to these old people, so he and I frequently would spend an afternoon with somebody. For instance, Mrs. Fred Wilson, whose husband had been one of the first postmasters in Las Vegas, gave us a lot of material. And the Henderson industrial plants donated a lot of material. We spent a lot of our time on that. Much of this material was not even catalogued; we'd rough sort it, make a record of what the material was, and store it.

RM: You didn't have the help.

CL: No, and it takes a very special kind of cataloguing. I did go to Reno and work with Bob Armstrong for a month at one time to set up the picture collection. We did get that started. He was the special collections

librarian in Reno and he was well trained. Picture collections were one of his main interests. We didn't circulate any of this material. We finally got an arrangement with a photographer to reproduce pictures. A lot of people had just begun to find out about our collection. Mario Puzo worked for 3 or 4 months there while he was writing The Godfather. Sat there at our table. I have an autographed copy of his book, as a result. This was just in the very beginnings. I worked there until I retired in 1975.

By then they had started building that new addition to the library: the one that has the walkway. It was planned that special collections would have the whole fourth floor, I believe, or most of it. It had begun to really outgrow the original space. My mother had come to live with me, and she was very very old by then, and I really wanted to quit working. But then I went to work for the Review Journal part-time. I didn't want to work full-time.

RM: When did you start with them?

CL: I'd been writing book reviews once a week since special collections was first started - I'd had a page in the paper. My column was titled "Echoes from the Archives." I did the book reviews for 14 years. I quit in 1983, so I must've started in '69 after I left the University. Then I began doing feature stories, which was a lot of fun, and not very good pay, but it's good for your ego. [laughs] My mother became more and more helpless as time went on, and I had to stay with her a lot of the time - which I enjoyed. My children by then had all grown, and I had 9 grandchildren, so life was very good.

And I really can say that I've never liked living on the desert. I love San Diego, where my daughter lives, because it's beautiful: flowers, and the ocean, and all that. But the desert has been very very good to me

and good to my family. My grandparents came here with very little assets, and they left us all - their 36 grandchildren and umpteen great-great and all the great-grandchildren - we're all reaping the benefits of what they established, as well as my own parents, and Deke's parents.

I think the desert forces you to be a realist. You can't have very many illusions when you're living out here in this bare desert. You see life as it really is. But then, you appreciate the good things. I've traveled a lot. I've been to Europe twice, and I've been all over Mexico many times. I've been on a cruise to the Caribbean, and in all of the states. Wherever I go, I see many people whose lives, I feel, are somewhat shallow, compared to mine, because I have lived a very basic life. I've worked for what I have. My parents did the same. And I think that in some ways the desert does this for people.

Some people don't survive the desert. They can't live on it. They have to leave. I have one aunt who I think would have lost her mind if she hadn't left the desert. She went back to New York City and lived for many years. She's back now, in San Diego, with one of her children, but . . . the desert was so bleak. There was no beauty - no softness or culture - and she couldn't live with it. And I think many people are like that. That the desert affects them that way. Does me, in some ways. I'm always so happy when I can get away. But then, I like to come back because everything I have is here. Centered here. I've always felt like Baker was just awful. I didn't <u>like</u> Baker. But my mother lived there for 42 years, and now whenever I take a trip somewhere and I spend that money, I think, "Well, you know, Baker was not too bad." [chuckles] So, as I say, I don't have any regret, living in the desert.

RM: How do you see the future of this desert area?

CL: I'm very disappointed in Las Vegas. When I read things like a columnist a few days ago, Ned Day - do you read his column sometimes?

RM: Yes, I do.

CL: He says things like, Las Vegas is known to tolerate anything: crime, prostitution, any sort of rip-off that comes along can be done in Las Vegas. And I think it's true. I think unless you fight it; unless you have a solid base in some kind of a religion, or a background that makes you shudder at this stuff . . . And I think the younger people get sort of mesmerized - all this money. We have a little studio apartment in Las Vegas that we keep just to stay there and my grandniece is living in it right now, going to college at UNLV. She's working in one of the casinos, and she is just starry-eyed at all this money. Her home is in Albuquerque; she's my brother's granddaughter. And I think a lot of these young people lose their sense of values - I think it may be happening to Becki.

RM: I wonder if that isn't kind of a national problem, though.

CL: The Me Generation. This is what we're doing. And of course I have always felt differently because, after all, my parents hung onto that old ranch in Las Vegas from the time it was nothing, until . . . They could've sold it years ago and spent the money, and done something with it, but they didn't. And we're trying to do the same for our children. Well, we've sold the ranch, but we hope that we'll be able to pass on something to them, too, when we go. We moved out of Las Vegas mainly because the house was too big. It was expensive to keep up, and a lot of work. We were able to rent it, and we bought this place in Goodsprings for a fraction of what you'd pay for a comparable place in the city. But it's close to Las Vegas. We have an apartment building we have to look after and we drive in in about 45 minutes.

RM: What do you think Las Vegas will be like in another 20 years?

CL: I think that unless Las Vegas gets rid of the organized crime, eventually it's going to ruin gambling.

RM: You don't think they've done that now?

CL: I don't think they've scratched the surface. And eventually . . . it's just a law of nature: you cannot say that something that's immoral is OK and legal. Eventually, as all through history, this is going to collapse. The type of gambling that goes on in these casinos, that drives people to all sorts of ridiculous measures to keep gambling, is not moral. And all of the things that go with it. I abhor prostitution; I think it's terrible. I don't like dead bodies turning up under every sagebrush. [laughs] I don't like the Tony Spilatros, and I don't like all these various things that go with it. Deke was on the federal grand jury for 18 months just 2 years ago, the one that indicted a lot of the gangsters that were tried in the big mob trial in Kansas City this year.

After it was over, and he could talk about it, oh, the terrible stuff these people would tell about. Like the ones who had immunity: they'd tell about the murders that they had done themselves, or they had witnessed. The whole thing was just enough to make you sick. But I could be so wrong. Maybe the whole world will operate on a shadowy theory of what's right and wrong. But of course Las Vegas, now, is developing other industries - we've got quite a few. And if some of the government installations such as the high-level nuclear depository, or . . .

RM: How do you feel about that?

CL: I think it's OK - I'm for it. If I was my father, I'd be firing off letters to the senate hearing, telling them my ideas. No, I think it's all right. We know that there is a big granite mountain up there, and there's

no water in it anywhere to contaminate a river. And it's going to be buried in such a way that it'd be safe. I do think that transportation of it may cause some hazards, but our scientists are the best in the world, and they can figure this out. And I think it'd probably benefit Las Vegas, too.

RM: You don't think it'll hurt Las Vegas, as some people say.

CL: I don't think the tourists give a hoot. And I think these people who are protesting out there don't really know what they're doing. I heard a very wise man on television just a couple of nights ago, a scientist, talking about nuclear weapons and all this and he said that it isn't anywhere near as dangerous as people think, because - of course, if it's uncontrolled . . .

RM: You mean, the testing?

CL: Yes, I mean the testing of it. He said, uncontrolled, it would be. But it is controlled. And of course there could be accidents, and he granted that this is a possibility, but then he cited Three-Mile Island, and now, of course the worst is Chernobyl in Russia. But even at that, the deaths are not like people thought they would be: that it would wipe out the whole country. I had a very interesting experience once. I worked with a newspaper reporter from Hiroshima. He came to our house, and we talked and talked and talked, and he told me about what it was like there. He was not even born then - he was a young man - but he knew the results of it, and he was here in the United States to try to stop testing, and stop all the nuclear stuff that was going on. But after we talked, and I really questioned him about how many people were deformed, and all that. "Well," he said, "you know, there's some." But it turns out there were not as many as we heard about. The genetic deformities and things were not

nearly as bad as . . . I think that it is a dangerous thing, and I wish that it had never been invented - I really do. Because I think the whole world would be better off without it. But in our modern world, we're going to need all of the sources of power, and sources of energy, that we can find, and we're going to have to learn to handle them properly so that the danger is minimal. There's danger in train wrecks, and airplane wrecks. There's danger in gasoline refineries blowing up. You have to have people who learn how to do this. Maybe we haven't learned how to handle nuclear energy at this point, but we will learn. I think it's something that's inevitable. I don't like the idea that somebody in Washington says, "Oh, Nevada will do anything for money, and we'll give them 9 billion dollars and they'll take the dump." [laughter] And I don't know if that 9 billion is supposed to dig the holes to bury the stuff or not. If they're going to just let us have that to build highways, and schools, and airports, and . . . And Nevada needs this. We need the money because the population is increasing.

RM: Is there anything else you feel you want to talk about?

CL: That's the end of my story. [chuckles]

Robert McCracken interviewing Celesta Lowe at her home in Las Vegas, Nevada
May 24, 1988

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Celesta, could you give me your first recollections of the Pahrump Valley?

CL: My first recollections are of people telling me things about it rather than of being there myself. My mother told about when she lived at Shoshone. In 1910 she was married and had 2 small children and my father worked in the mines and mother said one of the most memorable trips she can remember, when she had just my older brother and sister, was when she and my Aunt Stella Brown with her 2 older children, and a couple of other people, rode burros from Shoshone to Pahrump. They had a pack burro with their bedding and they camped at Pahrump. While they were there, they picked fruit and dried it. They stayed there a week or two, and when they were ready to go home they packed their burro up with all these fruits, especially peaches, which grew very very well there, and grapes; they had a lot of raisins. They rode the burros back. It was 20 miles, but that is quite a long trip on burros. We have some pictures in our family album of the little kids on the burros going to Pahrump.

Of course, that was quite a long time before I was born. By the time I was born my family was living in Fernley, Nevada, near Reno, so I was in school before I really remember coming to Shoshone and living there.

But by then we had cars and frequently went to Pahrump, because it was a fun place to go; they had a big swimming pool there. It was on the Pahrump Ranch and when we lived there, a family named Williams were living there. I don't know if they owned it or were running it for someone else, but they had 2 boys just about the age of the kids in our family. The pool

was, I think, a reservoir for irrigation and we swam in it. Then they always had wonderful watermelons and . . .

RM: Would this have been in the '20s?

CL: Well, probably the late '20s and early '30s. I graduated from grammar school - in the 8th grade - in Shoshone in 1930, so by then I left Shoshone. But of course the Indian kids were always going back and forth to Pahrump and they would tell us about what was going on. I don't know if there was a store in Pahrump . . . Pahrump people came to Shoshone to my grandfather's and my uncle's grocery store to shop and they were always very colorful people. I remember the first black person I ever saw was a rancher from Pahrump. I can remember him so well. They would come to Shoshone. He had a big, white convertible with a beautiful blonde wife. And his name was Stetson and he had a ranch in Pahrump.

RM: Was it his own ranch?

Cl: Apparently. As a young kid you don't know all the details, but we assumed he was wealthy because of that big white car, and of course he was a black man, and although the Mexicans and Indians were dark skinned, we . . .

RM: You had never seen a black.

CL: We just didn't, because there was no travel and we never went anywhere. Pahrump was the other half of the world to us.

I think Deke has told you that Kazarang used to come to Shoshone too; he was a nasty little man. He came in his car and hit at you with a stick, so we assumed that he must have had some marvelous treasure in that car because he was so possessive of it.

RM: Do you think he owned the Manse Ranch?

CL: I don't know. Kazarang lived on it while we were there, and I don't

know whether he owned it or not, or who did. And I don't know about the Pahrump Ranch. The only one we knew was Buol.

RM: Tell me about him.

CL: He had one of 2 wineries in the state of Nevada and he grew wonderful wine grapes. Now, this is a matter of record; one of the school teachers showed me some papers that he had, and his grapes had such high sugar content that people sent from all over to get some of grape juice before it was made into wine so they could test it. There was a special club in Los Angeles, I believe it was called the University Club, where he sold most of his wine. Most of the wine that he sold from his winery went to them because it was such delicious wine. As I said, Nevada had licensed wineries at that time and his was one of them. I don't think his output was too big, but . . . and he sold it all around the desert, too. He would come to Shoshone with the back of his truck full.

RM: This would have been during Prohibition?

CL: Oh, yes. Of course, we all knew about Prohibition and bootleggers and all that, but it didn't make any difference; people just didn't tattle on each other. Although in Shoshone we had a famous incident where they did. There was a big, big building built about a mile down in the marsh from Shoshone and they said they were raising chickens - hatching the chickens and raising baby chicks, and that they were bringing in these truckloads of grain for the chickens. One morning we found that the federal officers had raided it and it was a huge still. They blew up the vats. So they didn't always get away with it. But somehow the people did favor the bootleggers, because we felt that if people wanted to drink, they should be allowed to.

RM: Then during Prohibition, you could have a winery?

CL: You couldn't sell it, but you could make wine; I think you could make

200 gallons for your own use.

RM: How was Pop Buol able to sell it?

CL: He was bootlegging, I'm sure. I think he sent it to California after 1933, after Prohibition was over. The man who told me this was Ed Fleming, who taught school during the early '30s and boarded with the Buol family.

RM: Was Buol married?

CL: He was, and I know he had a son and that his wife cooked for boarders. There was no restaurant in Pahrump, but this was a place where you get a meal if it was mealtime.

RM: And he had a little store there, I've heard.

CL: Yes, he had a little grocery store, sort of like a trading post. And you could camp, there were trees with a lot of water. This place is owned by the Binion family now, as I suppose you know.

The only other person I knew well who lived in Pahrump was a man from Shoshone, Herman Jones, who moved to or built a cabin in the mountains above Pahrump. Somewhere in the late '20s or early '30s he and his wife Etta moved up there. They had no children, but they were always very nice to all the kids and a number of times my brothers and cousins and I went up there to stay with them and they would take us to Pahrump. There were always a lot of fun things going on in Pahrump with the school and the dances . . . Even if it was just to sit under a tree playing the guitar and singing, things were going on that were fun. There still is, you know.

It's a lively place and I enjoyed the time we lived there. I had a fortunate experience. When Milt Bozanic started the Pahrump Valley Times I'd just retired from my job at the university and I was looking for something to do so I worked part-time for him for 6 months. Deke was

living at Johnnie, and then we moved down to Pahrump, so I stayed there and it was a fun job. I was there when they blew up the Chicken Ranch. I got to go out and take pictures and saw these scraggly little 16 and 17-year-old girls, almost drowned from the water. They got out of the fire, but the firemen succeeded in drenching them. I only worked for about 6 months because the job was costing me a lot more than I was making. I had to drive my own car with no gasoline mileage. I went to Ash Meadows once to take pictures and do a story on water skiing on the lake up there, but I don't think the lake is there now.

RM: I don't think so.

CL: When I lived there, and it was something new and very unusual. I drove 40 miles each way to get the pictures and a fun story, but after that I realized that if you are going to work, you ought to get paid something.

RM: What were your experiences in covering the Chicken Ranch fire?

CL: Well, we were living in Pahrump at the time and I got a call at sun-up that the explosion had happened about 2:00 in the morning, but Sheriff . . . The girl in the sheriff's office called me and asked if I wanted to go out and get some pictures.

I did, and at that time there were about 6 house trailers parked close together in a little compound, and 2 of them, I think, were burned clear to the ground and the other 4 were all shattered - the doors off and the windows broken and kind of tipped sideways. There were about 8 girls there at the time, and they had been taken across the road and down a ways to a ranchhouse. None of them was seriously injured, but they were frightened out of their wits and this is one of the reasons that I . . .

When people say that brothels are OK and these women are only there because they want to be, and it's an OK kind of life, they should have seen

those young girls. There was a little black girl who I think couldn't have been more than 15 at the very most. She was scared and wet and had been up all night and looked so bedraggled. Some of the other girls were a little older, but I don't think they were any more than 20 or 21, and to me it looked like a very sad situation. The girls were not injured. Then they were all brought into Las Vegas. I understand that the man who ran it at that time - I don't recall his name - also had girls in Tucson and Phoenix. He had an airplane and shuffled them around. I'm not sure that it was true, but he had been connected with the ones at Ash Meadows who were national, and those girls would come from New Orleans and New York, and all over. But anyway they caught the man who set the bombs, but he was the man at Lathrop Wells who was later shot and killed by somebody. He had hired 2 men and they caught one in Shoshone and arrested him; he's in jail. But that's all there was to it.

RM: Did you know Lois Kellogg?

CL: No, I didn't. I don't remember seeing her, although I understand she lived out there about the time we were there.

RM: Do you remember anything that your grandfather - Dad Fairbanks of Baker, California - knew about Pahrump that is worth remembering and talking about?

CL: Yes. I talked with him at length about when he first came to the desert because I intended to write a book about his life. I ended up writing numbers of stories, but never the book. But I think he said that in 1898 he and his brother Brooks came on a wagon train from Payson, Utah. They were going to San Bernardino but on the way back they left the wagon train and, with just their horses and their pack mules, went through Shoshone. He said that's where he met John Tecopa, somewhere near Pahrump,

at a spring where they camped.

RM: Would that be Chief Tecopa?

CL: No, his son. Chief had died not too long after that. He didn't mention meeting Chief Tecopa, but he may have. But he said that Johnnie Tecopa had a horse that he thought was the fastest horse in the desert, so my Uncle Brooks claimed that he had the fastest horse, and they had a race. This spring is where Charleston Ranch is now; there's a big springs there. So they had a course that they raced . . .

RM: Did he beat the Indian?

CL: I think there was a little hanky panky. I think Grandpa did something to cause Johnnie Tecopa's horse to stumble.

They went on to Pahrump and the Younts were living at the Manse Ranch at the time and they stayed with them for a few days. And because this country was really new to them, they didn't have any maps (at that time we didn't have I-15 and road signs to go by). They were more or less heading for the mines in Death Valley because at that time they were told at the Manse Ranch that the mines had pretty much closed down, but they decided to go to Beatty anyway.

RM: Now, this would have been Beatty Ranch and Old Man Beatty? There were no mines to speak of there.

CL: No. Tonopah hadn't even begun to grow. They rode on to Beatty and from Beatty they went across country to Pioche.

RM: Across the Test Site from Beatty?

CL: Yes, across the Test Site from Beatty to Pioche and he said that at each place, as at Manse, they got directions about where water was - the springs and things - and they just made their way. Then they went to work in Pioche in the mines, and worked there until spring, and they both had

ranches in Utah and they went back.

RM: Your grandfather eventually went to work on the railroad, didn't he?

CL: Shortly after that. They called it the Clark Line. And he had a lot of mules and I guess when they were down here, he was just looking for a new place, although my grandfather was apparently a good farmer, but he wanted something where he could make some money. He just wasn't the type who could be contented with . . .

RM: Do you remember him saying anything about what Pahrump might have been like when he was at Fairbanks Springs?

CL: No, I don't. They didn't talk much about Pahrump, except that Pahrump was about 35 or 40 miles away and it was no problem for him to go back and forth. I know that my mother and Della White were about the same age, and they would go spend a few days with each other. My mother was 16 when she came to Ash Meadows and she was married a few years later. Apparently the families were friendly and knew each other. Other than that . . . freight lines missed Pahrump because they were coming from Las Vegas. My grandfather freighted from the railroad in Las Vegas to Greenwater, Rhyolite and Goldfield until they built the railroads through there.

RM: How about your father - John Lisle? Do you remember any experiences or recollections that he might have had regarding Pahrump?

CL: Well, he worked in Ash Meadows at the Clay Camp and he was a prospector. I recall him prospecting around the Johnnie Mine area but he didn't find anything, unfortunately. I don't remember him telling me any stories about Pahrump. Have you read the story of Chief Tecopa's funeral?

RM: No I haven't.

CL: Did I give you a copy of my story of Chief Tecopa's life?

RM: No.

CL: What about Aaron Winters.

RM: He just kind of vanishes from the record, doesn't he?

CL: Yes. So I asked Dick Lee, or Bob Lee, one of the two, what happened to . . . He said he went down to Copper World, which is a big copper mine and little town and smelter down here in the Clark Mountains around the time of World War I.

RM: He lived that long, then.

Deke Lowe: I'd say until 1916, and he died down there from the flu or something. Bob Lee told me that.

RM: What happened to Rosie, his wife?

DL: She died long before that. Joseph Yount was the father of Sam Yount, which were the people we knew.

RM: Did you know John Yount?

DL: Well, it was sort of like the Lees; I just saw him. But I did know Sam. He was down in California before I came to this country. I bought some property from him but a guy represented him and I wanted to go meet him. I guess he was a little senile . . .

RM: And the person Della White married - Fisk - was quite a mining man.

DL: Yes, and a business man; more of a mining man than a miner. Those are 2 distinct things.

RM: Yes, that's quite a distinction.

DL: He was all over this country - the Goodsprings area and Silver Lake - looking for gold mines and so forth, and when he quit mining he went into the real estate business.

RM: And he finally made some money?

DL: He made good money then. But I guess he always was a pretty good business man and contractor, like building a roadbed out on the desert.

People did everything.

RM: They had to, didn't they, to survive?

DL: But I don't believe they had any children as far as I know. Don't you suppose, Celesta, that material like that would be in the historical society somewhere?

CL: It probably is somewhere in San Bernardino, I imagine. I thought I'd read through and see if she said something . . .

DL: She was a very interesting talker.

RM: Yes; what a link with the past.

DL: Well, just like the Lees. They were born there in the '70s, both of them - '75 and '77 - and I used to pump them and get all kinds of information out of them. That's well over 100 years ago. Bob Lee was a young Indian - half-breed, you know. He lived at Tecopa, on the Resting Springs Ranch. His older brother Dick was working up at Silverpeak in the mines. Bob just decided to get an education so he got on his horse in Resting Springs and started out and he went to the Indian School at Stewart, but on the way he stopped a month visiting . . . it took him about 2 months to get up there. He went to school about 6 weeks and then he said he went to the head man and said he was quitting. The man said, "What's the matter, Bob?"

"I don't like the system." So he got on his horse and rode back. He didn't like the system.

Another time he told me that before the railroads came you had to go to Daggett - that's where the Santa Fe Railroad ran through. They would go in a buckboard down to Daggett to do their shopping, and all that.

RM: From Resting Springs?

DL: From anywhere out in this desert. Of course it would take him 2 weeks

because he would go down and party and all that. He and his wife went down - she was Indian - and they were drinking and raising hell and he caught her in the act, so he got the buckboard and left. He left her right there. He came back on out to Pahrump and he told me, "I was so down I took my pistol and I went out there on the desert, and I sat down on a rock and I put it up against my head and I was going to blow my brains out. And," he said, "you know, I thought better of it," so he decided not to do that. He said she used to write to him and want to come home. But he never let her come back.

RM: Was that the mother of his children?

DL: I think some of them. I don't know if he ever married again. But that's what he told me; he was going to commit suicide.

RM: Was Phi Lee part Indian?

DL: No. He came to this country 'way, 'way back in the early days before there was a railroad or anything like that. Dick Lee told me about his father. The Old Spanish Trail came from Barstow and then it cut across and came up the Tecopa Canyon, but also it would go down the Mojave River and then come up through Bakersfield. Two other men on horseback were coming over the Old Spanish Trail and they came down the Mojave River to what they call Crucero. There are lots of mesquites in there and water, that's the Mojave River, and then it sinks, so the Indians always used to come across at various times of the year from the Colorado River up into that country hunting rabbits and quail. When they were there they shot at these white men and they started running but they only had arrows. They shot one man - put an arrow through his lungs. They got away from the Indians and everything. Along about Baker, they stopped and the guy died and they buried him. Nobody at Baker knows this, but there's a grave there of this

man. And then they went on.

This would be 'way back before . . . in the '70s or even the '60s, because he was a pioneer in this country 'way back . . . '49ers. They came from Kentucky or somewhere to California and then in the '70s, they had this silver thing up at Panamint and he was there. He had cattle and he used to furnish beef to the mining camps. That's where he supposedly met his wife and married her. Then he had these kids and he was really an old-timer. Old Man Beatty was another one.

RM: And there was a guy in there named Lander before Beatty. Actually, I think Lander built the house there.

DL: There were accounts of people having cattle ranches out there 'way back in the '60s and '70s.

RM: Could we just get your recollections of Della White, Celesta?

CL: I was going to see if I put the date of when they came . . . I wanted to see if she said the year that they came to the ranch. I don't seem to have all my notes with the manuscript I've given you, so I don't have the date of when they came to Manse Ranch, but she told me they had a ranch in Montana - her father had lived there and her mother's parents, her grandparents, had come to Pahrump Valley earlier, but I don't know what date. Harsha White had come to Virginia City when the boom was on there in the 1850s and he raised cattle and sold beef to the mines there and Cub Lee was at Virginia City at the time. Harsha White and one of the Yount brothers, whether it was Johnnie Yount or whoever, that would be Mrs. White's brother. When the mines in Virginia City began to close down and there was no market for their beef anymore, they began looking for a new range and since the elder Younts were already in southern Nevada, they came down here.

RM: So that's how White got there.

CL: Yes. And she said that Cub Lee had 100 cattle and he drove them along with Harsha White and one of the Yount brothers when they came from Virginia City. They had covered wagons and all 3 of them put their herds together and drove them [south]. Cub Lee stopped at Indian Springs and stayed there and the Whites and the Yount brother came on to Pahrump Valley. Now, this must have been some time in the 1860s, because that's about the years that Virginia City began to fold up.

RM: Was the Yount brother Samuel?

CL: Yes, I think it was Sam. There were 3 of them.

DL: The old Yount was named Joseph.

RM: Joseph. The sons were John, Sam and . . .

CL: And Lee.

RM: There was a Lee Yount?

CL: Yes. And then whatever Mrs. White's name was. She was a daughter of Joseph Yount.

DL: Was Cub Lee's brother already here too?

CL: I believe he was, yes. But Cub Lee didn't come on to Pahrump Valley. He stopped in Indian Springs and kept his cabin there and I don't know how long he stayed. I know he couldn't have stayed too long because he was all over the desert after that. I think this may be documented somewhere; I've intended for some time to go to the Nevada Historical Society and see if they have any records of when the Younts actually came to Pahrump Valley.

RM: There's that article by Dougherty, and Pop Squires talks about the same story with some variations, of how . . . Towner was with them.

CL: He must have been with the older . . . with Joseph when they came. I don't know what year that would have been.

RM: Was White with them at that same time?

CL: No, White came later.

DL: Now, that sounds right.

CL: White was in Virginia City and he came later.

RM: This would be Buckboard to Beatty.

DL: Yes, and they went clear over to the ranch at Manse and stayed a few days and then when they went back, the way I understand, they retraced their way over toward Resting Springs, and then you go north from Resting Springs through Stewart Valley and up to Ash Meadows and right on up through that way. They didn't go from Pahrump that way.

RM: Up over the Johnnie Summit.

DL: They came right back because there wasn't any road from Resting Springs, because there was no road from Pahrump to Shoshone over the pass. I've got a mental picture of all the old . . .

RM: Now, who acquired . . . somebody else was on the Pahrump Ranch by the time Brooks got there as recorded in Buckboard to Beatty. Winters was gone by then.

DL: No.

RM: Aaron Winters was still there?

DL: He hadn't got there yet.

RM: Yes; he was still in Ash Meadows, I think.

DL: Yes and there were a couple of cattle ranches up in what they call Oasis Valley, which is Beatty, up at the Hot Springs, and they don't even mention old man Beatty.