An Interview With

Cameron McRae

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

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PREFACE

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

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

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

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

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

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

—Robert D. McCracken
2014

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—RDM
2014

Robert McCracken interviewing Cameron McRae at his home in Pahrump, Nevada, July 12, 15, and 21, 2011.

CHAPTER ONE

CM: Before we start, I wanted to say that I was a county commissioner when we hired you to start this whole history project and you did the first books on the Nye County communities. I remember delivering a box of stuff to your place on Swenson in Las Vegas.

RM: It's been an amazing journey for me. It was a long hiatus since the late 1980s but we've done about 120 interviews all together so far, and we've done a number of history books. Right now I'm working doing a couple of new books and going through the old newspapers and the oral histories. Most of the oral histories are so rich. There's a human dimension to an oral history that you can't get out of newspapers. It's the person speaking and using their own words. Many of the people I interviewed in the late '80s are gone now (they were old then) and it's a treasure to have some of their recollections.

Why don't we start, Cameron, with you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

CM: It's Cameron Ladd McRae.

RM: And when and where were you born?

CM: I was born July 16, 1955, at Condell Memorial Hospital in Libertyville, Illinois.

RM: What was your mother's full name, including her maiden name?

CM: It's Mary Elizabeth Bland McRae.

RM: And when and where was she born?

CM: I honestly don't know, Bob. To move forward a little bit, she died when I was 11 or 12, and I didn't really have that adult life connection with my mom or dad.

RM: What did she die of?

CM: She died of multiple body cancers at a relatively young age; she was 40-something.

RM: Did you have other siblings?

CM: Yes, I'm the seventh of eight children, four boys and four girls. The oldest would have been right around the 75, 76 range; she just passed on this last year. And my youngest sister died as a young girl from an automobile accident. I believe she was 14 or something when she was killed.

RM: What was your mother's background?

CM: As I understand it, they're part German. They lived in southern Illinois; I remember going down on Sunday trips to see them. They were kind of unique—they lived in a big multi-family home with Grandma and Grandpa Bland and five or six of their children and their families. It was kind of a big tenement house, almost, as I recall, with six or seven apartments in it. Other than that, I really don't remember much about that. Contact basically broke down. I was a 10- or 11-year-old boy.

RM: That living configuration sounds kind of neat to me because who can you be closer to in some ways than your family?

CM: My mother was a part of a very large family. I can't tell you that I remember meeting all my aunts and uncles, but I can remember some of their visits. It was different from my father's side; he had a brother and sister that I recall, but it was kind of the same scenario—we'd go to Gray's Lake and visit on a Sunday, and that's it.

RM: What were your father's parents' names?

CM: John was my grandfather's name. Again, I don't recall. His mother had died, and

my grandpa John had gotten remarried at some time. He had a very long life. After I moved to California with my brother as a young boy, he was still doing things. He came out and visited one time with my older sister in southern California. He was in his mid- to high-90s before he passed on. But again, that contact was when I was very young.

RM: And where did your father's father and his wife live?

CM: I believe it was Gray's Lake or Round Lake in the northern Illinois area. I don't know how my maternal grandfather earned a living. I believe my grandfather on my dad's side was in insurance; I remember something about insurance. But I truly don't recall.

My memories of those visits and time are fond, but they didn't really go much farther than that. After my mother died my oldest brother and sister gained custody of my younger sister and my older sister and myself from my father.

RM: Why was that? (If you feel like talking about it, of course.)

CM: There were some household issues. My father, I guess bluntly, had a problem caring for us. We had housekeepers, but it just didn't go well. I was a challenge at that age over everything. The older siblings got together and basically took my father to court and gained custody of us. I came out to live with my brother in Southern California. He lived in West Hollywood with his young wife at the time. My youngest sister went to live with my oldest sister and her family in San Jose. She had three boys and I think a daughter at that time. As I recall, they basically emancipated my older sister and she stayed back in Illinois with one of my aunts until she turned 18 and went on with her life. I think she was 17 at the time and I was 12.

RM: Before we move on to California, is there anything that stands out in your mind

about your years in Illinois growing up?

CM: I was a challenge as a young boy. [Laughs] I remember as my mom got sick and such, I tended to be a troublemaker, quite frankly, in school and so on. In the house I only remember my older sister and my younger sister. The other siblings had all grown up and gone to either college, the army, or whatever they were doing so I don't recall the household with the whole family. My dad worked in Chicago and my mom was a stay-at-home mom.

We lived in a village—they call them villages there; here, we call them towns—called Mundelein. We lived across the street from a nice park so we always did things. For whatever reason, I do remember my elementary school; I could probably draw you a detailed map of it. It's one thing I recall vividly.

RM: Do you remember the name?

CM: Yes, it was Fairhaven Elementary School. It was a K-6 school; you'd go down one hall, two first grades, two second grades, two third grades. You'd go to the other half, two fourth grades, two fifth grades, two sixth grades. It was right against the Soo Line railroad track, an elevated rail track with an old wooden trestle that I crossed under to go to school every day. And of course there was snow in the winter, which was cool.

RM: Kids don't mind the winter that much, do they?

CM: I can't say that I did. I remember instances when they plowed the street and the snowplow would pile the stuff up next to our driveway and our garage so we always had a big place to build igloo forts of snow. And, of course, we had snow the latest because it would melt the last and be there the longest. I remember ice skating to school when we'd have ice storms. And we didn't walk down the streets, we'd always walk between houses.

There were no fences. Your fences would be shrub lines or something of that nature, but you always cut through; it didn't matter.

But up through the first year of junior high, after my mom died, like I say, I was a challenge. My sister, who was 16, was trying to take care of an 11- and 9-year-old and I didn't do much to help her [laughs], as I recall. So that was one of the issues. My brother and sister originally thought they'd have me go to live with my sister because she had three boys, and have my sister go with my brother because he and his wife hadn't been married all that long and she was pregnant. But because of the challenges I was presenting, they changed it and that's why I went to live with my brother and his wife.

RM: How did you feel about the possibly of moving to California?

CM: I'm told I didn't take it too well. I was very antagonistic, very resentful of the whole thing with my mom dying. I'm told that on the day they came with the court order to retrieve us, I went to school. I had a pretty eventful day at school that day and was coming home to get in deep trouble. [Laughs] And they were there. They were there with the court order to take custody of us, and got on a plane with the clothes I had on my back and flew to California and my sister flew to San Jose, and that's how it was.

RM: You flew to L.A.?

CM: Yes. My brother and his wife lived on a street called Wilton Place in West Hollywood in a little one-bedroom with a little loft and den. That's where I came to.

RM: What was it like in Illinois? Was it sort of rural?

CM: Yes, it was pretty rural.

RM: And there you are in the middle of L.A.

CM: Yes. As I remember the story, I got enrolled into a school, Joseph E. Le Conte

Junior High School in West Hollywood, coming from a very rural Midwest setting. It was kind of a shock. I guess all in all it didn't take me very long. I suppose in reality I transitioned fairly quick because I didn't get into the same level of trouble once I came to live with my brother and sister-in-law.

RM: Why do you think that was?

CM: Well, part of it—and I say this quite fondly of my sister-in-law, who just passed away this last year—is that she cared for me like I was hers. Between that and whatever influence my brother shared with me, that seemed to, for the most part, calm me down and get me going. I wasn't, by any means, pristine, but there was a significant change. And I think this is mostly to my sister-in-law Susan's credit.

RM: She wasn't that much older than you, was she?

CM: She'd have been 20-something and I was a six-foot 200-pound seventh grader.

RM: You must have been the biggest kid in class.

CM: Yes, and in the Illinois setting I guess I would describe myself as kind of a bully. That didn't go too far when I got here. At Joseph E. Le Conte Junior High school I got paddled once by the dean of students or whatever he called himself.

RM: And he was able to do that?

CM: The guy was eight-foot eight, had a paddle that was two foot in diameter, as I remember. You know how that stuff goes. But, it's one of those things—it's where the two cultures meet. I'm new in the classroom and the classroom's kind of rowdy. I'm sitting there, and I'm new to the thing. One of the kids right behind me picks up an eraser and throws it against the wall. The teacher comes around and says "Who did that?" And no one says anything. She looks right at me and says, "Cameron, who did that?" And I, of

course, said, “He did.” And that was fine—he got in trouble. And when we got out of class, walked out in the hallway, he and his buddy came up and decided they were going to pay me back for my honesty. At that point, I decided that I could pay them back also and got into a little brawl and ended up at the dean’s office.

RM: Did you win the brawl?

CM: Well, it depends. I mean, I won the battle and lost the war because, you know, I thought I was doing the right thing, defending myself. But I got in trouble at school, got paddled, got home, got in trouble at home because the rule was you don’t fight at school, you don’t fight, you don’t fight. I realized quite early that I didn’t have any pleasure in seeing the dean and seeing the paddle again. [Laughs] The rest of it was relatively uneventful. I got a paper job.

RM: Which paper?

CM: I want to say the *Los Angeles Times*. I had a small paper route around where the apartment was. If it was raining on Sunday morning, then my sister-in-law would get up and help me do it. But other than that, I was on my own and when I got home from school I did that for a while and that allowed me to get a bicycle. I remember that sometimes my sister-in-law would drive me to the Griffith Park Observatory with my bike in the car. Sometimes she’d make me ride. I hated the ride up, but the ride down was wonderful, coming down the hills through the park to where we lived.

RM: So you lived not that far from Griffith Park?

CM: I couldn’t tell you whether it was a mile or two miles but it was close enough that periodically that’s what would happen.

RM: Was there anything particularly engaging for you about Griffith Park?

CM: Probably it reminded me a little bit of the trees and the road and a little bit of Illinois even though obviously, a park up in the mountains is not what I had on the plains of northern Illinois, but everything else was asphalt and rows of apartment buildings. We lived just south of Wilshire between Wilshire and Sunset. We lived there for about six months, and then we moved to La Habra Heights—my brother bought a home there. That was in '68.

RM: Where is La Habra?

CM: La Habra is at the north end of Orange County and La Habra Heights is the south end of Los Angeles County. Whittier was to the west and Hacienda Heights or the Roland Heights area was to the north.

RM: When you first got to L.A., did you experience homesickness for Illinois and your contacts there?

CM: I don't really know because of the trials and tribulations of that rocky family issue at the home. I certainly can't say that I was relieved to go or not go. And again, in no way was I an angel. I still got into my share of trouble as a 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-, 16-year-old, but nothing like the tantrums and fits of rage and stuff like that that I was experiencing before. Today you'd say I was acting out or whatever before that transition.

RM: Living in Hollywood, did you have any experiences with the movie industry?

CM: No. It was just, as I remember, a relatively nice area. The routine my sister-in-law and brother had set up was that you don't give somebody idle hands. I had to get home, do my studying, and I had a paper route.

My brother had a couple of motorcycles—back then he had a Norton and a BSA. I had a motorcycle helmet and a set of boots and on Friday and Saturday nights,

particularly since my sister-in-law was pregnant and couldn't ride, I'd get to go ride with him. The guys would get together and meet at Pioneer Chicken on one of those streets and then ride up and down Sunset Boulevard, cruise Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood Boulevard—they had some kind of loop. You'd go down to La Brea and then to Vine Street. As long as I kept my nose clean and out of trouble and did what I was told, then that would be the things that we'd do. I remember I liked that a lot.

RM: How did you think about leaving the Hollywood area and going south?

CM: La Habra had a rural, hilly feeling. We had an acre lot, a house kind of on top of a hill, avocado groves on one side, orange citrus groves down below on the other, so it was kind of nice. And in the same way, they kept me plenty busy with things like helping with the house, painting, yard work. I pulled weeds till I can't believe it because they had a big long hill with ivy and I always pulling weeds, always doing stuff like that. [Laughs]

My brother had kind of an entrepreneurial sense. He ran some businesses out of his house that I immediately got involved in. Again, I was a pretty good-sized big boy and could do a lot of things. La Habra was really kind of neat. That's where I became a volunteer firefighter.

RM: Oh really, as a kid?

CM: Yes, through high school. It was kind of unique. Sixteen years old is when I first got into it. I drove my first fire truck there. I did that for a while even after I moved out of my brother's home after high school. But being a volunteer firefighter at the high school was kind of an interesting scenario. There were three or four of us in the school and the local paper did a couple of stories on us answering calls.

RM: How did you happen to get into the fire department?

CM: La Habra Heights had a truly rural all-volunteer fire department. They had what they called a junior firefighter program, and if you lived there you could get into it. And when you got your driver's license, you could train to be a driver, and I did. I took their training and got qualified to drive the fire truck. I did that for a number of years.

RM: Did you fight any of those big L.A. fires?

CM: I think 1969 was the year they had a pretty big brush fire that went through the Roland Heights, Hacienda Heights, La Habra Heights area.

That's where I first went to an EMT class, first aid, because they had an internal program that they used and trained everyone in. It was a unique program. You know, we have pagers now that are very small and this Plectron was a huge brick thing. [Laughs]

RM: And you had your own? Did you carry it with you?

CM: Well, you could. It was battery operated so if it wasn't plugged in at home, you had a bunch of batteries and you could keep it with you. That's how they notified the volunteers in that area because it's a big rural sprawling hilly area.

RM: Did you do a lot of house fires, also?

CM: We didn't do a lot but there were some. It was a hilly area so there were a number of car accidents and smaller brush fires. My wife, Susan, can tell you that one time she got grounded and I got scolded. We were at one of the high school dances, the spring dance or the winter dance. I'm in a tux, she's in a formal. We walk out of the gymnasium where the dance was and we saw the glow of the fire. We jumped in my van, went up there, parked on the side of the road, and I left her there in a van. I had my stuff with me so I went up and did the fire, and I was there mopping up at the end. I had my bunker pants on and my shirt.

RM: Your tux?

CM: And the fire chief went by and said, "Not dressing down, are you?" I got her home late—she got in trouble because I got her home past curfew, so to speak. The fact we were at a fire didn't matter. Her mom said, "You blew it, you're grounded." [Laughs]

RM: Did she go to high school with you?

CM: Yes. Susan and I are high school sweethearts. She was a freshman and I was a junior. Matter of fact, it was December 1971, so we've been together as boyfriend and girlfriend for 40 years and we've been married 34 years.

RM: How wonderful. Why don't you give us her name?

CM: She was Susan Margaret Boyd. She's from the Ohio area. Her dad worked for General Motors and her mom was a nurse. They moved out from Ohio to La Habra when Susan was a very young girl, four or five, somewhere in that neighborhood.

RM: How did they happen to do that?

CM: I can't answer that; they just ended up there. Susan and I met through church and high school or through high school and church, I don't remember whether the other chicken came first, to be honest with you. But that's where we met, at the Methodist church in La Habra. And the rest is history. [Laughs]

RM: Do you want to say when and where Susan was born and give her parents' names?

CM: Susan was born in Ohio, somewhere in the Cleveland area. Her dad's Arnold Boyd and her mom's Margaret Boyd. He was a CPA, basically an accounting individual, and her mom was a registered nurse for their whole careers.

So my brother bought this house and I went to Rancho Cañada Junior High

School in Whittier for the year and then went to Lowell High School in Whittier. I call myself no better than an average student.

RM: What do you recall about the smog in that area?

CM: I don't really recall the smog. There was some that came up into La Habra Heights but I don't really recall it, not like I see it today when we go and visit Susan's mother. She still lives in Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga, so we go down there periodically.

RM: I think people were less sensitive about awareness in those days.

CM: That's probably true, and I think at that young age, that's probably not something that really caught my attention.

RM: You went to high school in Whittier following the era of Richard Nixon, who of course was from Whittier. Was there any anything of Nixon that you remember?

CM: No, not that I remember. And the high school was on the very east border of the Whittier community. It certainly wasn't any influence to me at the time. Though there were activities on the campus—the Young Republicans Club, which I think I got involved in due to the conservative influence of my brother.

RM: Oh, was he conservative?

CM: Oh yes. By the way, I ran for student body president and got beat my senior year.

RM: It sounds like you were popular.

CM: I don't know if I was popular or not, not really. But I had good friends. I participated in church. I don't even know why I got talked into running but I did and, like I say, got beat. [Laughs] But it was one of those things that I'm glad I did. It was kind of an interesting experience.

I did do some things in high school. I did shop classes. I kind of did some unique

things in a life science, physical science-type class. As Susan would tell you, we'd spend the weekends digging through dumpsters. That class did a lot with recycling so we'd do a lot of recycling projects. I did it to make money and also to recycle. Our church was big on that—we did a lot of paper recycling and a lot of aluminum recycling—and it fit well with this class. I was always kind of at odds with the instructor. He had some unique things that he'd do to try to get kids involved, particularly in recycling. I would challenge him, and he would challenge me. One time I won tickets to the winter formal. I'd done something wrong and he wanted to discipline me. I said, "Okay, I did it wrong. I'll work and I'll get you 500 cans."

He said, "Okay." Then he was ticked because I already had the cans in my truck or van. But it was a good thing; I really enjoyed it.

CM: That type of class is partly what got me going in some mechanical issues. Even on my time on the Nye County Commission, I believe my strong points have been math and numbers—I'm analytical. One of my first big jobs was with a company called Johnson Mechanical Contractors. It was kind of a fluke that I even got the interview. This gentleman, Dean Schull, was an engineer. We talked and he presented me a small set of plans and asked me what I saw. He was flabbergasted that I could take this plan view of a piping drawing and, with no real technical training other than some drafting I took in high school—the old drafting, not the CAD, but the pencil and paper, #2 lead. I was able to take that plan drawing and freehand a three-dimensional isometric of what I saw. That really impressed him and he said that's why he hired me. But then he told me, "I'll hire you under one condition. You've got to go back to school."

I said, "I can't go back to school. I'm married, have a young family."

He said, "You've got to go back to school. I'll pay for it but you've got to go." So during that time frame, they paid for my tuition and books. He even let me change my work schedule. If there was a class that was only available in the daytime, they'd say, "Okay, adjust your schedule, get your class." That's how I got what college education I have.

RM: What school was it?

CM: A little bit was at Rio Hondo College and Chaffee College. Chaffee was the one I went to mostly because by then I had moved and we lived in Ontario. Chaffee Community is where I took my accounting classes, took some general business classes. I

think I have about 30 units of college credits. Then the business that he was in got a little tight and tough. It was a small company and I got laid off and went to work somewhere else.

RM: What was the time frame that you were there and going to school and so on?

CM: It would have been around ’78 to ’83. I worked for him for about four or five years.

RM: Why don’t you give me your brother’s name and if you know it, his birth date and place and all of that.

CM: I don’t know his birth date, but his name is Craig.

RM: Do you know his middle name?

CM: Laird or Lloyd, I can’t remember—one of them’s Laird and the other one’s Lloyd.

RM: Okay, we’ll call him “L.”

CM: All eight of us were “C. L.” There were four boys and four girls and we all shared the same initials, C. L. McRae.

RM: I wonder why your parents did that.

CM: I don’t know, but it was Colleen L., Craig L., Colin L., Cary L., Caren L., Cameron L., Cynthia L., Cathy L.

RM: That’s unusual. How did he end up in California?

CM: I don’t know.

RM: Where had he gone to school?

CM: It was either Northwestern or another northern Illinois schools, and then he took a job in Southern California.

RM: That was a high-end school.

CM: Yes. And he put himself through—he worked, spent some time in the military. He used to tell me stories about driving some form of missile truck all over Europe during his tour of duty. He came home and went to school and worked and got his degree. I believe he worked in construction—road construction, highway construction. And as I remember, he got a job for an outfit called Babcock and Wilcox in the refractories division. They were out of Alhambra, so that's, I think, how he got to Southern California.

RM: How much older was he than you?

CM: I'm going to be 56 and I think he's 74 or 75, so it's 19 or 20 years.

RM: And what about his wife?

CM: That was Susan Ruth. She was from Youngstown, Ohio. I don't know exactly what the connection was and how they met up.

RM: Were they about the same age?

CM: He was a little older. They were married in Youngstown because I remember we took an airplane and flew to Ohio for their wedding.

RM: He was probably out of the house when you were born, wasn't he?

CM: I think so.

RM: So you didn't grow up with him?

CM: No. Like I say, the only siblings I remember in the house were my older sister Caren and, of course, my younger sister, Cynthia. I don't remember my brother Cary, the next one above me, ever being in the household.

RM: When you were going to live with your brother and his wife, how did you feel about that?

CM: Honestly, I don't know that I had any thoughts because we showed up home from school and there they were, and away we went.

RM: And did you know him at all?

CM: No, not really.

RM: It seems like it was a wonderful thing that he did to fight for you.

CM: There's no question about it. Today we don't talk about those unfortunate things that I wish were different. A lot of that, I think, goes to a time where he had to be my father but wanted to be my brother and there were conflicts. I always remember some of the life lessons he taught me. As I say, I was not a problem child but I wasn't great, either.

I tell the story—I was dating Susan and my sister-in-law Susan had grounded me for something and my brother was in Chicago doing some work. I wasn't going to stand for being grounded and I said something stupid. She gets him on the phone and said, "You talk to Cameron; I grounded him and he's not going with the program."

I said something stupid to my brother like, "What are you going to do about it? You're in Chicago." I hang the phone up, go out, disobey rules, come home, go to bed.

And some time in the mid-morning all of a sudden my door goes boom! In comes my brother and we had a little discussion on, "This is what we do. When you're grounded and I give you something, you're going to do it."

Now, that type of caring—because that's really what it was—has stuck with me forever. What they gave up to do that at the time I didn't know and probably wasn't super appreciative about, but I often say that part of the reason I've been successful in business as an entrepreneur and so forth is that Susan McRae taught me. She ran the home office

and I learned from the way she did things and what she expected.

And Craig, my brother, with all the things that we did that—people would say, "How do you even get an opportunity to do that?" What he instilled in me has been wonderful. I owe him for that, and I never have a problem saying it. Sometimes, excuse the expression, I'll say, "He's an asshole." [Laughs] We've had those kinds of brotherly candid discussions, both face-to-face and over the phone.

RM: You were 12 years old or so when you came under his influence and it sounds like he had a lot to do with shaping your character and determining your future. Some people would say 12 is too late. It's really interesting.

CM: Well it's the good, the bad and the ugly. As I've raised my children with Susan we've often talked about that, you know. Whatever happened to Cameron L. McRae after I made that transition, whatever clicked and made me decide to change, I think that my brother and some of my older siblings would say the same thing. I was on the path of self-destruction at that age.

RM: And he saved you?

CM: As I told you, I say "they" because much of it was my sister-in-law Susan's influence, truly. But as far as my work ethic and some of that stuff, that rubbed off from Craig because even though he worked for somebody full time, he always had something going on the side. He had a little business called McRae Enterprises. When somebody would say, "What do you do?" he'd say, "What do you need done?" I remember digging post holes and putting in post poles, small chain fencing; we put up a car dealership. He made an agreement with someone and I painted houses with some guy who taught me how to paint.

RM: And this was his enterprise?

CM: That's how he made a living during a time when he needed to.

RM: So he didn't stay with Babcock and Wilcox?

CM: No, he went off and did other things. Then he and another fellow took McRae Enterprises and went on their own, called it JMAC Industries, and did all kinds of industrial things. I learned to weld, I learned to lay brick, I did kiln work, I did a lot of things at 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 until I moved out when I graduated. I turned 18 on July 16 and was gone on July 17. They said I could stay but he gave me some parameters. "Here's what you can do." And one of the options was, "You go away." [Laughs] I chose to go away.

RM: But you could have stayed and worked under his umbrella?

CM: I could have, but that's not that I wanted to do, and therefore I didn't. During that time frame I went to school and I always had at least one part-time job. I got my license and I went to work for my neighbor on Saturdays at a place called A to Z Mart in Whittier; it's still there today. I lovingly call it the "We Buy Junk Sale Antique Store." I worked there on Saturdays and helped the guys pick up furniture. I would clean furniture, fix furniture, clean and scrub refrigerators, clean and scrub stoves. I would deliver furniture.

And the regular guys who did it might get a side job to move somebody, so I'd do that on a Saturday night or on a Sunday. Then during the week I got a job at Babcock and Wilcox working in their warehouse; they moved to La Mirada. I'd get out of school early because I had enough credits and work at Babcock and Wilcox in the afternoons till 5:00, unloading railroad cars, cargo containers, stuff like that. That was my first full-time job; I

was graduating.

The way I recall it is I went to work one afternoon like I normally did. I got out of school at 11:20 or 12:20. I showed up and my boss wasn't there. I went inside. The big guy's name was Joe, as I remember. They said, "Joe didn't show up today. Can you take over?"

I said, "Yeah, I can do it but you've got to help me a little bit." So they did.

RM: You were 18 years old?

CM: Well, I hadn't turned 18 yet. I was still going to school. I guess on Friday he showed up. When I showed up the next Monday, the guy said, "We don't know where Joe is. Do you want to do his job?"

I said, "Okay." So I got my first real full-time job, for I think it was $650 a month.

RM: That was good money back then.

CM: I thought I was living high on the hog. [Laughs]

RM: Especially for a kid.

CM: Yes. I made some typical, stupid mistakes and summarily got fired. The district manager would want this, want that. I was young and didn't know any better. One day he told me to do something and I said, "Make up your mind—you want me to do this, you want me to do that." I talked myself out of a job.

But still, that whole scenario is when you go through the segment of just going to school. At the same time, I was a volunteer fireman so I was always busy. And shortly thereafter, my brother started his enterprise with another fellow and I worked for them for a year or so. I drove tow trucks for a while and I drove garbage trucks for a while during that time. That's when I went to Johnson Mechanical.

RM: In the interim?

CM: Yes, when I got fired from Babcock and Wilcox, I got a job driving a tow truck at a place in La Mirada with Jerry Christian Chernow.

RM: How did you know how to drive a tow truck?

CM: I didn't. I just applied for the job, went and interviewed. They taught me how to drive a tow truck. From there I went to work for a competitor, who kind of stole me over. Back then they were a club, an AAA, affiliate. You would hear all the other contractors in the region, and I had my call sign. A couple of times, I towed into this guy's shop in La Habra. One day he said, "Hey, I'd like to talk to you. I listen to you all the time on the radio. You take more calls than anyone that I hear. You always seem to get them done. Would you like to come to work for me in La Habra?" He made me a deal and they got me a little two-bedroom apartment behind their Chevron gas station/tow yard.

RM: Did you tow cars off the freeway and things like that?

CM: Not many off the freeway because we didn't have the freeways right where we were. Once in a while I might get a job off the Highway 91 freeway, but not very often.

RM: It seems like that would be kind of a harrowing thing. It sounds like your brother had what I would call a can-do attitude about things, and he gave that to you.

CM: I think he did. I credit him for that, absolutely.

RM: Did your other siblings have it?

CM: To some degree, but he certainly was the big one who did it. Again, I think in his case it was out of necessity. I take it that the relationship between my father and particularly the older brothers was never good. And all the issues that occurred around my mom's illness and ultimate death didn't help. There was absolutely no love lost

between at least the two older boys and one older sister and my father.

RM: Was he the second child?

CM: He was the oldest boy. I have a sister who was older. I think his attitude was purely a necessity—that's how he got through life.

RM: But so many people need a can-do attitude and they never get it. In fact, I would say the majority.

CM: I would agree with you. So I drove a tow truck for a while, then through driving a tow truck I became a reserve policeman. The policemen, if they had a flat tire or something, couldn't call for help—they were supposed to fix it themselves. Well, I had a police scanner and if I heard there was something, I'd go down and I'd help them.

RM: Did you charge them?

CM: No. We rotated police calls every second or third week. And it was good because if I went to a traffic accident and there were two vehicles, I could get both vehicles. During the daytime it didn't happen so much, but at night when I'd hear about an accident I'd get in my tow truck. You're not supposed to do this nowadays, but I'd go down close to the accident and wait for them to call dispatch for the 926, which was the code for tow truck, and show up. I could pick one up, take it around the corner, drop it, and get both of them.

Anyway, during that time frame, the police lieutenant who was in charge of their reserve program enticed me to apply. I did and they hired me and I went to the North Orange County Police Academy. It was sponsored by the Anaheim Police Department and was given out of the Fullerton Community College. I successfully completed that program and got my Level 1 POST certificate and was a reserve policeman from the

summer I turned 21, so basically ’76, until I left California.

RM: What does it mean to be a reserve policeman?

CM: It’s just like now—they have reserve officers. At the time it was a different level of training but I had a POST certificate. I could arrest people. I could go in and work. I could work alone.

RM: If they needed you, they could call you?

CM: They could. They had a thousand-hour club—there were a number of years during that time frame where I’d donate 1,000-plus hours.

RM: That’s a lot of time.

CM: Yes, it was—on top of working full time and having a family. Susan will tell you that there were weekends that she didn’t hardly see me because I’d work on Friday, get off early, go in for a briefing, work Friday night, get off, go home, sleep a little bit, and go back in on Saturday night.

Now, some of that was also a source of a little income because we’d get paid for special events. We’d work every football game. The stadium in the community of La Habra was the stadium for three high schools—Lowell, the one I’d graduated from, La Habra, and Sonora. So there were always football games at the stadium. Part of the deal was that the school district paid the police department for security.

I got the opportunity to go to the advanced officer’s academy twice for the Orange County Sheriff’s Department and that’s what I had thought I wanted to do. But I was married and gainfully employed and the only people that were being hired in that era were people who qualified under CETA, the California Employment Training Act. I could never qualify because I’d have had to quit my job and lose my house. [Laughs]

RM: In the meantime, you'd bought a house?

CM: Right, in Ontario. We got married in April of '77 and we moved into the apartment where I was still driving a tow truck. At around that time there was a fellow who was a reserve policeman. His family owned a local garbage business in La Habra—a small commercial collection business. I befriended him and went to work for his dad. So I went from driving a tow truck to driving a garbage truck. [Laughs]

RM: Did they use dumpsters like they do now?

CM: Yes, absolutely. Well, we got married in April of '77 and in October Susan and I bought our first home in Ontario, California. At that point, I worked for the garbage business and Susan got a job there. They hired her to come in and help Mrs. Benoit, the mom in the family. I worked in the truck and she worked in the office. Then she got pregnant and quit working there and basically tried to be a stay-at-home mom for period of time.

RM: What was the garbage business like?

CM: It was also kind of interesting.

RM: Was it more or less fun than the towing?

CM: The towing was extremely more fun; every day was different. The garbage business was pretty mundane. But the garbage business allowed me to recover a lot of stolen vehicles. I'd start my route about 5:00 in the morning. I obviously knew the streets and was picking up the dumpsters in all the back alleys and I'd see things that were out of place, so to speak. So after work in the afternoon on a Friday, I'd go down in my police car, check out the vehicles that I knew were wrong and many of them were stolen.

RM: In towing, did you see a lot of gory accidents and things like that?

CM: Yes, there were a number of bad accidents. With the tow truck, once you got there, most of the bad stuff was gone and we're just picking up the vehicle pieces. As a reserve policeman, I went to my share of shootings.

I think about the whole journey as a volunteer fireman—going to the accidents, going to calls where people I knew died. There were two brothers, the Grafton brothers, who were volunteer firemen and one of them electrocuted himself picking avocados in a tree. So you'd go to a call like that. There were a couple of accidents where you knew the people at that age. And then when I became a policeman I was doing some of the dead body calls with the regular officers—because sometimes you'd ride with them—they'd put you in a two-man car with somebody sometimes. For the time, it was a very outgoing program; they really used their reserves. But again, those were things that I was exposed to at that level. So I did that whole process again until '88, when we purchased the garbage business in Pahrump and moved here.

RM: It sounds like your involvement as a volunteer fireman and so forth put you on a course of doing community service, getting involved in things that have to be done in a modern community, like putting out fires and picking up the wrecks and getting rid of the garbage and everything.

CM: The answer would be yes, particularly the volunteering. I've been a volunteer for as long as I can remember. Like I say, we moved to La Habra Heights in '69 and I got involved at that time. When I moved to Pahrump, I went back to volunteering with a fire department. And then after a number of years, with Wade Lieseke and Bill Weldon, I became a special deputy with the Nye County Sheriff's Department. So it's been that way almost my whole life. I don't ever remember not being a volunteer and doing things for

people.

RM: And it's getting out there and meeting people, too.

CM: It's been as beneficial as it's been saddening, particularly my time as the assistant fire chief in Pahrump. There are some things that—I don't want to say that they haunt me, but they are significant events in my life that give me pause to give thanks for my family, the good fortunes of my children being raised without incidents, without heartbreak. I've recovered dead children from house fires. I've recovered adults from house fires. I've recovered adults from charred vehicles. I've taken helicopter flights doing CPR the entire time from Pahrump to the hospital in Vegas, been there for delivering babies, been there and had to make the decision that the life has expired and there's nothing I can do. And I have had those things with people I've known, with friends. And as my boys got involved in the volunteer fire department with me where we went on calls sometimes it was their friends that we were rendering aid to.

RM: That must be hard to think about sometimes. It's a credit to your high school that you had a volunteer fire department program. I think that helped put you on a successful path in life.

CM: That's right.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: The kind of material you're giving here is really good because not only does it show your background but it shows the evolution of your life. Now, I assume you were working for the garbage company La Habra and then made the jump to Pahrump. Is that right?

CM: No, from the garbage business I went to work for my brother.

RM: When did you quit the garbage business in La Habra?

CM: It would have to be after '79. Sue was working at Benoit Disposal when we had Jonathan, and then I was working at Johnson Mechanical when we had James. So from L. J. Benoit and Sons Garbage, I went to work for my brother.

RM: And what was he doing?

CM: He had started a business with a fellow named Sam Jacobson called JMAC Industries. They were doing a lot of industrial furnace and industrial air pollution control and industrial systems. They also did some warehousing. I was kind of a jack of all trades. They'd get the job and they'd give it to me to get it done. [Laughs]

RM: On pollution control and everything?

CM: Yes, wet scrubbers, bag houses.

RM: How did you know about that?

CM: I learned very quickly—burners and control systems. That was something that I naturally picked up on. I really didn't have any formal training. I mean, I took an auto shop and a welding class in high school but my brother would say, "Here, we're going to do this. This is how you do it. Go away, do it." And that's how I did it.

For instance, when I was in high school, he had a Buick Skylark. He bought me a Craftsman toolbox for one of my birthdays or something, and he had this Buick Skylark convertible. He said, "I want you to go out in the garage and take the engine apart." Cool. I took that thing apart. He said, "Good. Put it back together." I couldn't. So okay, he went out and we put the car back together. And he taught me a valuable lesson.

Then he said, "Okay, take it apart again." This time, I took it apart and I marked every piece I took out of the vehicle. While we had it apart he did what he was going to do—he got the block done and put new rings on and new bearings and so on—and we put it back together. So that kind of thing came natural.

When he got into the business we put up a 22-foot steel oil pipe tripod with a chain wrapped around it, put a come-along on so we could lift things up and drive a truck underneath, and set things down in his driveway in the middle of La Habra Heights; those kind of came natural. During that high school era when I was doing that work with him and for him, that mechanical inclination just kind of came. It's something that's served me well with no formal training my whole life.

So I went from the garbage business to JMAC Industries, and from JMAC Industries I went to work for Johnson Mechanical Contractors. I told you about the fellow who gave me a sketch and said, "What do you see here?" and was impressed I showed him that I could follow the drawing. Then that company went down and I was unemployed for a bit and went back to work for my brother doing some things part time.

During all that time, I would still drive a tow truck on the weekends when they needed some help or I'd say, "Hey, I'm looking for some extra money" and the owner would say, "Well, come on in and you can give these guys a break." Then I went to work

for a Lebanese contractor, a guy by the name of Abdul Chade, at an outfit called Pro Plus Mechanical, a much smaller, different business. Johnson Mechanical was a very specialized process piping mechanical contracting company; I learned tons there.

RM: And when was this?

CM: This was from ’81 or ’82 on. From there I went to an outfit called Winterbottom Brothers and worked for them for a couple of years until June of ’88, when we bought the garbage business and then moved to Pahrump in June of ’88. By the way, during high school I spent two summers in San Jose picking apricots and working on an apricot ranch. My sister lived there. So for six, eight, ten weeks, whatever it was, I want to San Jose picking apricots, cutting apricots, sulfuring apricots, stacking apricots [Laughs] you know, in high school time. And then out of high school Babcock and Wilcox, worked a short time for an outfit called Loren Church Plumbing, worked for U.S. Gypsum sweeping the docks in Southgate. These were short-term things.

RM: You have an impressive work ethic.

CM: Some of the work ethic wasn’t very good because some of those transitions didn’t go well.

RM: Sure, but you were always, it seems, working and pushing.

CM: I know. I learned a lot from the plumber but I learned real quick I didn’t want to be digging ditches and cleaning septic tanks and cesspools my whole life. Then a neighbor helped me get a job at U.S. Gypsum and I found that I couldn’t stand sweeping the docks so I didn’t stay there long. Then I got into driving a tow truck, which I truly liked, and then got an opportunity to get a commercial license and drive a big garbage truck for more money. That was better than getting woken up at night when the

dispatcher called to go out and fix some drunk's tire or something, you know. Then I had applied and actually had gotten a start date for the Ontario Police Department so I quit the job at the garage business.

RM: To become an officer?

CM: Yes. And that was really something. The recruiting sergeant lived across the street from me in Ontario. He called me up and said, "Cameron, I've got an issue. We re-evaluated your physical, and there's a problem. You have a deviation of the spine so we have to withdraw the offer." I'd already quit at the garbage business. Susan's sister was the industrial nurse at Brockway Glass, which made glass bottles.

RM: In Ontario?

CM: Pomona. She got me an interview and I got a job as a general laborer there. This story kind of shows how my work ethic was. I was a bottle stacker. As the bottles came off and were packed in the packing department, I'd get the cases of bottles and stack them on pallets. And the long and short of it is I was quick at it because I was a big strong kid. I could do things with my fingers that some guys had to use their whole hands to do. I would clear my lines and jump the wall and take a break. And they didn't like that. It was a union job. They said, "Well, we can't let him do that." So instead of two lines, they'd give me three lines. Well, I'd get the three lines done and I'd still jump the wall and have a soda and wait for the lines.

RM: So you were doing more work than the other guys.

CM: As it turned out, the shop steward came to me one night and really got on me. He said, "If you don't slow down, you're going to have an accident." [RM laughs] I'm serious. I didn't really like the job but I had needed a job. I walked into the foreman's

office and told him what happened and quit.

RM: You were making the other guys look bad.

CM: Yes. But again, I wasn't unemployed very long. I always got jobs. That's when I got into the more stable stuff, the tow truck. And then I got out of that and got into the Johnson Mechanical, then Pro Plus Systems, then Winterbottom Brothers—truly more stable things. Then early one afternoon on a Friday I went in to pick up my police partner who worked at the garbage business. That was in 1987.

They said, "Hey, we know you've talked about wanting maybe getting out of Southern California." I lived in Ontario and my office was in south El Monte, 27 miles away, and it would take me an hour and 30 minutes to make that transition on the 10 Freeway. It was terrible.

I said, "What do you have?"

They said, "Well, you ever heard of Pahrump, Nevada?"

"Where the hell is Pahrump, Nevada?"

They said they saw an ad for a one-truck garbage business for sale in Pahrump, Nevada. "Do you want to go? Let's go look at it."

RM: Who said that to you?

CM: My police partner, Larry Benoit. The Benoits had the garbage business; it was the son, Larry, and his brother, Ron. Ron ended up being my partner when I bought Astro Disposal here in Pahrump. They said, "You want to go? Let's go and look at it."

So I called Susan up and said, "Hey, I'm not going to work but pack me a bag. We're going to stop by because we're going to Pahrump, Nevada." So we drove home, I got my bag, and we drove over on the highway from Shoshone. It was in December. We

came up over the hill and it had been snowing down to the base of the alluvial water fan. It was a full moon, and as we came over I said, "Jesus, this place is neat." We got a room at the Charlotta Inn.

RM: Where was that?

CM: Do you know where Floyd Construction is on the highway across from Saddle West? It used to be a motel; it was called the Charlotta Inn, run by Ron and Charlotte Floyd. The next morning, Saturday, we got up and took a look. We went out and met with Harvey Stafford, who owned Astro Disposal. We went home and talked about it, then we came back and made him an offer, and he rejected it. Actually, we sold our house—I needed to sell the house to get the money—and we had an offer on the house. When he rejected the offer, we got on the phone and told the realtor to cancel the sale because we had accepted the offer contingent on buying the garbage business and went on with life.

RM: Where were you working then?

CM: I was working for an outfit called Winterbottom Brothers. I was a contract plumbing and piping estimator, project manager. So we continued with work and all that stuff. Some time later on, my partner and his brother called me and said, "Hey, I see the ad in the trade magazine again—the garbage business is for sale again."

I said, "Well, what the heck, let's go back and talk to him again."

So we came back out in early '88 and, in fact, the deal he had made with another offer had fallen apart and gone away. We made him the exact same offer we did earlier and he accepted. [Laughs] But this time I hadn't sold my house yet. We made the offer to him contingent upon us getting our house sold and being able to close up. And, in fact,

we were able to do that.

I did it with a partner, Ronny Benoit. He and his wife, Kathleen, still live here in Pahrump. They sold the family garbage business they had in La Habra and bought a recycling business, in Havasu City.

We closed and took control of Astro on July 1 of 1988, and we moved out here lock, stock and barrel. I told people, "It kind of reminded you of the old Beverly Hillbillies." When we moved out, we brought a 1978 Master garbage truck with us and we bought a second front-load garbage truck. We brought a roll-off truck with us.

RM: Which is what?

CM: One of the big bin roll-offs, the big containers that slide off the back of the truck. So we bought one of those. We had a service truck and a bin truck.

RM: A service truck is for servicing?

CM: Yes, for servicing vehicles; it had an air compressor on it, a service body. We had a small bin truck that picked up the smaller bins. We had a U-Haul. At the time, my wife was driving a little Escort, I think. We loaded all our possessions out of our house in Rancho Cucamonga and drove up Highway 15 through Baker and through Shoshone and looked like a caravan of nomads [laughs] and showed up out on 372 and Z Street, the double-wide home we had bought.

We had a piece of property we bought on Belle Vista and we had bought a double-wide that was supposed to have been up and in. It wasn't ready so we had no place to stay. My wife and I and the two boys stayed in the spare room of Harvey Stafford's place out on Z Street for two weeks until the manufactured home got delivered and set up on Belle Vista. We did that about June 15th; then on July 1st, 1988, we took

over the business.

RM: What did the business consist of when you took it over?

CM: We had 238 accounts. It was residential pickup and some commercial, what little commercial there was. In 1988, Pahrump had about 5,800 people, depending upon who you talk to. I tell the story that there were probably 76 streets named "Easement." The route cards might say, "Mabel Smith, third blue house after the second left-hand turn past John's something." [Laughter] You know, they hadn't even truly started the street naming and numbering system.

RM: Did they have trucks that came with business?

CM: It came with one serviceable garbage truck.

RM: And where did you take the garbage?

CM: Well, the landfill was being operated by Nye County at its current location up off the west end of Mesquite. And by the way, it was only supposed to be there for five years in '88 and it's still there today. [Laughs]

RM: Did your partner work with you?

CM: No, they moved to Lake Havasu City and bought a recycling business there. I had managing partnership rights and my wife and I ran Astro Disposal.

RM: Do you want to say what you paid for it?

CM: In 1988, we paid $150,000.

RM: That sounds like a lot of money.

CM: It was. My half of it was every penny I could scrape up. [Laughs]

RM: What made you want to invest in Pahrump?

CM: Well, I'll say my wife and I had every plan conceivable for what if it didn't work.

But the biggest thing was I wanted to work for myself. The last two people I worked for were entrepreneurs; they owned their own business. I wanted to do it myself. And I wanted to get out of Southern California. I didn't like the drive, I didn't like the congestion. I loved the neighborhood I was in—we had great neighbors—but I guess it was just an opportunity I saw.

People would say, "Why did you do it?" And I always told them, "I never saw a poor garbage man." That was kind of my canned answer. Everybody I ever knew in the garbage business—they might not have been rich but I never saw anybody who was poor. I obviously was not afraid of hard work, long hours. Therefore, it seemed to me that it could be a thing I'd do. I bought myself a job that I thought in the long run could be very beneficial.

RM: Did you and your partner pay cash?

CM: No, part down and then we paid it off over a short period of time.

RM: And there were 200-plus accounts, you say? At $6 a month, 6 times 200-plus is—

CM: It's $12,000 a month. There were some commercial accounts, too, but at the time there were far more residential accounts.

RM: And then did you send out bills and all that?

CM: Every month. The residential stuff was one-month coupons; there were coupon books. And the commercial ones, Susan would prepare and send monthly bills.

RM: How long had Astro been in business?

CM: For some years. The Bollings had the garbage business in Pahrump apparently at one point in time, and then Harvey Stafford came out here and bought it.

RM: Was Harvey Stafford an older man?

CM: Yes.

RM: Did he stay on in Pahrump or did he go?

CM: He stayed for a while and tried to do a couple of things. We kind of lost contact after that.

RM: How did the garbage business here differ from down in the L.A. Basin?

CM: Well, it's spread out. When you think about it, the valley is 238 square miles. We were picking up trash from the Gold Pan up on Highway 160 all the way down to the Chicken Ranch and Sherri's on the south end of town. It just was a huge expanse.

RM: So you were burning up a lot of fuel.

CM: Sure, and garbage pickup wasn't mandatory. A lot of people burned it in burn barrels.

RM: And that was air polluting, wasn't it?

CM: Sure. The dump was free so they could take it to the dump, they could pay for my service at $6 a month, or they could burn it. You know, there were times when we didn't know how we were going to make payroll but we did. There were times we didn't know how we were going to get the trucks fixed for Monday morning but we did. [Laughs]

RM: How many employees did you have?

CM: When it started out there was one driver; his name was Bobby Hurst. He's since deceased. He was the driver for five days a week and his son, Jeff, would be the can-thrower three days a week.

RM: The can-thrower is the guy who empties the cans?

CM: That's correct, into the front. So we picked up residential trash three days a week. And we used the same truck, took the bucket off it, and picked up commercial work in

the dumpsters twice a week.

CM: We did residential three times a week, some on Monday, some on Wednesday, some on Friday. And in the beginning, as I said, Susan would do the phone, the billings, most of the paperwork. I would deliver and pick up bins. I would solicit business, fix flat tires, paint bins, and fix the trucks, whatever necessary.

An interesting story I tell is when we moved to Belle Vista, across the street was one of the local watering holes called the Our Bar. I had a beer and came out and called my buddies at the police department. I said, "You guys have got to come out here. They've got bars out here even we can't get thrown out of. [Laughs] Susan couldn't believe it because when I first started with Harvey, every day he'd hit every bar.

RM: As a patron or as a businessman?

CM: Both. After I took over, I'd go to the bars and come home with six, seven, eight, nine, ten new customers all written down on cocktail napkins. I guess it all went over good because the business just grew and grew and grew. Part of it was, I like to believe, because we were friendly, we were professional, we upgraded, we improved. But for a long time I'd have to go to every bar and check in because they were all my customers commercially. When I'd get there I'd come out with new customers, almost guaranteed—kind of a phenomenon.

RM: Were you known then or did you have to introduce yourself?

CM: I had to introduce myself. And at the time for Pahrump it was news—Astro Disposal sells, Californians coming out. But it was my wife, myself, and two small children. I think we were readily accepted in the community.

RM: What was your perception of Pahrump when you guys first moved in here?

CM: I loved it. We took over July 1st and the very first thing I did is meet the fire chief, Pete Wallace, because the fire department volunteers and others were doing the 4th of July festival. I donated a roll-off box and set it down at the park so that they had a place to put all their trash, and I did it for nothing.

So immediately there was that connection and he found out that I had some experience as a volunteer firefighter and he recruited me to get involved in the fire department. I lived two blocks away from one of the fire stations, I had a license, and I could drive their big fire trucks. So I immediately got recruited—not without controversy because they apparently had some internal process that he didn't bother with for me. [Laughs] He just recruited me, gave me keys and gave me the wave of the hand. All of a sudden, I was a volunteer fireman.

RM: About how big was the fire department at that time?

CM: About 30 to 40 people. They had the three stations, they had really antiquated equipment. They were in severe need of help on maintenance and repair, which Astro and I provided most things at no charge—even parts, because I had parts. If something happened and they needed a slap adjuster or they needed that and I had it, it got on. If it needed to be fixed, it got fixed.

RM: What percentage of the people in Pahrump would you say were customers or households when you started?

CM: I would say a relatively small percentage because if you're going to figure 5,800 people you'd say there were 2,000 residences, if you were going to use the figure of 2.7 people per household. We had about 10 to 15 percent.

RM: And the others took it to the dump themselves or burned it?

CM: They either burned it or took it to the dump or dumped it in the desert.

RM: Oh really, there was a lot of that?

CM: A lot of that. That was always a frustrating part. The dump is free, you can burn it, or you can get it picked up once a week for $6 a month. And the seniors got a $1 discount; the county paid me $1 for seniors and they only had to pay $5.

RM: Was that the way it was when you took it over?

CM: Yes. When I took it over I got an existing contract. Harvey Stafford had a contract with the county. When I bought Astro I bought that asset. Bobby Revert, Joe Garcia, and Pat Mankins were the county commissioners. They had to approve the transfer of the contract to my partner and me and they did. And part of the contract was that health and human services paid $1 to Astro for those who qualified.

RM: Probably to a younger person 1988 is a long time ago but to me it wasn't that long ago. It almost boggles the mind to think that Pahrump's population was 5,000-something then. How did the business change over that time period, and do you still have it?

CM: No. I sold it in '97.

RM: How did it change in your nine years?

CM: It boomed; it just flat boomed. I say this in all honesty—the one plan that my wife and I never laid out was what we were going to do if it blossomed. We never expected the double-digit growth for nine years. For a small guy in a small rural area who did it on a shoestring to begin with, it was very, very challenging to buy the additional trucks that were necessary as it grew. We started and continued with these blue one-yard containers that were extremely popular. We'd have back orders or we'd have 25, 30, 40 people that wanted them. We'd buy a load, get the leasing for them, drive down to Southern

California with a pickup truck and a trailer, put them on, and drive them home. We didn't have to unload them, we just stopped and dropped them off and then we'd be out. Then we'd have to work on getting more financing to get another load of containers.

RM: How many customers were you adding a year, would you say?

CM: I don't know; hundreds.

RM: So you were doubling from your first year?

CM: Easily.

RM: It must have been a struggle to keep up.

CM: For us it was. In nine years we tripled the number of trucks on the road. We went from one to four. We had the roll-off trucks. It was financially challenging but it worked out nicely. I'm glad we did it the way we did. We bought a place that had a small, 900-square-foot office building in the front. We put our double-wide on five acres towards the middle behind it. The office was 300 feet from the house.

RM: Where was that?

CM: It's still there today, on Belle Vista and Stephanie. It wasn't that many years later that we again got a loan and put up a shop. The nice thing about that was that I'd get up in the morning, do what we had to do on the trucks, and Susan would be able to be in the house with the kids. They'd get up, catch the bus, and if I was at the shop or in the office, it would be, "Hi, Dad, how are you, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." They'd go to school, come home, and stop by the office, "Hi, Mom, Dad, we're home." They'd go back to the house and do their thing.

Without that, I don't know that we'd have had same outcome. Because truly, when you're able to keep the family thing close and tight and take care of the business,

you're able to weather some of the rough patches that you go through there.

RM: What were the rough patches, business-wise?

CM: Well, business-wise it would be cash flow. It's a big thing when you lose a transmission or a motor or something on one of those trucks. All of a sudden, you've go to come up with $3,000, $4,000, $5,000, $6,000, $7,000, $8,000, $9,000. In the nine years, we had one rate increase.—we went from $6 to $7. Our commercial rates went up a little bit more than that, but that was it.

I got elected as county commissioner in 1991 so during that time there was a whole process with interconnections and people suing me and filing complaints to the ethics board and making allegations of corruption.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: When you bought the business, what would you think if someone said, "Are you going to get into politics?"

I'd say, "You're crazy. I'm going to buy myself a job. I'm going to have enough to do." But I went to town board meetings, got on the volunteer fire department, and then all of a sudden I find myself being recruited to run for a county commissioner because that's when county commissioners went from three to five seats. I ran for the newly created Pahrump seat.

RM: Well, your trajectory was to get involved, wasn't it? I mean, you got involved as a fire department volunteer staring in high school. You were involved in the community a lot.

CM: When I came out here, there was a discussion about if I was going to become involved in law enforcement. I could have kept up my certification and come to the Nye County Sheriff's Office as a reserve.

RM: Why didn't you?

CM: Two things. Let me give the positive one. The program I left was so forward and so open in how they used the reserves that when I met the Nye County Sheriff's office, I thought, "This is nothing like where I left." It didn't take me very long to see that this was not the way I wanted to do police work. It just was different. Not that Southern California didn't have its problems in law enforcement and police work, but I looked at what was here at the time and just said, "I don't think I want to do that here." And so I left that issue with all the good notes I had had in an almost 13-year period for the city of

La Habra.

And I said, "Well, the fire station is right down the street. I can do more there because I can drive, I can get right in it. I can do it at any time." And I did. I mean, I drove the trash truck to fires.

RM: Oh sure, because that's when you'd get the calls, right?

CM: Yes, the pager would go off—they had little red pagers—and I'd stop the route I was doing and drive to the fire. If I didn't have my gear with me, Susan would meet me and bring it. So I picked that as my community service.

RM: What were some of the things in the sheriff's department here that you thought might be problematic?

CM: I think there were seven deputies at the Pahrump substation, seven different police, and they were out all doing their own thing. And no disparagement to Stick Davis or Mark Zane, but that was the perception. I decided to get back into being a volunteer fireman because I thought it would be better for me, and I could do more for the community.

RM: When you're making your route picking up people's garbage, what are the things you have to be aware of and what are the challenges that you face on a daily basis?

CM: It would change. If I did the route, people could see me coming and would come out and want to talk to me. So instead of it taking me six hours to do the route, I might be two hours late. If they could get out soon enough, they'd wave me down and want to just say "Hi, how are you?" or they'd have some concern or something they wanted to talk about.

RM: What kind of concerns did they have?

CM: "You're driving too fast," "There's too much dust," "You're leaving trash on the ground," "How come you're ten minutes late today?" [Laughs]

RM: Did you have that in L.A.?

CM: Not as much. Part of it is because in Orange County, it was mostly commercial so there wasn't the same contact. We did a little bit of residential pickup in the unincorporated area of La Habra, but other than that, the residential pickup was done by contractors. I'd pick up a bucket from a commercial site, empty it, go do four, five, six streets by myself, then take the bucket back to the commercial account, or we'd have a spare one set there. So it was very different here.

RM: What other kinds of things would people want to talk about?

CM: Once I got involved in things, they'd want to talk about the fire department or the planning advisory board—I got appointed to that before I ran for commissioner. And as I said, some of them just wanted to come out and say hi, you know. Some people would come out and pay the bill directly to me instead of mailing it. And particularly back at the beginning, I might have a pickup on this street and a pickup over there, and instead of going down the street, if that was a vacant field I'd just go across the lot.

RM: That's the way Pahrump was, wasn't it? You'd take a shortcut across the desert.

CM: In the far north, the far west, and the south there was a lot of that. As I told you, it seemed like there were two or three dozen streets all called "Easement." And you'd have other issues—a couple of times someone would put hot ashes in their dumpster that would catch our truck on fire.

RM: You mean deliberately?

CM: No, the ashes just weren't cool; they didn't do it to set my truck on fire.

RM: Did you have trouble getting paid?

CM: If people paid us, their checks were good. In the nine years we didn't have more than a handful of bad checks. Now, we had a lot of people who would sign up and not pay for months on end.

RM: And how did you handle that?

CM: Go track them down, see them in the grocery store, see them at the convenience store, see them at the bar and say, "Hey, what's going on here?"

RM: And what would they say?

CM: Everything from, "Oh gee, I'm sorry," to "Kiss my ass." And Susan will tell you that she wanted to be much tougher than I was about just not doing it.

RM: You would let them ride—that was your predilection?

CM: For the most part. And they wanted to be seen by me and not Susan because if she saw them out somewhere, she would put the strong arm to them. [Laughs]

RM: Your business put you in contact with a lot of people face to face, didn't it?

CM: Absolutely.

RM: And that helped you when it came to commissioners, right?

CM: I think it did.

RM: Yes, because you knew a lot of people and you must have pretty good social skills.

CM: I believe that all was part of it, absolutely—the good, the bad, and the ugly of it. I also think I always presented a very level, reasonable approach to how I saw Pahrump and Nye County and what I thought the important issues were and how they should be handled. But there were those who hated my guts for all kinds of reasons.

RM: What were they thinking?

CM: You know, who am I, a carpetbagger, coming in and this, that, and the other.

RM: I see; I guess some people just never like change. How did your feelings and attitudes about Pahrump evolve from the time when you got here during those first ten years?

CM: I fell in love with it. I liked the ruralness, I liked the openness, I liked the environment, I liked the climate, and I truly liked the people—even those, for the most part, who I didn't get along with. Even Harley Kulkin. I mean, he sat in my office on Belle Vista and we vehemently disagreed over issues when I was commissioner. But I think that, in the whole career span in my personal life I was very involved in things. I was a Rotarian for a while and I'm a Mason.

RM: Did those affiliations help you?

CM: It all helps. Any time you become integrated in the community, if you do it right, more good comes out of it than bad. But it's not all good. For instance, we became active in a church but as politics got involved, some of the social things that I did like the church, some of the Masonic things, and some of the other things, all became clouded. I found myself having to pull away from them because I said, "Well, wait a minute. Every time I go, I get bombarded over politics, and that's not what this is supposed to be about." I had an open door—you can come to my personal office any time, day or night—because we didn't have county offices at the time. Come to my business office, we'll talk, we'll go over things.

When I go to lodge, I go to lodge for lodge, not to be bombarded over politics. When I go to church, I want to go to worship in our church, not to get bombarded over

politics. I want to go to Rotary because of the work that Rotary does. And when the politics overwhelmed things, I found myself drawing away from those activities. And truthfully, even after politics went away, I never really did go get back with them. So as I say, there's good and bad. And there's more good than bad. Let me make it quite clear—with Pahrump, the people, the community, there's tons more good than the bad. But I'm not going to insult anybody by saying it was all good because it really wasn't.

RM: Were there ever times when you thought, oh screw this. I'm going to toss in the towel.

CM: There was one time. We were having trouble with the trucks—they broke down. And I'm sitting at Comstock Park, the transmission is hanging right off with a broken motor mount. It's 120 degrees out and both my trucks are broke down and I'm having trouble. I called my partner and I said, "I need your help. You got to get your ass up here. I'm at my wits' end."

And, of course, he's older than I am. He said, "Okay, I'll try to come up and let's get you a hand and get you out of there."

As it turned out, a local fellow—matter of fact, it was Gary Hollis' brother, Larry Hollis—was a mechanic; he worked at the Test Site. We got ahold of him and he came down, and he helped me get it back together. But truly, that was probably the only day in the whole nine years that I was saying, "What in God's name did I do?" [Laughs] Other than that, like I say, overwhelmingly the relationships and the interactions have been positive. There are a lot of great people here.

RM: How did Pahrump change between when you got here with 5,000 people and when you sold out?

CM: Well, there's no question, as it gets bigger it becomes less personable, becomes more cynical.

RM: What would be an example of some cynicism?

CM: Oh, "Everybody's a crook" and "You're only in it for yourselves," are probably the biggest ones I heard. I always found that difficult. I would tell people, "Look, this was for sale when I bought it. Do you want to buy it?" That type of thing. People would complain about PJ's Market, they'd complain about Dodge's Market, they'd complain about whatever.

RM: Was this when you were commissioner?

CM: Well, even before. If you have a business, some people assume you've got all kinds of money, you're raping them.

RM: You mean at six bucks a month?

CM: Yes, that's the kind of thing. And I always defended the businesses. I said, "Look, these people have come out and they've done these things when no one else would. You don't see Silver State Disposal here; you don't see Waste Management here. Those big guys are not here. Whether it's a Bobby Bolling or the Bolling family, or whether it's Harvey Stafford or Staffords, or whether it's Cameron McRae or Ron Benoit, we've invested everything we have to come in and do it. And if you really think that we're raping you, well, it's for sale." [Laughs]

The same thing came up when I was commissioner. People would say, "When am I getting my road paved?"

And I'd say, "Probably not in your lifetime," because that's a flat-out honest answer. I wasn't going to give somebody a political answer just to make them feel good,

just as I wouldn't do it in the business. When someone asked why it cost so much, I said, "Because that bin cost me $242 and I want to pay for it over a three-year period. That's why it costs you $12 a month. If you don't want it, pay $6 a month and put your cans out." That's the way I was.

That's what some people liked about me, but other people didn't like it. They'd say, "You arrogant asshole, talking to me that way." Well, you asked the question, you know. If you don't like the answer, don't ask the question. But again, the good part of this growth is some of the things that we didn't have we now have.

RM: Like what?

CM: Well, when the McDonald's came or when the Burger King came or when the Taco Bell came. You know, everyone's, "We need to have this." Archie's was great. I'm sorry to see Archie's go because that was a great place, and the same with Betty's Feedbag and the No Name Café—and that's not even all of them.

RM: So they're gone.

CM: Yes. No Name is now Su Mesa Mexican Restaurant, Archie's is now Quizno's. Betty's Feedbag is now the taco place.

RM: So Pahrump has become more a franchise-type place?

CM: Well, sure. You know, those people moved in. It's cycled, they've changed. I know some of the independents have come and gone. So some of those things you miss, but that's part of the evolution.

But the good, bad, or indifferent about Cameron McRae has always been my ability to work and talk and interact at all levels. Even before I came here, I could put on the work clothes and get dirty and do what I had to do in the trenches, in the dirt, and then

I could change, put my suit and tie on and go and talk to the middle and upper managements of businesses. And when I came to Pahrump, that was the exact same thing.

There were a lot of influential people who had started that way. I talked about Ron and Charlotte Floyd and their commercial enterprises; and there were the Wulfensteins, Ray and Irene, their commercial enterprises; the Mankins, Pat and Bill, their commercial enterprises; Hollis Harris; even Ron Murphy, and others. When I went and solicited business and talked to them, or they came and solicited me, they'd say, "We understand you bought the business." Being able to connect and socialize and professionalize with them was a big thing because that was all part of particularly the initial growth spurt—having them feel comfortable with Astro Disposal and Cameron McRae, giving me the opportunity to provide our service to them. That was all part of that social style issue.

And that gets included in the fact that I was willing to put in the time, energy, and effort in the volunteer fire department. Then I got recruited to participate in Rotary and I did, and the Chamber of Commerce, and all of that all interconnects. It's not just the social issue but it's how you meld that social with the professional and the community. I think it just came naturally for me; it wasn't a front. It's just something that happened.

RM: That was who you were.

CM: Yes, and the fact that I had a young family. I was only 33 when we came in—I'm 33, my wife's 31, I have an eight-year-old and a seven-year-old. So that whole umbrella and how it molds into a social professional fabric was, I think, a great experience in my life. I don't regret a minute of it.

RM: I'm very interested in the principles of personal success. In other words, why are some people able to do something in life and other people can't seem to get much right? I could see a list of principles on how you integrate yourself into a community and the things you need to do in order to make better things happen in your life in a community.

CM: Well, I'm not going to tell you that I was so smart that I knew what I was doing. We say it's good to be lucky and lucky to be good. In this case it was just more so that I was able to maximize, to a good degree, the circumstances that were presented me as life moved on.

RM: That's right. And that is the basis of all success, being able to take advantage of what's offered you.

CM: I don't like the term "take advantage" because I don't ever believe I took advantage. But it is making the best if what you have, making lemonade out of lemons. Even during the bad times, you make the best out of things. And when people see you do that, and you genuinely project that type of aura, they feel more comfortable with you personally and professionally.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: That's a great lesson. Now, I thought we might talk a little bit about picking up trash. I'm curious to know how many places you can hit in a day and how physically arduous the work is for the operator.

CM: It's difficult to say, exactly. And, of course, it's been a decade since we sold the business. In our case it was pretty labor intensive when we started. We had a driver and we had a can-thrower and two people on top for the residential stuff. When we first got here we'd pick up everything from garbage bags to 55-gallon drums to plastic garbage containers, so it could be rather strenuous, particularly for the can-thrower.

RM: It wasn't a job for a guy who was out of shape, was it?

CM: Well, he wasn't out of shape for very long or he didn't do it for very long. And here in southern Nevada, of course, the climate also made it also strenuous, particularly in the summertime.

RM: How did you handle that?

CM: We started early. We tried not to start before 6:00, trying to be nice neighbors to everybody, but we'd try to get started in the morning and be done as early as we possibly could. When we first started there were days we might be done at 11:00, and other days we might be done at 2:00. As we grew and got into multiple trucks some routes were a little longer than others because of having to go down to the south end of town and all that (we were on the relatively northwest part of town). The trucks were not air conditioned and you sat right over the engine compartment and got the exhaust from the vehicles.

RM: Did you have a hard time adjusting to that or were you kind of used to it from California?

CM: I don't know that I was used to it. I learned some things very quickly. I always wore a long-sleeved white shirt. Even though I'd sweat profusely, it would basically keep you cooler. I always wore a hat and sunglasses because when you're out all day in it, that's to protect yourself. And when I drove the truck myself and did any of the routing work, I would drink tons of water. It would be nothing to take two or three gallons of water and drink it during the day.

RM: That's certainly smart. Did you work five days or six days?

CM: The routes ran five days. It wasn't until a few years into the system that we started picking up on Saturday morning. But even then, Saturday and sometimes a lot of Sundays we were still working on the trucks, making sure they were ready for Monday, and delivering bins, changing out containers, doing maintenance on the containers, and so on. So the business itself wasn't just Monday through Friday. Particularly in the beginning, my wife and I did most of the work ourselves. We had a driver and a can-thrower but when they didn't work I got to go pick up the garbage and then come back and do all the other stuff that we were doing. So the work just varied.

RM: Tell me how it worked with the landfill.

CM: It was up on West Mesquite, where it still is today, on county land, and the county operated it.

RM: How big was it?

CM: It wasn't real big—40 to 60 acres, maybe.

RM: And did they dig it out and then fill it, or how did it work?

CM: At the time it was a very shallow cut landfill. They'd dig a small shallow hole, put the garbage in it, and cover it with dirt periodically. The state changed requirements about landfills over time. Today the landfill is the same footprint geographically and it's still owned by the county but it's operated by a group on contract.

RM: And they get their money from fees charged for dumping? Is that how it works?

CM: Yes and no. When Subtitle B in the landfill regulations came in, we in the county determined that it was necessary to fund it and operate it a little differently. I was a commissioner when it occurred. A parcel fee was added to each property owner's land. The landfill is needed and required for all residents of the county, whether they utilize the private collection service or not. The landfill is a county need. It's all-inclusive. So the idea was to put a fee on the tax bill and it's still there today, so much per parcel owner. People who own commercial businesses or motels, hotels, or RV parks have a fee structure that goes on their tax bills.

I think the basic rate is $18 or $25 a year, and then they may have an additional $5 fee per room. That was the main mechanism for funding the operations of the landfills throughout Nye County. The landfill at Pahrump is not the only landfill the county has. They have other landfills that are operated either by the county or by another operator up north. They've closed a number of their landfills because of operating costs and environmental issues and have some transfer stations in some other communities; then they bring the trash to the Pahrump landfill. Then there is some fee-based on-site dumping for some of the other-than-normal household waste-type programs.

RM: You mean things like refrigerators?

CM: It could be that, and they might use the fees for demolition of debris that comes

back up. They take some stuff from out of state. I know, for example, that the operator hauls from California—Tecopa, Shoshone, some in Death Valley—into Pahrump. They pay the landfill for the privilege to do that; that agreement was done a decade ago or so. But when I bought the business—the landfill collecting contract was part of the business, an asset—so it was transferred to me and my partner.

We did not operate the landfill, but the franchise for collecting the landfill fees was with the county. Built within that franchise agreement we could deliver our waste, anything we picked up, at no charge. The taxpayers were already paying for the landfill so all they were doing was utilizing the franchiser, Astro Disposal, to pick up their garbage. As I told you, it wasn't a mandatory service. They could choose one of the other options—to take it to the free landfill or burning portions of the household trash. The third option—and again, unfortunately, many people did it—was to dump their crap in the desert.

RM: And your franchise was exclusive, right? Somebody else couldn't come in and use the dump as a trash service?

CM: That's correct, and that always was a bone of contention to a segment of the population. But as I told them, "Where are the big guys? Where is the competition?" We had invested everything we had to provide a service. We did have a free hand in charging whatever we could get, but the service wasn't mandatory. Historically the residential stuff is always franchised. And there's a health issue. If you have two or three companies picking up and one guy picks up one day and another guy picks up the next day, and some day no one picks up, and you don't know who's who, there's no way to do it effectively and efficiently and know who's responsible for whose trash. I always told

people, “It protects me because I come in and do it.”

At the time, quite frankly, Silver State could have come over and wiped me out in two months. If somebody comes in and is willing to invest not only the money but the sweat equity to provide and build a service he should have some protection so that when the big guy comes in, he doesn’t just wipe them out. I know a lot of other people have the same issue—the small markets, the small gas stations, and so forth are all at that dilemma. They come in and provide something and then the big boys come in, pop open a store, and wipe them out. It’s the old David and Goliath story.

RM: Like Wal-Mart.

CM: Yes, you hear all about the Wal-Mart. But these were discussions and issues well before Wal-Mart ever got started. My perspective is I believe that there is a good reason to afford some protection, like the franchise with the landfill, to those kinds of operators, on one hand. But the real issue with the trash is it’s probably the best way to control the health issues and safety concerns that surround the idea of household and industrial garbage collection.

RM: What were the rules, if there were any then, about toxics? For instance, what if somebody had a barrel of gas they wanted to put in the trash?

CM: You’ve never been allowed to dispose of that stuff. The problem is there’s no good way to keep it out of the waste stream. In other words, John Q. Citizen goes into their garbage, whether a 55-gallon barrel, a 35-gallon can, or a plastic bag, and they pack something in the middle of it.

RM: How are you going to know?

CM: There’s no way. Even with all the rules and regulations at the federal and the state

level that are supposed to monitor us, the household waste stream is still the absolute hardest to manage and maintain. It's the hardest to keep data on. You can't just dump a battery at the landfill knowingly, but if they put it in a dumpster or they put it in their garbage, it's there; it's going to get into the stream.

RM: Did they require liners at the landfill?

CM: They do now. As a commissioner, I went to a landfill certification class and did a lot of things to try to gain information. Our county fought what the state was trying to do, particularly in the rural areas, for a long time, and we did it successfully. Not just because we ran them down, but because we were able to show them things.

We hired a consultant on the county level. I would get permission and I'd weigh my trucks. I'd keep track of how many cubic yards I put in—I packed it and weighed it. We were able to show them, in the early '90s, that Pahrump was not generating a typical waste stream. We didn't have the moisture content in the generalized waste, which meant we didn't have the same weights based upon the cubic foot that you would put in a compactor truck.

RM: Why was that?

CM: The fact that it was such an arid area. Particularly at the time, we didn't have the green waste like grass and trimmings. There was some, but we did testing and we were able to show them that because of some of the inefficiencies of the landfill operation, we weren't getting the density and the compaction so we didn't have the methane gas and the leachate, which is the liquid coming out of decomposition, that are created by decomposition of trash, so the risk was minimized. So we were able to continue the shallow-cut process without lining.

RM: How deep did you go?

CM: Oh, they varied—20 or 30 feet, maybe. Subsequent to that, they are compacting now for all the right reasons; they're doing larger, deeper trenches and compacting more efficiently.

RM: How do they compact—with dozers?

CM: Dozers or actual compactors. The equipment has to pack your steel, compact the wheels in it. So the operation has evolved into a better process and now they do line them.

RM: With rubber that's supposed to last a long time?

CM: That's right. There's a membrane that they use when they do it and there's test monitors and testing wells that they have in place. It truly has evolved both as technology but also, obviously, grew from 5,800 people in '88 to 35,000, 38,000, depending on what numbers you want to use, in 2011.

So it's been an evolution all in its own. And now they're perimetering so they're stacking them higher. Where we were down below on the eastern slope, the property line, for example, would've gone through. In 1992 and '93 you'd stand and the lights are way up high. Well, now when you go up there, because the perimeter is up, all of a sudden if you look up you're almost looking out at the power lines that ran on the east side of the property. That's how they managed to extend the life of that footprint. And they're still using that footprint today. I became a commissioner in '91 and we were supposed to have a new landfill in five years. They're still a long ways away.

RM: Where will they put it?

CM: They have a plan, but I don't know exactly where they stand on implementing it.

RM: How do you see the future, generally, of waste disposal? Are they going to go to total recycling?

CM: First off, the consumer's going to pay for it all in the end. Recycling absolutely was not economical in the '90s for a number of reasons—no end users, long distance to market, no reason for the consumer to participate.

RM: You mean, like separating their trash and things like that?

CM: Correct. All those inconveniences that people lay to that. The economics just weren't there. Today, they're doing a good job on some of the recycling. They're pulling out appliances, they're cutting up tires before they landfill them, they're mulching and cutting a bunch of green waste that is no longer going into a landfill.

A landfill's a real estate venture—you want to compact as much garbage in a cubic foot as you possibly can, and so they've made a lot of improvements on that. But we still don't have any end users, for example, in Nevada, for some recycling. We don't have a place to take our glass, newspaper, cardboard. Aluminum, steel—there are no smelters that are close. The farther away the market is the more costly the transport, which means the less you can give people to make money at doing it.

Even the big guys, when you look at it, if you are honest about the Silver State issues, or now it's Republic Services, they got huge grants to start recycling programs. Today when you hear the political battle about trying to reduce garbage pickup from two days a week to one day a week so that they'll do the recycling one day a week and the trash on the other, that's all part of the economics of trying to make recycling more economical.

RM: Do you foresee the day when society in Pahrump or somewhere else is going to

mine the Pahrump landfill for valuable items?

CM: You think about the archeological digs that we're doing now when someone goes out and all of a sudden they find something. And of course, when it's Native Americans, it's a big issue.

RM: Right, for the archeological and historical value. But I'm talking about, "Hey there's some aluminum up there," or "There's some steel or glass."

CM: Well, it's like anything else. You know how many times they've reprocessed tailings in the gold and other mining industries. I assume there probably could be something like that. But if Mother Nature is doing her thing, much of what you're going to get there is going to be decomposed and engrained in the balance of the minerals of the Earth.

What they're doing now and as far back as the early '90s has to do with the issue of separating and incinerating waste. It's being done with various levels of success in other places. There's no question that the issue of waste stream reduction is the thing of today. Get your ferrous metals out, get your high-dollar metals out of it—the aluminum, the coppers, that type of thing. They've made advancements in plastic and plastic recycling with the various identifiers of the types of plastics. Now you mulch your green waste, keep your green waste out of the stream. They're even recycling roadways, concrete; a lot of things that used to be demolition waste are now being reused.

You see post-consumer amounts listed in paper and other products—"This product's recycled using X percentage post-consumer product." That's really the first thing to get, is to move and evolve industry and technology to where we can better reuse all the products we get out there.

In construction it's the same thing on their chipped pressboard stuff, when you see it out there. I don't think that "re-mining" of a solid waste landfill is something in place. The times you hear about it is when a landfill, either knowingly or unknowingly has accepted huge amounts of hazardous material and it's a Superfund cleanup site. It might be mercury or lead or PCBs that have been knowingly or unknowingly disposed of improperly.

RM: Okay, now you started your business in '88, right?

CM: Yes, sir.

RM: How did your thinking evolve so that ten years later, you sold it?

CM: People ask me, "Why did you get into that?" As I said earlier, I tell them, kind of being flippant, "Well, I've never really seen a poor garbage man." I got into it with the idea that I could build something and at some point in time sell it. I surely didn't think it would be as early as nine or ten years, but I was thinking that I would be able to sell it and retire after 20 or 30 years.

I've always had the philosophy that when someone says, "Is something for sale?" that everything's for sale. What am I going to do tomorrow? I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow because I don't know what tomorrow's going to bring. It goes with my whole philosophy that I was looking for a job when I got this one. The best job security is how quick can you get another job, particularly when you work for other people, because now you're relying on someone else's vision or someone else's thing. At one point, one of the Isola boys from Silver State came to my office on Belle Vista . . .

RM: Who were the Isolas?

CM: They were Silver State Disposal out of Las Vegas. After they got into trouble with

the IRS and all that mess, Republic Services bought them. But they were the big boys in southern Nevada. Tom Isola came out and introduced himself and I'm thinking, "Oh golly, this is going to not be a good thing."

He was asking, "What's your plan?"

My boys were in school and I said, "Well, this is my plan. My plan was to buy this, operate it, raise my family, do this and that."

He said, "No problem." He said, "First of all, we're not going to come out and run you out of business."

I said, "Whew. Well, thank you." [Laughs]

RM: They couldn't have anyway, could they have? I mean, they would have to get the franchise.

CM: Like anything else, money does a lot of things; so who knows? I couldn't have survived the legal battles if they had wanted to get the franchise. But he said, "The only thing I ask is if you do get the itch to sell, call me first."

So great, no problem; thank you. And there was a no man's land, as I call it, at the Clark County/Nye County line and Mountain Springs summit. Silver State didn't come this way to Mountain Springs summit and I didn't have a franchise—I really shouldn't have gone anywhere outside of Nye County.

RM: Were you serving Mountain Springs?

CM: No, but there were a number of homes south of CAAS Road and you'd go out to where the Sharbonos lived, going toward Las Vegas. That was actually all Clark County. As you went farther out you had Trout Canyon and if you went farther out you had Lovell Canyon. I'd gotten some calls from some of those areas. I learned eventually, but I

didn't know any better at the time, and I would service them periodically with roll-offs. For the area of Sharbono's and the area of CAAS, I did a normal weekly service with regular household containers.

He said, "I'm not going to say anything about that area, and if anything I'm going to tell the regulators, 'Leave them alone. They're providing something there at an economic level for those Clark County taxpayers. They wouldn't be getting that kind of deal from me if I came over the hill.'"

A few years later I was gone on a trip as county commissioner and my wife called me and said that a couple guys called and came up and asked if we were interested in selling.

RM: And this was not Silver State?

CM: No, because by that point Silver State had gotten in trouble. They sold out. The Isola boys went to prison because they got in some financial issues. I said, "Boy, I'm sure glad my name wasn't on their Day Planner." [Laughter] That was kind of an internal joke I used to tell. But John Shae and Dave Carroll, the young men who eventually bought the business, called to talk to my wife. She told them the same thing I had told the Isolas, "Hey, everything we've got's for sale. But if you come, bring lots of money."

RM: [Laughs] Where were they from?

CM: The Carroll family had just sold a very large garbage operation out of the Carmel Valley south of San Francisco so those boys were out looking. Dave Carroll was the family's son and John Shae was a longtime friend who went to school with Dave Carroll and worked in their business.

When I got back to town I gave them a call and they said they wanted to come

and see us. I said fine and they chartered a little plane and flew into the Pahrump Airport. My partner, Ron Benoit, and I went down and picked them up. We went for a little drive and had a little visit. We came back to our office and they started talking and they opened a briefcase and whipped out a fairly large earnest check and said, "We'd like to offer you X and here's our earnest money." [Laughs]

RM: Wow. How long was this after Silver State?

CM: It was a few years. Subsequent to that visit by Silver State, we had had some contact with a group in southern California that Ron, my partner, knew of called MG Disposal—he had bought some used trucks from them. We had tried to make some connection with them to get some help with the growth because we felt comfortable with them. And about a year earlier, they had made an offer and we rejected it. The offer from MG Disposal and their group was kind of an industry standard-type amount and we didn't want to do it for that. We weren't ready to go just to get the industry standard; we thought there would be more to it down the line. So when Dave Carroll and John Shae came in, their offer to us was a lot more than what the industry standard had been.

RM: What did you think when you saw this check?

CM: What I said was, "These guys aren't messing around."

RM: What did you say?

CM: I said, "Gee, guys, you're going to have to excuse us for a little bit."

My partner said, "We truly didn't contemplate that you would be coming prepared."

RM: They must have done some assessment.

CM: I would assume so. Their family didn't get where they were by being dummies.

So they went outside and my partner and I sat and talked about it. My wife wasn't even really involved in it and his wife wasn't, either. We penciled it out, looked at it, and said, "Buddy, we'd be crazy, we'd be absolutely nuts not to take this at this time." What I saw in Pahrump was it was moving. In 1997, my vision was that it was even going to get greater. My partner and I had talked about things that we thought we'd have to try to do to meet the needs of the community and it was going to take some significant money, a minimum of a half-million-dollar investment.

RM: More trucks?

CM: More trucks and different trucks. We had started, on a pilot basis, an automated collection; we had purchased an attachment to our front loader that would pick up the containers and dump it.

RM: So you didn't need a man picking up cans.

CM: You didn't need the body to do it anymore. And we had gotten away from the front-loader can; we were starting to do side loaders so we were looking at the attachments for side loaders to automate it.

We always paid our bills, so it wasn't that we didn't have good credit, but we were very small and he and I didn't have the financial backing—if it went bad, someone could chase us down on stuff. We were small, we were very inexpensive, and we didn't have the cash flow to support that kind of investment without some sort of significant rate increases. And there was that interaction due to fact that I was a commissioner. Even though our contract was with the town, I couldn't go there politically, asking for a bunch of raises.

So when we were presented with this offer that was significant, my vote was, I

think we need to do it. Ron wasn't so sure. We were 50/50 partners as stockholders, but I had managing interest and rights. So I had to throw a little trump card and negotiate with him rather strongly about why it was in our best interest to do it. We invited them back in and we said yes. We said, "How did you perceive the balance?" They came with about 25 percent down. They were pretty open about it.

My partner and I had different needs at the time because I also owned the Express Lube out on Pahrump Valley Boulevard. By that time Ron's business venture in Havasu City had gone south; they sold out. They got out of their big home and so forth down there and they had moved up to Pahrump. For a number of years when Ronny came up to work at Astro, he lived out of his fifth wheel on the site. So I had different needs for the balance of the money based upon what I wanted to do, and they had some different needs.

The other thing was that they wanted us out, and we lived on a house on the property. They were going to rent the site Susan and I owned and were renting to Astro; they wanted to rent or lease it. So that meant that we had to find a house. [Laughs]

RM: And your partner had to move his fifth wheel.

CM: Yes, but that was a lot easier. I had a house and two kids in school. So we came to separate arrangements for our 50 percent and Susan and I were booted out to another home here in Pahrump in 30 days—they had a 30-day escrow. Actually, we got the escrow put off because that was the year that the capital gains changed. We held off on the closing until after the tax change so that we didn't have to pay so much in capital gains. But it was a very short thing; we were gone and they were in. It was just one of those things—an offer, quite frankly, that you couldn't refuse.

RM: Was it a shift for you psychologically? I mean, you've been doing this for nine or

ten years and then all of a sudden you're in a different game.

CM: Well, that's right. But I was still a commissioner and I had the Express Lube. Susan and I still took care of the accounting and the bookkeeping and stuff like that but I had somebody running the lube shop and other than that we kind of hung out for four, four and a half years. Traveled, took lots of vacations, took the kids to places; my boys were then going to college so we were able to do that. We bought a place up in Reno for the boys while they went to college.

RM: They went to UNR?

CM: They went to UNR. My younger son played football for three years with them so we'd go up for all the home games.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: Talk about your career as a commissioner. How did you get interested?

CM: When I came to Pahrump and I got the contract for trash disposal, I recognized quickly that I needed to be up front and center politically at the town board meetings and the commission meetings because my livelihood was now dependent upon all those political things that go on there. So I started going to all those meetings.

RM: The county commissioners' meetings were in Tonopah at that time, weren't they?

CM: They were in Tonopah. I also went to all the Pahrump Town Board meetings. During this process I was appointed to the Pahrump Advisory Planning Commission and that was kind of the start of it. The high road/low road controversy through Ash Meadows was in place at that time and that was the political thing that got me going. I believed that the county commissioners needed to follow through with their signed commitment and not change it for what at the time appeared to me and others to be financially and politically motivated to benefit the particular commissioners involved.

RM: Just briefly describe the high road/low road issue.

CM: It goes back to Preferred Equities. They bought a bunch of subdivisions in Amargosa Valley. There was a big move by the Nature Conservancy to get those areas out of private hands and into public hands so the Conservancy bought the Preferred Equities subdivisions. There were some negotiations between the federal agencies, the Conservancy, and Nye County to get those roadways out of Nye County as public roads and put them in the refuge, the Conservancy, so the Conservancy could then give or sell the property, however they do that, to the government.

There was an agreement that said U.S. Fish and Wildlife was going to give the county $863,000 and they were going to build a road so that the main road would bypass the refuge, thereby better protecting the environment and all the critters in the refuge. That was south of the refuge and ran basically from Death Valley Junction, where that old road comes out of Death Valley Junction, and stopped. And there was nothing but a two-track from there up to the road that's now known as the Bill Copeland or Bob Ruud Highway, depending upon where you're at on it. And we were supposed to build that bypass road.

Well, the commissioners at the time wanted to make a change. They wanted to improve the road that goes north through the refuge and ends up out in Amargosa Valley just off the state line. And there were people, and I concurred, who said that that was self-serving on the part of the commissioners individually because of some property ownership or potential property ownership issues.

As part of that, I lobbied and I was participating as part of a group to encourage Fish and Wildlife to not allow for the change while the county and the commissioners were trying to get it done. There were phone meetings and public meetings from the Nature Conservancy group in Portland, Oregon. Anyway, we were successful in basically postponing that action.

That, I think, was a big thing and then when Nye County went from three commissioners to five, there was going to be another seat in Pahrump and I was encouraged and lobbied by a lot of local people to put my hat in and run. I did and I was successful in being elected.

RM: Who did you run against?

CM: I honestly don't remember who my opponent was the first time.

RM: Was it for a four-year term?

CM: At the time, you didn't know—there was also an election for the Tonopah region because there was going to be another northern commissioner. So there was an election and two people were elected—I was elected and Joe Maslach was elected from Tonopah. Then they said, "Well now we have a problem; one of you has to have a four-year seat and one of you has to have a two-year seat." Joey and I agreed that we'd flip a coin or draw a card, I can't remember exactly how we did it. As it turned out, he got the two-year term, I got the four-year term.

RM: What was your impression of campaigning—was that something you liked doing, and how did you campaign?

CM: The first time around, because it was done by district, when they created the district I only had to campaign in the district, basically.

RM: What was your district, roughly?

CM: It was called District 4 in Pahrump. Its configuration has changed some, but District 4 out of Pahrump. I made some signs and I would speak at the campaign stump. And I would talk to anybody any time they could catch me, and that was a lot. In the 1990 era, when I was campaigning, it was very personable. Everywhere I went, whether my family was out to breakfast, lunch, or dinner, whether we'd go the park or whatever it was, people would engage me in political discussion.

I was conservative by nature and I believed in Pahrump; I really thought that Pahrump was going to be what it is, the engine for Nye County. So it was pretty simple; I don't think I spent more than a few thousand dollars to do it.

RM: Did you go door to door?

CM: I didn't go door to door, but every time I went out, every time I did something, every time I delivered a bin, every time I picked a bin up, whatever I did, people would engage me. And by that time I'd become very active in the volunteer fire department; I was already assistant fire chief. So that was a lot.

RM: Well, you had a leg up in a lot of ways, didn't you? Because you knew people who had been your customers and you were with the fire department and so on.

CM: I was very community oriented and I think that helped me a lot. And I was very family oriented and I was conservative. I think all of those things helped me and were to my advantage for the first election. I think the other thing is, I never had a problem talking to an individual, to a small group, or a large group. I could talk to them, not talk at them, and I believe I could explain positions and reasoning so they could understand it. I think people appreciated that.

In my whole political career, and even today, I don't tell people something because I think they want to hear it. I tell them things because I think they need to hear it. Sometimes I get chastised because people want to call me blunt or sarcastic or whatever, but though people might not like it, if they understand it and then they move forward with their decision process while understanding it, then I'm okay with the fact that they think I'm a jerk. [Laughs]

RM: What was the core of your philosophy that you presented in terms of the commissioners? Not your overall political philosophy, but the vision that you had for the county commission?

CM: My vision was to try to show the other commissioners how important it was to

make Pahrump successful, overall. And how we needed to live within our means and truly prioritize what the county did based upon what the majority of the people wanted.

The vocal minority will always want to try to browbeat you into what they want. Everybody's got an interest. I believe that one thing I was successful at in my political career was I never let my personal interest sway me. If anything, particularly with the garbage, I think the record will show that it was just the opposite. Being involved in politics probably inhibited some of the things that I could have or should have done in my business to better it. If the stockholders weren't just myself and my partner, the stockholders would probably have run me out.

And that went farther. In '94 when I got the lube shop, I did no work for Nye County vehicles but I did a lot for the town of Pahrump, particularly the fire trucks. When they went out to bid for servicing and for the repair of those trucks, no one could touch me because my bid was so low. It was low because I would do the work or my staff would do the work and part of my staff was volunteer firemen who I would hire. Because that's how I felt that it should be. Susan will tell you that there were times two or three of us would leave because there was a fire call, and we'd finish when we got back. Those were part of the community service-minded things that I did.

RM: What year did you run for commissioner the first time?

CM: In '90. I was a commissioner from '90 to 2002. I was a three-term commissioner. The first time around was almost kind of fun. Then the first reelection was a little tougher; there was a little more involved and it took a little more money.

RM: Who was your opponent?

CM: I ran against Harley Kulkin once and I ran against Gary Hollis. Gary was in a

primary because we're both Republicans; I beat him in the primary. Harley tried to recall me once and it wasn't successful. I ran against a fellow from the Test Site one time; I don't remember his name but I see him periodically. I ran against Ray Hendricks; he came out from Southern California and started a couple of businesses. The Horizon Markets were his to begin with.

I can say that there was no such thing as a dirty campaign in any of the elections that I participated in. (There were five because I ran for J.P. one time.) I always told people my vision, my thoughts, and I never commented on someone else and they did the same thing. So we were still friends when we all got done. I wish that would be the same today but it's not quite as congenial now. [Laughs] But I'm glad it was that way; I wouldn't have done it any other way.

RM: What were the challenges in being commissioner?

CM: We were and are a poor rural county. We have a huge land mass—we have constituents and taxpayers scattered throughout 18,000 square miles that all have a right to some level of service. The challenge was how to do that while recognizing that I'm elected by a district in the county, Pahrump, that has a significant amount of needs that are different from other areas in the county. The distance is absolutely a huge thing to try to deal with and overcome. And trying to get the state to recognize our needs because with the state, Clark County is the engine and they can make you or break you.

And then, recognizing that being a commissioner was a whole lot more than just going to the commissioner meetings twice a month. There were other boards. The whole time I was there I worked on the Work Force Investment Act, which did a lot of good things. It was tough to make sure that Nye County got a portion of those federal monies

for job training and youth training services and other things.

The whole issue of Clark County and the water district there wanting to take Nye County water was hugely time consuming. Commissioner Dick Carver truly was at the forefront of that. Then there was Yucca Mountain, and I think I kind of took that one on.

There was the whole issue of emergency services needs and I kind of took that because that was my field. We had emergency services issues between the ambulance service, the fire service, and so on. During my time we created the LEPC, Local Emergency Planning Commission, because all of those things were evolving. It was extremely time-consuming. Economic development was another issue. And that whole thing cycled good, bad, to ugly. We started with the Nye/Esmeralda Economic Development Plan and it's had its problems. But there was state money available and if we didn't participate we'd lose it. The state said, "We can take care of you better." Well, they weren't taking care of us at all so we had to try to develop something to try to do that. There were some successes but not as many as we'd like; it's very difficult.

Another thing, which is going well today, is the Rural Nevada Development Corporation. I was one of the original incorporators. Mike Cosgrove was the city manager of Wells for a while and he was on it, I was on it; a number of us were the original creators of the Rural Nevada Development Corporation, which has done a number of things. There have been a lot of deals for improving housing for the seniors. We were able to get some development money in Pahrump. A notable one is D&D Tire. They were successful through the Rural Nevada Development Corporation in getting some money to assist them in their expansion and improving their facilities in Nye County, particularly in Pahrump.

RM: Tonopah had been the head of Nye County for a long time and Pahrump was kind of the little sister, and then the roles were reversed because of population changes. Was that rivalry hard to deal with?

CM: It was very hard. People would say, "Well gee, Tonopah's only got this many people but all their roads are paved."

I'd look them right in the face and go, "Wait a minute. Tonopah's been there 100 years. Their roads were paved before Pahrump was thought of. And oh, by the way, remember Tonopah's one and a half, two square miles, so give me a break. Stop your crying."

Now, there's no doubt that Pahrump didn't get its share of attention—I'm not going to call it a fair share. It's the same way with Beatty. People would say Beatty's all paved. Well, the actual Beatty is one square mile and it's been there for 80 or 90 years and that's where the gold mines are. The unincorporated town of Pahrump was formed some time in the '60s or '70s under Judge Beko. The bottom line was, we're a baby. And oh, by the way, we're 375 square miles and oh, by the way, the good, the bad, the ugly—the whole Preferred Equities thing. I always would say, "I'm going to hate that in 15, 20, 30 years" and people are going to say, "Look what the commissioners left us." Well, we were dealing with that.

RM: You mean Preferred Equities.

CM: Yes, all these subdivisions. There were a lot of improvements but there were a lot of land sales, a lot of dirt and gravel roads and a lot of unimproved issues. All of sudden people are moving in and they want what their neighbors want. People hated me because they'd say, "Why can't you do more?"

To explain, I'll use the difference between some of the subdivisions. Hollis Harris built a little subdivision called Joycelyn Estates; I think he named it after his wife. He paved the roads to a minimal standard, but they were paved roads. He brought telephone to the back and he had the power in and he might have been selling those lots for $13,000.

Some of the other developers had similar-sized lots but they had gravel roads and maybe they didn't have telephone in, and people were buying them for $8,500. I'd say, "Didn't you buy that lot for $8,500? If you wanted it paved, you should have bought Joslyn Estates and you'd have a paved road." I was always big on the county not giving in on an issue like that because we couldn't do it for everybody.

And it was very difficult because even then the subdivisions question was a 3-to-2 issue. Barbara Raper, bless her soul, and I didn't always agree. She was a Pahrump commissioner but quite frankly, a lot of times what she did was not in Pahrump's best interest. So at that time the vote was 4-to-1, and particularly when she didn't get reelected, it was a lot of 3-to-2 votes.

RM: Who did you initially serve with? Was Bobby Revert a commissioner?

CM: He was on and off and then he came back. It was Dick Carver, myself, Barbara Raper, Dave Hannigan, and Joey Maslach. My challenge in most of the process was to try to convince one of those three northern commissioners about the benefit for the whole county of something that I thought benefited Pahrump. And I was somewhat successful. I will say that for the most part, Joey was the one for the first couple years who understood that, particularly on the high road/low road issue. He was the third vote to turn that around and to say, "No, we have a written agreement. We collected the money; we

needed to do what we obligated ourselves to and not renege and try to do something different." And subsequently, the road's where it's at and it's been beneficial to all involved.

RM: What are you proudest of, looking back on your career as commissioner?

CM: I am really proud of convincing the commissioners not to take the state's line, not to take even some of our staff and consultants' line, on the Payments Equal to Taxes issue for Yucca Mountain.

RM: Oh, really? In what way?

CM: We were all for it but they wanted to go forward in what I called a blue sky issue as far as how to deal with the Department of Energy as it relates to our right to come to an agreement on Payments Equal to Taxes, which was written in the law. There was a group out there that said we should get $30, $40, $50 million a year.

I said, "You guys are crazy. There's no way. They're going to keep us at bay and we'll never see a dime if we take that approach." The short of it was that I was able, in open forums, to convince the commissioners that there was a better way to go—that we needed to be reasonable because if we couldn't be reasonable, the senators and the congressmen from the other 49 states who allocate the money were going to say, "Forget it. You're crazy. We'll never appropriate anything." Or they would write PETT right out of the law and we'd get nothing.

RM: And PETT stands for payments equal to taxes?

CM: It was supposed to be. It was originally called GETT, grants equal to taxes, because you can't tax the federal government. The provisions were there to allow for grants to affected units of local government for the impact of something like Yucca

Mountain. I believe that my biggest accomplishment was spearheading that and getting the commissioners to agree, and also getting them to take a stand of neutrality. We were not going to fight the federal government or fight the state. We wanted to take a position to say, "Look, when you big guys get all done, whatever you decide, Yucca Mountain's in Nye County. Whatever you do is going to affect us. Let's make sure that Nye County is protected in whatever you do."

And it was the same way with our oversight. "Give us the money and have our oversight program built so we don't get on this politically emotional bandwagon that everyone else is on." Let us hire consultants and do good science so that we can say to the public in Nye County, "Look we've done this independently and we either concur or we don't concur. Here's what we think."

And we were successful in a couple of big things. We disagreed with the experts at the DOE site. One of the biggest things we did was to convince them to not have this be a closed facility for 300 years. We said, "Technology is changing. We need to keep that nuclear material so that we can get at it so that if 100 years down the road, all of a sudden we could reprocess this, my goodness!" We presented a good case and by golly, they bought it.

The other issue was our drilling programs. We needed to know the existing condition of the water coming from Yucca Mountain—where is it? What is it? And we have a whole thing with wells and hydrology data and geology data that we've done at Yucca Mountain.

And the GETT, what now they refer to as PETT, was all part of the negotiations. I spearheaded it and went back, and the short of the story is, the guy at DOE who was in

charge of that segment and I and Bill Offut and our staff went back to Washington. We were trying to negotiate a settlement and I saw our staff and his staff butting heads and really getting in the way. I went in the room; I looked at him—he was a very nice man and I'll try to remember his name. I said, "We need to have these guys get out of here. You and I have to talk."

He threw his staff out and I asked my staff out. We sat. He was supposed to be somewhere. His staff was trying to stick their head in. He's telling them "get out." We hammered out a process of how they would pay us.

I took that to the board—they were going to make a lump sum payment for from the time the law establishing Yucca Mountain came into place up to that time. We had a five-year agreement of what they were going to pay and it was significant. I got some heat because when I went back, they gave me the check. It was kind of a ceremony. That money eased and paid for a lot of our woes, and even that evolved. But that would be an accomplishment of mine.

RM: Do you remember what that check was for?

CM: It was $15 million or something like that. Part of it was back payment. That has allowed this county to do a lot of things.

Dick Carver and I were adversaries a lot of the time, but when we got done disagreeing, however it went, it was done. We just went on to the next issue. I didn't win all of them; he didn't win all of them. And they cycled. For example, when we got this first amount of money, his vision was he didn't want to spend it, he wanted to do endowments. I said, "We've got way too many things to do, Dick. Really."

When people say that the county never gives the towns any money, that's hog.

They say we never give the school district money, that's hog. With the first distributed PETT money, we gave money to every taxing district and community in the county. Everybody. The town of Pahrump, the town's library district, the pool district, the Smoky Valley radio district, the town of Amargosa—every taxing group got money.

The only restrictions we had was it had to be used for capital funding. We didn't want them to put the money toward salaries and benefits, and with valid reason. As we toured—because we would go back to all these federal facilities—we saw the facilities that were shutting down and the local governments that were in deep shit because they had taken the monies they had negotiated for the impacts from those federal facilities and they were using them to fund their sheriff's office, their police department, their government, and now the facility's gone and they are being devastated. I said I didn't want to see that happen with the PETT money and I was able to convince the other commissioners that using it for capital funding was the prudent thing to do.

After we spent that first bunch of money, I said, "Okay, Dick, now we're getting more money." We put together an ordinance and the way it worked was if we got a payment of $10 million we'd put $3 million in this and $3 million in this and $3 million in this and use a little bit of it. Then in the next agreement we made, we did the same thing. We set up three endowments—the educational endowment, the county's capital endowment, and an emergency fund. And that money is still there, for the most part, today, though it's been changed. After I left the first thing the group did was to change the ordinance. They stopped putting what they got into the endowments funds so the funds could grow.

So the approximately $10 million in the education fund, which should have

continued to grow, stopped growing. The capital fund stopped growing. The idea of the endowment was to use the interest. So each year when we got the interest on the endowment we were able to spend that for all kinds of infrastructure—roads, chip seal, sheriff's office vehicles, fire trucks, all the other things we did.

We gave money to the schools; we gave them a $4 million to $6 million infusion in their capital when they first came out with their five-year needs plan. We gave them cash. Boom, there it is. And subsequent to that they've been getting interest. I hope it stays that way because the economy and the interest rate of course suck at the moment so the interest is not that great. But please hang on, because it's going to rebound. I hope that will be one of the legacies that I was very instrumental in formulating and formatting.

I want to tell you a story on my wife's behalf. When Admiral Watkins was Secretary of Energy in the '90s we went to a tour of Yucca Mountain and to the public place where they have all their big boards showing what Yucca Mountain is and all that. My wife was with me and went back to talk about something and someone came in to me and said, "Cameron, do you know where your wife is?"

"I don't know; she's not with me."

He said, "You need to come here. She's giving Admiral Watkins an earful." I went out there and she made a valid point. She said, "This is great; this is a lovely forum. But you've got the wrong people here. These aren't the people who are going to be operating and needing to know about Yucca Mountain. You need to be having outreach and an educational program to the elementary schools, to the middle schools, to the high schools."

RM: That's right.

CM: That's her legacy. Because he did tours that allowed younger groups to go to Yucca Mountain. They had an outreach for educational issues. They put in a deal at Beatty High School for it. They expanded their community outreach and I have to say it was because "Your wife was just chewing on Admiral Watkins." [Laughs]

RM: She hit the nail right on the head.

CM: She said, "My Boy Scouts need to be the ones here because they're the ones that are going to be running it. You need to have a program to educate Nye County students to become the engineers of the future because if it comes, they're the ones that we want to be here."

RM: I certainly agree. My perception is that one of DOE's great failures was that they didn't do that from the beginning. They did not come into Nevada and really try to educate people on what was going on and that gave the opponents of Yucca Mountain a free hand. She hit the nail on the head.

CM: I'd never have thought I'd have the opportunity to do and see the things that being a Nye County Commissioner allowed me to do. I don't know the exact order, and there's not one that's more significant than the others, but I can say that I've been able to see a big portion of the Nevada Test Site—to see what they've done, what they were doing, and what they were going to do. I've been able to see a big portion of the Tonopah Test Range and the Electronic Warfare Center out at Beatty. I've been at live fire exercises at the Indian Springs Range. I've been able to see the good portion of what our government does to advance the United States of America in this kind of thing. I've been in the control room of a tunnel where they were going to do an explosion of some kind. Not during it, but to be able to see how that interacts. When someone talks about thousands of miles of instrumentation, to be able to stand on the platform and see the setup prior to the explosion, I just can't tell people what it's like, or what it's like to testify in front of Congressional committees in hearings.

RM: What is that like?

CM: It's humbling. But it was important for them to be able to see the elected official representing the group. I don't want to use the word plead, but to bring to light the situation—don't forget, everybody in the country wants to play NIMBYism, "not in my

backyard." You don't want a nuclear repository in Louisiana, you don't want it in New York, you don't want it in Illinois, you don't want it in Florida, you don't want it in Texas. I am Nye County. So treat us and protect us like you'd want your people to be treated and protected if you were the one in my seat.

That's how I did it and it was very well received. Even our own congressional and senate leaders, our state leaders, had a hard time fighting that. We could agree to disagree. They could do their thing, but they would not purposely try to slam my position. Because frankly, all I was doing was pleading the other side—if they weren't successful in stopping Yucca Mountain, let's hope to God that the government would really take care of us the best they could.

I've been underground at WIPP, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico, twice. I mean, most people wouldn't have a clue. I sat at a nuclear plant back East where I touched the containment containers where they're dry cask storing, above ground, the waste right now. I'm not glowing and I'm not sick. I stood in the catwalk on the railing and looked down at the cooling pool of the nuclear waste in a nuclear power plant. I've toured Yucca Mountain. I have a picture somewhere of my family in front of the Yucca Muckers. These are things that most people would never have a chance to do and I cherish those things because they've allowed me a much better understanding of government.

RM: During this period, what was your perception of what the state was doing, vis-à-vis Bob Loux and Harry Reid?

CM: They took the emotion and what they thought would get them the most votes. I truly respect Harry Reid. I've had face-to-face conversations with him, I've sat in

National Airport with him when flights got cancelled and we've agreed to disagree. I just feel that they were wrong. Everyone knows nuclear waste is bad; no one's saying it isn't. But someone's got to store it and I will disagree with them that at this point in time Yucca Mountain is not the best way, particularly since we've changed the picture so there's a process that would allow us access to the waste if something goes good. I firmly respectfully disagree with their position. I believe that for the most part they did what they thought could get them the most votes.

RM: So you think the anti-Yucca Mountain position they took was politically cynical?

CM: I'm not using the word cynical; I just respectfully disagree. The anti-Yucca Mountain stance is the easy position to take. Negativism is an easy political sell. You drive the emotion and it's almost a winner every time. To me, that's the bad and the ugly. I think that the Nevada politicians like the governor and Senator Reid could have been protecting the interest and the welfare of Nevada while benefiting from the rest of the country's wishes. You have a facility here that's been blowing up nuclear bombs for decades. By everyone's admission—and no one's debating this—the Nevada Test Site is going to be a wasteland or uninhabitable forever. It seems to me that it's appropriate to move forward with consolidating waste in that area.

I'm not sure that I would agree that recent events and mishaps like the one in Fukushima, Japan, would be anything different. I think it actually says that we need to get this material in a more confined, better-engineered place than it is today. I'm not convinced that we can't continue to transport the product safely to do it. So there's the politics. Nothing's foolproof. I mean, come on.

RM: If you were looking in your crystal ball, would you say the Yucca Mountain

repository is ever going to be a reality?

CM: I think Yucca Mountain, in some form, is going to eventually happen. Because the issue over having the waste where it is today is not getting any better. The political atmosphere out there for those areas is not changing much. I still believe that Yucca Mountain, in some format, will be in place. I just hope that sufficient protections are in place for the citizens of Nye County. But I also hope that for accepting that burden, the residents of Nye County are compensated and aren't lumped in with the political furor that the state is portraying. I hope we're not beat up because of the posture they're taking.

RM: What is your view on the '87 amendment to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the so-called Screw Nevada Act?

CM: My take on that is exactly what I said—the fact is that there are 48 senators and 328 congressmen who don't want that stuff in their state. Are you really surprised by the act?

RM: What was your perception of Pahrump citizens' view of Yucca Mountain in the late '80s and early '90s?

CM: I think, again, most of them were somewhat in favor of it because they saw the economic benefit. And we had been supportive over all of the various federal projects, and particularly the nuclear testing program, for decades, so it wasn't a big stretch for them to agree to Yucca Mountain.

Of course, it wasn't by any stretch of the imagination a no-brainer because there were a lot of those who feared it and said, "You can't trust the government. DOE doesn't know what the heck they're doing anyways." But you always had that attitude. As I said before, I think most people said if we were going to accept this burden, protect us. Let's

truly make sure.

And they were giving us millions of dollars to do our independent science work to either agree or disagree with the Yucca Mountain project. And we were getting some PETT money, which was a payoff—call it what you want. But the bottom line is it was sorely needed, it's been truly put to beneficial use. You could check with the county, but I've got to imagine that we're up to $100 million that we've received from that original agreement.

I think Yucca Mountain will ultimately, in some format, exist. I could even perceive that there'll be some aboveground dry-cask storing for a while. That's just kind of my gut feeling. The idea of this deep geological storage for protection from nuclear waste still seems to make the most sense. But who knows what will come in the next one to five years, both engineering-wise and technology-wise?

RM: To the extent that you got to Vegas and Clark County and talked to people as a commissioner and during your life in Pahrump, what was your impression of the citizens' perception of Yucca Mountain over there?

CM: I think most of them bought into the issue of the threats portrayed about transportation of the nuclear waste. Truly, that's what it was. As far as the issue of it's going to hurt tourism and all that, people said, "Wait a minute. They used to make the nuclear tests an event—people would go outside on the Strip to watch them."

You're blowing things up and people came. You're doing the underground tests, people came. So to me the whole argument that it was going to kill tourism was lame. The issue they could stand on was hauling the waste to Yucca Mountain. But look at all the stuff that comes through Las Vegas—look at the dangers.

I would go, "Okay." But then I said, "Fine, engineer out of that. Because remember, it doesn't matter where you come from, all the roads end up in Nye County. Therefore, I understand your concern. Whatever they do to fix the transportation issue in your county, make sure they double-fix it in Nye County because all those fingers end up in Nye County. Whether it's from the north, whether it's from the south, whether it's from the east, they still come because Yucca Mountain is in Nye County.

They talk about the nuclear waste but they forget that there are so many other dangerous products transported over our highways on a daily basis. We accept that but we can't accept the highly regulated waste that would go on the highways. In one of my trips we went out of Carlsbad and went through the plant where they make the casks for transporting the nuclear waste product and where they were doing some prototyping of cask storage for transportation. We saw what they were doing to reduce risk with that material.

When someone says we can eliminate risk, I take pause. I say, "Well, thank you, but I don't know how you can ever eliminate it and say you can have 100 percent of anything." But I could see, touch, and feel that they truly were developing programs and processes in the transportation format to reduce as much as physically possible the dangers of having a breach in containment. I felt comfortable coming home and looking across to my constituents, to my wife, to my children, and saying, "I think they really are doing the best they can."

And they're not stopping. Even though they think, "This is good," there's still a group that is spending tens of millions of dollars trying to improve it. So I was satisfied with the process. I was a little disappointed in not getting some of these facilities for

doing some of the things like developing containment, as hard as we tried, within Nye County.

RM: Do you think the federal government was punishing Nevada for not agreeing to take Yucca Mountain?

CM: Yes, I think there was some of that. We tried to get some of those facilities into the county, and we had some success. We always wanted to bring some of the work, as I called it, "off the reservation"—to get it out to make them productive county taxpayers.

They got some economic development money and they developed a facility, but it hasn't come out yet. If something is truly sensitive and it has to be on site, do it. But if it doesn't have to be, get it offsite. Make it a community-based support of whatever's going on at the Test Site, whatever's going on the test range, whatever's going on out there.

If you can get it to where those companies are participating in a community, paying taxes and everything else, that's what we've got to do. And we're not there. If I have a disappointment, that would be one of them.

RM: As a former commissioner, what's your take on the low-level waste disposal site at Beatty?

CM: People don't see it. There are times you see truck after truck after truck coming through with the yellow radioactive placards. They're burying the low-level waste out there, probably as we speak. And it's coming across Highway 160, it's coming up 372, it's going through Las Vegas. It's all there, both the low-level and the transuranic waste. And again, it's providing jobs for those who live here and in Vegas. I just would hope that the county could do better on getting some of those facilities to be taxpayers in Nye County.

RM: Do you have any thoughts on how the county or private groups could get more of that type of thing in Nye County?

CM: If I knew how, I'd have done it. I think it's going to take a better relationship with the state hierarchy—and if we can't get our senators and congressmen truly on board with that, it's not going to happen. Because remember, anything that comes to Nye County is going to come from somewhere else. Therefore, we now are a competing interest and if we can't get our own state involved it won't happen. I understand the taxpayers' position—yes, there's a state burden, there's a Clark County burden, but the Yucca Mountain facility is in Nye County.

And we don't want it all. I mean, I'm not asking for it all, but let's reevaluate what we're getting and see what we can do to better that situation. When you talk about the basic David and Goliath issue or the development issue, if Clark County is having all these air quality and other problems, well, let's move some of it out to the rural areas. People say we don't want it because if you bring it here, then we're going to start having air quality issues. But, like anything else, if you concentrate it, it's going to magnify. If you can disperse some of it, you're going to help that situation. Yes, you're going to have some harm, but let's get to where the benefit overshadows the harm and you can manage the harm better.

RM: What's your take on the solar energy effort that's underway in Nye County now?

CM: I think it's a good thing for rural Nevada and I hope that Nye County can capitalize on it. I won't even get into the whole issue of why it should or shouldn't be subsidized as it relates to competing energy sources. [Laughs] But here we are in Nye County with, by all estimates, some of the best solar "regions" that they've tested for.

Let's get it on. Let's do that. It's going to bring jobs, both construction and permanent jobs.

Valley Electric is a great organization but they don't produce power. We are reliant on Hoover Dam; we're reliant on all the big coal, oil, and gas-fired stuff that comes from elsewhere. If you don't want a coal-fired, gas-fired, or something other-fired generator facility in Nye County or for Valley Electric or whatever, it would seem that the continued development of solar and other forms of energy is something that we need to commit to.

That goes with a couple of other things. We have geothermal resources that we could be hitting here in Nye County. We have an artesian well producing oil in Nye County, in Railroad Valley, that we've unsuccessfully fought in court with the state legislature to get more benefit from. There are a lot of things that Nye County has that could be beneficial, and solar is the hot item now. But like anything else, we've got to somehow get the infrastructure to harness that power and then distribute it and use it.

RM: In looking back on your career as a 12-year county commissioner, what was your greatest frustration, or what was it that you wanted to do but couldn't?

CM: I will start on the local stuff, the easy stuff. I wasn't able to convince enough commissioners on a number of the items to formulate development in Nye County, to spend money a little differently than what they might have done, to better fund, in my time, emergency services, programs to help the communities. Again, I believe an overall umbrella picture is government should only do for the people what the people can't do for themselves. And that pyramids from local to all the way up.

RM: Was there any overriding issue that you just couldn't bring home and it left you

with a feeling of, "I wish I could've done that."

CM: I don't know. We did a lot of things. There were a lot of things that I wish had occurred earlier. We spent a lot of money on the Nye Regional Medical Center in Tonopah. We should've been out of that years before we were.

RM: And the county's out of it now?

CM: Yes. Finally we were able to get to where we sold the facility and got out of the business of running a hospital. We should have done it millions of dollars sooner. And people called me to eliminate Gabbs as a city and get it back to being a town.

RM: They're not incorporated any more?

CM: It's no longer a city, it's now a town. No one likes change and those areas were—I hate to say the word—dying and we should have done things differently because we would have better spent money and not hurt them. We'd have had money to spend doing other things.

RM: From a former commissioner's perspective, how do you see the future of Nye County, or possible scenarios of the future?

CM: It's interesting that you say that now because the county has to redistrict after the last census. I believe they made a mistake on how they redistricted last time by fingering the two northern districts into Pahrump. My position has changed a little bit. I've always said if it's good for Pahrump it's good for the county.

RM: And you believe that?

CM: Yes, absolutely. But I also have to say that for the people of Pahrump, where 83 percent of the population is now, that they can now do something about it. They need to redistrict and get four commission districts in Pahrump, elect people who will do what

they think they need to do, and that's probably going to not benefit the northern part of the county.

RM: How are the northern areas going to be protected?

CM: You just hope that they will be. I've said before, "Remember when Pahrump was the bastard child? You didn't like being treated that way, then don't treat them that way."

RM: But that's not a real protection.

CM: Of course it's not; it never is. And that's why those in the north, when I left office and they did that redistricting, were able to do it. The three commissioners in Pahrump didn't understand it so the other side prevailed for whatever reasons. But now they have a time to change that again. I'm not going to sit here and promote that it's now "screw the north" because people thought it was "screw the south" for two decades.

RM: Did you perceive that attitude towards Pahrump when you first moved there?

CM: Oh, yes. I went before Commissioners Bobby Revert, Joe Garcia, and Pat Mankins in the commission chambers in Tonopah on behalf of the town of Pahrump to present an issue about a water tender that the town of Pahrump wanted to do for the fire department. When I got up there, Bobby Revert looked over his shoulder at me and said, "You wasted your trip and time, we're not going to talk about it."

I said to myself, "What a way to treat a constituent." So I saw that attitude firsthand.

RM: You hear rumblings from time to time about splitting the county. What's your take on that?

CM: I'm going to say two things. I supported incorporation. However, I think the time to have done it was back when, before the state had time to change the laws on those kind

of things. The financial splitting of revenues and assets is different.

RM: Oh, you mean incorporation of Pahrump?

CM: I'm not going to go there. That's all changed and that's done. People have to recognize that northern Nye County produces more than the 17 percent of the county's revenue.

RM: Because of the gold mine?

CM: Yes, and other things. I don't think you can ever split one thing and expect to not have it cost you more to operate.

RM: Because there would be two governments you'd have to support instead of one.

CM: Right. I don't think splitting Nye County would be beneficial for either portion. I'm not talking about half and half.

RM: Exactly, and where would you split it? Would you give them Amargosa or Beatty?

CM: I can't see a legislature saying, "Well, we're going to make Pahrump County" (I just made that up) and make Pahrump County the existing boundaries of Pahrump, then make everything else northern Nye County. What a financial disaster for both entities, in my mind.

RM: Years ago, people said maybe Pahrump should go with Vegas. I don't think that'll ever happen.

CM: And again, if the economy doesn't rebound and really do something, the state's going to have to look at the issue. A number of sessions ago there was an initiative I've heard referred to as tic-tac-toe, consolidating the 17 counties of Nevada into nine. This may have been nothing but on somebody's bar napkin or sketch pad. But think about

Nevada. If you can get past the emotion of the ownership and history of the counties, and if you do it strictly on economics, strictly on the provision of services, I don't think you could dispute that there are some counties that don't need to be there. At the same revenue you could absorb some of the functions and administration and hierarchy and provide the same or better services at the ground level. I'm sure we're not the only state that talks about stuff like that.

One of the things that I pushed for, because it was so important, and we got it, was to change the county boundary between south Nye and Clark County out at the CAAS Road exchange.

RM: Oh, really?

CM: Yes. Part of that was, in the economic development forum that I did, I worried because Nye County, let's say, ended here. Then there was a segment of private land in Clark County where Highway 160 ran through. Then there's all this federal land. I was worried because for years we've talked about tax leakage—Nye County people going to Clark County, buying gas and groceries and goods in Clark County, and we weren't benefiting from the taxes. What worried me was that right outside the southern border of Nye County was that segment of private land in Clark County. I was worried that somebody would come in and develop something on the border, whether it was a gas station, another casino, or whatever, and take that tax base.

Bob Swadell and his group helped us a lot in making those connections. Our commissioners agreed and we went to the Clark County Commissioners and got a unanimous agreement from them, and the legislature changed the boundary of Nye County to include those square miles going up 160 so that that private land was included

in Nye County. Part of the reason was, as I'd say, "We're providing services there. We've done it for decades. Those kids come to our schools. If they need a sheriff or fire protection, we respond." Common sense prevailed and it happened.

RM: Maybe Clark County people were afraid they were going to eventually get stuck having to provide services a long way from their base.

CM: Right, and so we got their support. When you went to Metro or you went to their fire department or their public works department, we got support. That's a local accomplishment I felt good about because now that private property is in Nye County. When it develops, the taxes that will be collected from the commerce will come to Nye County.

RM: Yes. When you look in your crystal ball again, how do you see the future of Pahrump?

CM: I think when the economy gets back on track, Pahrump will continue to grow.

RM: How big do you see it getting?

CM: There are 50-some thousand available lots now.

RM: So that's 100,000 people.

CM: At 2.7 people per house, it's 130,000 people. Those are lots, parcels, already in place. When you go to the assessor, there are 50-some thousand lots. Many of them aren't buildable and many of them are. That's what's available in 375 square miles. Will that be in 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 years—will I see it? I don't think so. I don't think we'll go from 38,000 to 130,000 that fast. We went from 5,800 to 38,000, so let's just say we grew six times in 20 years. I don't think we'll go six times in the next 20.

RM: In let's say 2050, if things stay on track for the Earth, do you see 100,000 people

here?

CM: It could be. You've got to remember, right now we're on a minor downslide. There was a slight reduction in the first quarter of 2011 to the 36,000 range.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RM: Do you have any other thoughts on your career as a county commissioner or on Yucca Mountain? I talked to Joni Eastley the other day and told her I was interviewing you. She spoke very highly of you.

CM: I appreciate that. I enjoyed working with Joni while I was a commissioner and she was on the Round Mountain Town Board. And then she became a commissioner and we served for a couple of years together.

RM: She said she really enjoyed that and was sad it couldn't have been longer.

CM: Well, life continues on and each new path you take, you can't go back and say, "Well, what would it be like?"

RM: Right. Did you want to say more about your time as a Nye County Commissioner?

CM: I think the relationship that I built as an individual commissioner with the town board in the community I represented played a big role in how the town and county interacted, outside of the population issues that were driving the change from a three-person commission to a five-person commission.

I think the people of Pahrump had felt generally disenfranchised with some of those who were elected to represent them prior to there being a second seat on the commission for Pahrump. As a commissioner, I not only went to the commission meetings but I would be present at almost every town board meeting, and I would make myself present for other meetings if I was asked—the planning commission or holding a workshop on roads and road improvement issues—when we would try to put together

lists of what we were going to do. I think that was a very positive thing, particularly when it came down to many things where the county and the town needed to at least be on the same freeway going the same direction. They didn't necessarily always have to be in the same lane, but that was really important.

I firmly believe that after I left office, that didn't continue. I think some of the animosities that we read about and hear about between the county and the town are because of that. I wish that my successors from the Pahrump area had spent more time at the town board meetings because I think you get a real sense of what's going on, not just reading what's in the paper.

That is an evolution all in itself—who is reporting on the various town and county issues and how they're doing it. That's no commentary on a liberal or conservative press. I think it's just a fact that what's presented can be skewed or driven one way or another by the person doing the reporting, by their own personal things, by their knowledge of the community, by how involved they get. And again, as that has all evolved, that lack of having a commissioner sitting in the audience listening, getting up and talking, even, is evident. Many, many times I would talk about my personal position and then I would talk about the commission position—not representing them, necessarily—but I was able to verbalize and be there face-to-face with that room full of people. Whether they were for you or against you or liked you or didn't like you, they really appreciated that type of commitment and that type of communication.

So when it came down to issues of property, emergency services, ambulance, money grants for the parks, planning, road issues, animal control, all of these types of things, it made for better government on a whole where you didn't have that perception

that Nye County was big brother and the town of Pahrump was a little brother. It was more of an interaction, more of an interplay and a level playing field because of that face-to-face interaction that took place.

RM: Is this true for the five-member board or before you went on the board?

CM: Well, both before, when there were three commissioners, and then later. When there were five commissioners, they wouldn't come to meetings. Or, if they came they had this big brother, I'm the county, attitude. I think that was part of why the community wanted to go to five commissioners so they could get another representative. After I got elected, like I say, I would attend almost every meeting. And that interaction, I think, made the relationship and the governments work better together for the 12 years I was a commissioner.

After I left, I saw an immediate decline. I think if you look today, when you read the papers and so on, there's truly animosity, the most animosity I've seen in a decade, between the town and the county. And most of it, quite frankly, is that lack of communication, relying too much on the town manager and the county manager to play nicely together in the sandbox. I think that the town of Pahrump is suffering because of it. I hope that future county commissioners from Pahrump—recognizing that they all can't be there at the same time because they can't violate the open meeting laws—take that extra step and show personal interest in their town of Pahrump to move that forward.

I would hope that Joni Eastley and Lorinda Wichman, for example, would show that same interest in the communities they represent up north and the Gary Hollises, Butch Boraskys, and Dan Shinhofens would do that in Pahrump. If they did that in the communities they represent, I think that the relationship and the delivery of services and

so forth would be so much better.

I would say that a couple of the other elected officials, the sheriff and the district attorney, should do the same thing. Sheriff Wade Lieseke used to do it a lot more than his predecessor and more than Tony. Tony does spend some time there but it's usually when there's conflict or a difference or some issue instead of just his mere presence and having that spontaneous type of communication, not just with the public that's there but with the board itself, so that the governments and the services they provide can have better communication and do things better.

RM: Is there a mechanism that could be put in place that would encourage or facilitate having elected county officials attend their town meetings?

CM: I don't know how you would do that. And there are even hurdles, particularly with the open meeting law. But communication is so important. Again, I think that was another very positive thing that I did while I was a commissioner. I think it made everything so much easier because it's easier to get things done when you have a relationship with other board members, even if they're on different boards, and with their staff, than if you're doing your job in a vacuum or narrowly confining yourself to just what you have to do for fulfilling your job requirement.

RM: What you're saying makes really good sense in terms of human relations. To change the subject, do you see analogies between Las Vegas and Nevada and Pahrump and Nye County? In other words, you've got this huge population down south and then there are fewer people up north. How would you react to that?

CM: Certainly that's the case. That's changed; in Nevada history the political power base was up north, as it was in Nye County. As the southern area grew, that whole thing

has evolved. I was called just today by the chairman of the board in Nye County and advised that they had put together a seven-member committee to bring forth a plan to redistrict the county for commission districts. He told me that I had, in fact, been appointed to that board and that he had appointed me chairman of the board. My wife hasn't heard that yet. [Laughs]

I'm hoping that I can use the strengths I have and my knowledge, my history and longevity on the political side of things, to do the right thing, do my job, so we can come forth with a redistricting plan that fulfills the statute of developing a representation base as close to 20 percent per district as we can. In the coming months, that whole issue of the political aspect of Pahrump having 83 percent of the population is going to be a challenge.

RM: Yes, how can you redistrict? You've got to have the weight of representation in Pahrump. It sounds a little bit like a Solomon, King Solomon. [Laughs]

CM: Yes, and you have some statutory requirements. I believe the effort will be to try to do it as fairly and equitably as possible without disenfranchising any particular group or any particular segment of taxpayers but yet bring into a better balance the issue that four-fifths of the population is in Pahrump. How do you realign so that you have four-fifths representation and stay open to other alternatives that may be presented? The committee is created with four members from the Pahrump area, one member from Amargosa/Beatty, one member from Tonopah and one other member from up north, with some division lines. I wasn't part of creating the committee so I'm paraphrasing how it was done. The Nye County Board of Commissioners appointed the members at large and they allowed some of the various town boards to appoint people.

RM: Philosophically speaking, how do you govern where four out of five people are from one area and the culture is different in that area from the rest of the place?

CM: It's a split philosophy. I hope I remember what I said when I was commissioner when I was part of the minority in the 3-to-2 vote; it was to always do the right thing, and remember that just because there's more of them, that doesn't make it necessarily right. But the makeup of our system is one-person, one-vote representation. You can't lose that fact; you have to try to balance it with the fact that the law, the process, the system that's made us what we are today, the good, the bad and the ugly, says that four-fifths of the representation needs to be in Pahrump.

The outcome should not be part of the process of determining how you make the four-fifths work; it's not our job to create the political atmosphere of Nye County. Our job is to create a logistical distribution of districts that fits the statutes. We've got to kind of keep the politics way out of sight.

RM: But can the statutes override justice, for want of a better word?

CM: I suppose they can, just like anything else. There's history of that in our state. As the political power base has shifted, those who have seen it shift away from them have done things legislatively to try to protect their assets, or their power, as best they can. And there are those on the growing side that are now saying, "Ha, pretty quick we're going to have power and then we're going to fix all of this." That's just a part of human nature and I don't know that you can legislatively eliminate either one.

RM: The founding fathers of America faced that same problem and they handled it by setting up the Senate versus the House of Representatives.

CM: And thirdly, the executive branch. Just think how Nevada would be if that

senatorial safeguard wasn't there—we have as many senators as any other state. Our state was supposed to be the same way but, as you know, our senate/assembly didn't fall under that. So therefore, instead of each county having one senator regardless of size, the senators are apportioned the same way the assembly representatives are. So you lose that checks and balance for the little guy.

In county government, there's not that ability. But it's also not as divisive because you don't have an executive branch, you only have one legislative branch. Now, the fact is that that's the system we have, and so therefore you have to hope that the folks that get elected will not just be political vampires and forget that it's Nye County. Yes, you're elected to represent a district but the business of the county is not to just throw the baby out with the bath water.

RM: I know we covered it the other day, but I still wonder about splitting the county into two parts.

CM: I would think that the state legislators would say, "Golly, why would we want to create an 18th county that's going to be poorer than the one that we break up?" As I mentioned earlier, I think it comes down to some of the legislators, and particularly in southern Nevada, saying, "What can we gain by consolidation? We have 17 counties. Half of them are in various states of extreme financial difficulty and always will be." You have a county with less than 1,500 people. You have other counties in all ranges from there. So consolidation is no silver bullet, no easy question. But there is that type of discussion, too.

That issue of north versus south, populated areas versus the non-populated, urban versus rural, is all there. I guess the only good thing is that at least we live in a republic

where you get to make decisions based upon other people's actions and you get to go forward and do the best with whatever's given you.

RM: One of the things that I'm really interested in is economic development, and specifically for Nye County. You have been a part of the economic development of Pahrump Valley. What's your take on the future economic development of Nye County, speaking as a guy who came in here and helped facilitate that whole economic development?

CM: I think we need to continue to improve on building a level of infrastructure—I say a level because we have our physical limitations and I think we need to recognize them. And we need to recognize the negative impacts on the lifestyles and the quality of life that would be present should we overburden those elements. The biggest one is water—quantity, availability, and quality. And there's air quality, and then your other stuff that comes in—the noise, the light, the congestion, all the other things that can play into that. The availability of electrical power and how you get it. Because you just can't say, "Damn everything. We want development, we want people here. Damn the negatives." I think that's very short-sighted.

On the other hand, there are those who say, "We came here because we didn't want any of the stuff. Now that we're here, bar the gates." You can't do that, either. You've got to be honest and open to look at just what the natural recourses can support, then what the community can support, and get behind those things.

Take the Boulder City issue. Whatever they decided their resources were going to allow them to be, their community made a conscious decision to limit what their growth was going to be. It appears to have worked for Boulder City, though it certainly has been

not been without controversy because they go through that cycle, too, of, "Well, we should allow this, we're too restrictive, we're too this." So we need to do the same thing. Because remember, if something comes to Nye County then it's not going to a Clark County, particularly in this environment when the whole state is in a recession. You've got to get out of that competition because economic development is good for everybody if it comes to Nevada—again, up to a certain limit.

Going right back to Yucca Mountain—with all the economic development that would come with Yucca Mountain, there's a group that says, "We don't care. We don't want that economic development." But you do the same thing whether it's a mine, another casino, another gas station, an amusement park, or a theme park of some kind. Pahrump is going through a little bit of a controversy now; it's spending money looking into the development possibilities of some form of theme park. It doesn't matter what it is but there's more than just one level that we need to look at.

I think there's a bright future in Nye County. Like anything else that's created, there's good with the bad and there's bad with the good. I think there's room. I think there's appetite to bring economic development to Nye County, to bring good-paying jobs to Nye County, to improve on infrastructure as long as we can do it without overburdening all these things and creating something that, down the road, ends up being a monster in disguise. Because now, all of a sudden, all the roads again are over-taxed.

I don't know that Pahrump is a poster child of the idea that development pays for itself—that growth begets growth. It doesn't always stay that way. We still are struggling with not enough money in road funds to maintain what we've got. We can't improve what's there; we can't maintain what you want. More people come in and go to these

vacant lots and buy them. They want something, they expect something, but they don't want to pay. Those that are here want and expect and don't want to pay any more. It's a vicious circle. Finding those happy mediums are sometimes very, very difficult. Sometimes tragedy ends up being the trigger to get people behind it. Sometimes it's just the luck of the draw where elected officials will get elected and do something either based on their own conscience or their own beliefs, and that comes together and things will happen. But we do have a lot of space, a lot of area.

Someone asked me, "If you retire today, where would you go?" Why would I want to go anywhere else? I love Pahrump. And I think that people who've come behind me have loved Pahrump. People will say, "Arhh, I hate Pahrump."

I say, "Remember, the road goes both ways—the one that brought you here could take you home or take you to whenever you want to go." [Laughs]

RM: What types of economic development do you think would have the best chance here, and have the best potential fit? In other words, where should we focus our energy? I'm not just talking about Pahrump, I'm talking about all of Nye County.

CM: I think first off, you want development that is considered new money, something where people bring the money in. We have to have something that's not going to be a high usage of water because we have a very critical water issue. And face it, there's no real good way to get more water within Nye County, not without violating some of the things we've been fighting for for 20 years, which is, don't take our water and send it to Clark County. If we were to try to put a straw up north and suck all the water from up north and bring it to Pahrump so that Pahrump could develop into a 250,000 urban setting with all kinds of things that water would support and damn the air quality, what would

that mean? We just built that tunnel through the mountain to help relieve the traffic over the Potosi Mountain. All that aside, it's just so hard to do.

But in today's technology-driven environment, to me it could be having a lifestyle environment that companies want to come to, the ones that can use the technology of today, the fiber optics, the various satellites and other forms of communication. I think we should try to develop a balanced base with what they're calling "green" manufacturing where you have zero waste in whatever you're doing so that we don't have to deal with the wastewater, we don't have to deal with the air pollution, and we don't have to deal with the solid waste that historically has been associated with most production-type jobs.

We have advantages here. The lifestyle is great, the openness, the overall environment, the sunsets. My wife and I sit out a lot and enjoy that kind of thing. We have a lot of the amenities you can get to in 50 minutes. Because of the improvements in the roads and the fact that Las Vegas has grown to the southwest, a lot of the things that used to be an hour, an hour and 15, 20 minutes away, are now a lot closer.

RM: They're up at Blue Diamond.

CM: And past it. Many of the things that we had to go farther in to avail ourselves of, retail, eateries, all of that, are now a lot closer. We still can't overcome some things—we don't have a major highway, we don't have access to rail. We're not going to be able to be an Elko or a Fernley or a Sparks because we don't have anything like the I-80 corridor and we don't have the rail corridor. And we're not going to be a Mesquite because we don't have that I-15 corridor. We're not going to be a Laughlin because we don't have that river access. So there are a number of things that limit certain kinds of growth.

RM: If Nevada had a congressional delegation that knew how to bring home the bacon and they called you in and said, "Cameron, what do you want? I'll try and get it for you for economic development in Nye County," what would be your advice to them?

CM: We need to get a county-wide telecommunications setup that is better, faster, and more economical. We need to have that up and down the corridor.

RM: Like fiber optic?

CM: Whatever the technology is today, instead of us struggling with our county-wide radio communication systems.

RM: How would that help?

CM: That would allow companies to go to the more isolated areas of Nye County and do business. You talked about Joni Eastley. She relabeled the Tonopah airport—instead of in the middle of nowhere, it's in the middle of everywhere; that type of thing. And again, if the government is going to provide for the citizens of the country things that they can't provide themselves, then let's bring more of those to Nevada—the Nellis test range, the Test Site—let's build them back into the true technology engines that they were over the '40s, '50s, '60s and early '70s and let's do it with some sincerity. Let's develop solar power like we invested in developing nuclear power.

RM: But is solar too intensive a use of water?

CM: Well, the technology is changing—the photo cell stuff that they're doing now, for instance. I'm saying invest at these facilities and expand them to bring their R&D capacity back to what they were when we were dealing with nuclear sources. Because we all know that, outside of whatever they did in the nuclear weapons arena, there were all kinds of offshoots from that technology. I would say to our congressmen and senators,

"Bring that back and expand it."

And then I'd say, "Get our roadways." Okay, I-15 is great. Now, let's get that bypass. If you're going to talk about Nye County, let's get that bypass from the Southern California area up through Sandy Valley, coming up through Pahrump and back out. And let's turn Highway 95 into a U.S. highway. And at the places where you've got to cut across because you have to do some of that in California, then allow that California stuff to filter down the eastern side of California and over to Nevada. Do it in a manner that protects Death Valley, but get the technology back in the solar, the wind, and the geothermal.

RM: I have a couple of pipe dreams. The world has huge problems facing it over the next 70 years and one of them is water. Pahrump Valley would be a good place for an institute for the study of the efficient use of water in agriculture, in manufacturing, in recycling.

CM: That's exactly the kind of thing. And even outside of water, that kind of thinking went to the same thing that I was promoting. As I was saying before, Yucca Mountain is an example. The government could plop any one of probably a thousand of their research and development programs that they have all over the country and the world right in Pahrump Valley or in Nye County.

Why couldn't the Tonopah Air Base be resurrected into something that could be beneficial militarily for the government and for Nye County? And get back into developing the water sources up there so that not only would it support an air base but it would support the private and the public.

RM: Yes. Why can't our representatives bring home the bacon—or do you agree with

my proposition?

CM: I think they certainly could do more. As we've talked about before, I think Nye County has been punished for its view on Yucca Mountain, which opposed the state's view. I think the state, itself, has been punished by the rest of the country because of its opposition to Yucca Mountain. We might have gotten hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to support the public and services for that. So this may be a theoretical discussion.

RM: One more pipe dream. I've been in and out of Los Alamos, New Mexico, a bit. I think the world, America in particular, is ready for the next development from Los Alamos. I see a science city, a city of the future that's devoted to science technology, the future and betterment of humanity. And I see it in the Amargosa Valley.

CM: That's all good, and I think that you know that many of those who got here before us in Nye County had visions of what they thought could or should happen. I'm sure, as you've done your work in sessions with other significant people in Nye County, you've heard them, too. Some have probably said how they think some of their expectations have been met, and others may not. Some have probably talked about how it's failed. That's just all human nature. But I think continuing to communicate, continuing to foster good relationships, is important. If you don't do it, you'll just inhibit the possibility of getting things.

It's no different than going out and soliciting some private person. We're trying to solicit our officials to bring in more income and do things in Nye County. The same hurdles are in place when you start talking about private enterprise. In the work that I did in economic development, when I would try to market Nye County and Pahrump, you

had to build that relationship of not just blowing smoke in their face but having the sincerity, the openness, in going to them. You have to have enough regulation to truly protect health, safety, and welfare but not have regulations that stifle and choke people's ability to come and invest and grow—because it is an investment.

And you've got to get away from this attitude that they're a big business, they've got lots of money. It's somebody's money. If they're going to invest it, you've got to have a true and honest openness with them so that they feel comfortable and good about coming to your community and investing in it.

RM: How do you convince them?

CM: First, you've got to do your homework more than just on the surface. You've got to really know what the needs of that prospective investor/client is. You just can't say, "Nye County needs a plant that makes widgets." If you go out with that intent, you're not going to get anywhere because everybody wants something that makes something. You've got to find out who's looking at building and investing somewhere. You've got find out about them, find out what drives them, find out what their goals are. And again, you've got to be honest about it. Because the minute you're not honest about it, you're just going to spend a lot of time, energy, and effort and you're going to derail everybody and sour future people.

So you learn about Company A: what they are doing, why they do it, what they want to do, how they've gotten where they've gotten, and that type of thing. What are their expectations, why do they have those expectations? Someone says, "You've got to have an educated workforce." Okay, why and at what level of education? You've got to find that out.

Then you come back and say, "Honestly, do we have this ability? If we have it, how do we package it and market it to them? If we don't have it, how can we get it in a way that they'll be assured that we can have it and that they will come?" And that's extremely hard. Whatever you're doing, you're in competition with everybody else. So if that were a silver bullet, everybody could be everywhere. That's how I look at it.

RM: Here's an off-the-wall question that's dear to my heart. You mentioned that things could happen by chance. I'm very interested in the role of chance; let's talk about chance in terms of the development of Nye County history. What role has chance played in your being in Pahrump and in Pahrump's development since you've been here?

CM: I was not ever really looking to buy a trash company and move anywhere. By chance, a friend and a colleague I was a reserve policeman with saw an ad in a paper for a garbage company in Pahrump, Nevada. How much more chance can there be? And then, how much more chance can there be than that you make an offer that gets turned down and you go on with your life as it was prior to chance No. 1. And then, boom, it's chance that the business in that same place is available a year later.

In politics, there's an election. I win. But now we have to decide if it's a two-year or a four-year term. Well, okay, the chance was that I had a four-year term. If I'd gotten a two-year term, would we be in the same place today looking across the table at each other? I'd say to you, "No" because you go back and something different happened by chance and then it's gone.

And something new is going to come in, and that's everywhere. People talk about death: "Well, it was just his time." A guy gets struck by lightening. How much more of a chance thing is that? It goes on and it goes back down to something I talked about

earlier—sometimes it's lucky to be good but it's also good to be lucky.

RM: What things have you seen in the development of Pahrump that have made you think, "Hey, it could have easily gone the other way but," some chance thing happened?

CM: Let's talk about the improvements to the state highway. A fellow—I wish I could remember his name—who was a Catholic priest or bishop was part of the state highway department commission that decided priorities for the projects. When Tim Hafen and a few of us went up to the highway department to plead our case to get a four-lane divided highway, he came down for a tour, and he rode with me. I was a volunteer fire chief and he rode with me in the command vehicle one day. I was showing him around and we had an emergency call out on the end of the highway. He got to ride with me Code 3 while I wove my way through the congestion of traffic to go to the emergency. He came to the meeting up in Carson City with the governor and the other person who was on the board, and he told the story about how that incident made him realize that what we were asking for not only made sense, it was needed. That event swayed him to support us in that commission and it ultimately funded the four-lane highway as we see it now.

RM: That's a great example. Now, when you came here Pahrump was what, 5,000 people and now it's crowded for you.

CM: That's correct.

RM: So there's been this incredible growth that you have been a part of and witnessed. Talk about the role that Las Vegas played in this whole development.

CM: I think it played a big role on a number of fronts. We are still today a bedroom community to some degree. All you have to do is get up in the morning and watch the red taillights heading into Vegas. In the evenings, particularly in the winter, watch the

headlights coming back in. Vegas provided and provides a place for a lot of people to work, make their living, and come back and live in Pahrump. The Nevada Test Site was influential, too.

It's the good, the bad, and the ugly because they come back, and that's fine. But while they're there when they spend their tax money and buy their gas and other things there, that doesn't help Pahrump much. For a long time, Vegas provided the place where those who chose to come to Pahrump would get the stuff to be able to live the lifestyle that they wanted.

RM: Do you think Preferred Equities and some of the other developments in Pahrump would have happened if Vegas hadn't have been next door?

CM: I think that's very possible, but I don't want to put Preferred Equities land development in the same basket with any of the other developers.

RM: Because of negatives?

CM: Absolutely. Their land sales issues were just that—negative. In my editorial opinion, there was no community there, particularly after the primary individual, Jack Soules, died.

RM: But they never would have bought the Pahrump Ranch if Vegas hadn't have been there, would they?

CM: That's right. They used Vegas, the glitz and the glamour, because that's where people were coming. They used that because it was their market; they just exploited it, and I'm going to use that term. They exploited what Vegas did and brought for their betterment. And out of that, in spite of itself, Pahrump prospered and Pahrump is here today.

Outside of that, there may be a handful of other developers that came, bought their little section, developed it, sold it off, and were gone. History will bear their names. But there are the ones who have been here for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years, and they and/or their offspring are still here and still participating in the community. Maybe they're not in the same and function that they might have been ten, 15, 20 years ago, but they are still here.

RM: Pahrump made the transition from cotton to basically land development and community growth, whereas Amargosa Valley, which is farther from Vegas, didn't. I don't know whether the two valleys are comparable in terms of water and all of that, but it's interesting that the growth and potential hasn't happened in Amargosa yet.

CM: You'll hear that Amargosa is going to grow and it's because of Pahrump. It's kind of a leapfrog thing. As Pahrump has grown and the infrastructure has come to Pahrump, whether it's ten, 15, 20, 25 years, that leapfrogging thing is probably going to continue. Many people in Beatty and Amargosa who used to go to Vegas now come to Pahrump to the Wal-Marts, to the Albertsons, to the Smiths, and so forth in lieu of going to Vegas.

RM: Would you agree with the statement that Vegas was the engine that pulled Pahrump, and Pahrump will be the engine that pulls Amargosa?

CM: Yes. I think, to a lot of people's chagrin, it's probably going to be like that. I was in the local plumbing store today and both the Parks Service maintenance vehicle from Death Valley and the vehicle from the Furnace Creek Inn happened to be there picking up supplies. I think you can't avoid it. As the Home Depots and all those other things have come in you're going to see more of that. You don't know what the time frame will be but I think it's going to occur.

RM: Could you argue that if you go east of Vegas, Mesquite and those places have somewhat a comparable relationship in that Vegas is an engine that would pull them?

CM: To some degree but not as much because, again, the gaming—or in the Laughlin case, the gaming and the leisure and the Colorado River—is an internal generator. I don't think it's nearly as pronounced as the Pahrump-Vegas relationship was by any stretch of the imagination.

RM: And Pahrump had the great advantage of lots of good land.

CM: Lots of cheap land.

RM: That's right. What about the next valley south, Sandy Valley?

CM: I think it's a little different. Highway 160 was a farm-to-market road. You don't have a road like that directly from Vegas into Sandy Valley. You've either got to go south to come across and or you've got to hit that that old dirt road off of 160. So it's a little different. I don't know the geographics, actually, of Sandy Valley.

RM: No, I don't either. I don't think they're as big as Pahrump Valley. Maybe if they build that corridor you're talking about off I-15 then it will pop.

CM: Well, certainly. It's no different than the areas that died because the interstate highway system bypassed them. There were areas on old Route 66 that had thrived and then died because of the interstate, and other areas flourished. So you don't know. You see the same thing in northern Nevada with the 395 bypass with that new highway they're doing. What's going to happen to the Washoe Valley when you come down the Carson City bypass? You have to see what the real impact is of that kind of development. Again, you never know. You can plan and look in your crystal ball all you want, but sometimes . . . .

CHAPTER NINE

RM: What was your thinking when you stepped aside from the county commission seat? Were you term-limited out?

CM: No. I could have run for a fourth term.

RM: What was your thinking in not running?

CM: It was twofold. I had gone back into the workforce and became full-time employed with the school district in the last year of my third term.

RM: And what year was that?

CM: I got hired in October 2001 and sold my other business and property in 2002. So the last year of my term, I was working full-time for the school district and still fulfilling my duties as commissioner. I felt that for the first 11 years I was self-employed so I had leeway. I could make decisions and do things, as far as work, that could allow me to do the job as commissioner the way I thought it needed to be done. When I went to work for the school district, of course, my work ethic was such that now I have a boss—I have a commitment and a responsibility to the school district, and that had to be primary. I didn't have any problem with the board of trustees. The superintendent said that my participation on the commission wasn't affecting my job performance, etc., so I could have done it, but I felt that I wasn't being able to do the same job as a commissioner the twelfth year that I was able to do the first eleven.

After discussions with my wife, I had decided not to run. Then I was inundated with people wanting me run and I gave in and said okay, I would go ahead and run, but I didn't have my heart in it. I really didn't put on much of a campaign, and Candice

Trummell beat me. It was a relief because I didn't want to continue doing a job at a level that I wasn't totally happy with. And I really enjoyed the work I was doing in the school district. So I was able to back out. After only a few months they asked me to participate on the regional transportation commission so I got back into that kind of thing. I've been doing that for almost another ten years. And I continued my work in the LEPC, the local emergency planning commission.

RM: How did you come to work for the school district, and what were you doing for them?

CM: There was an ad in the newspaper for a transportation director. They were looking for somebody who had experience in transportation, commercial drivers, commercial vehicles, maintenance of vehicles, and so on. My logistical knowledge of the community and the county was certainly a plus, the fact that I had been dealing with both commercial vehicle drivers and inspections and maintenance and operations and repairs through the garbage business. I had my Express Lube shop, so I had a lot of experience in vehicle maintenance.

Critics would say, "Well okay, you can haul trash but now you're hauling kids."

And I said, "I created routing for garbage trucks, I created routing for school buses." I thought it was a good fit. I put an application in and competed for the job. After the interview process with the committee and the chief financial officer and the superintendent, Dr. Leroy Key, and so forth, I was offered the job and accepted it. I started in October 2001, and my duty was to manage the school bus system and take care of all the vehicles.

RM: What made you make that transition?

CM: As I told you, after I sold the business we had kind of semi-retired; I just got to the point where I said, "It's time to go back to work." [Laughs]

RM: And you didn't have an impulse to start another business and try and build that up?

CM: No, I really didn't. It just kind of cycled. I started in private business and then went into my own businesses and then just cycled back into, in this case, public work.

RM: So you were in charge of all of the school buses for all of Nye County?

CM: Yes. And like I say, the big advantage I had was that I knew Nye County. I knew where Currant and Duckwater were. I knew what Round Mountain looked like. I'd been there. I've learned a little more about them as I've worked on specifics about the school district, but it seemed like a fit, and after ten years I believe it was a good fit.

RM: You're still doing it? How many buses did you start with, and how many do you have now?

CM: We're up about 15 to 20 percent, or maybe more. There were 60 buses or so and we've got about 100 now. Part of that was the fact that we were able to acquire them very inexpensively. We've talked about contacts and the personal face-to-face that I fostered and continued with my counterparts in Clark County. As they were buying new buses that most of us would drool to have, we were able to get them to sell us school buses. One year we bought 12 buses for $12.

RM: Their older ones?

CM: Right. We've been doing that for seven or eight years and many of those buses that we bought for $1 are still on the road today. Then the next year we might have paid $2.50. We've gotten up to where we have to pay $4,000 a bus when we're able to buy

them.

And during that time, because of other experiences and other things I've done and my management style and so on, my duties have expanded from operating and managing the bus system. I've now participated in negotiations for the labor union contracts. I participate and have written and chaired committees for emergency services and emergency response plans and a drug-testing program that was implemented by the district for regular new employees.

Today, I not only am the director of transportation, but I am also the director of maintenance and operations. I take care of not just the vehicles, but all the buildings and grounds for the school districts in the county. When I started ten years ago, I was a 208-day employee; now I work all year. I believe that they've used my talents—they've allowed me to develop my talents and use them to their benefit. And of course, I'm proud of that because it shows me that I'm a valued employee. I do it with the best interests of the school district and I think a lot of that is because I brought my private enterprise business mentality and experience and processes and have been able to mold them into the educational area for its betterment.

In 2004, I was nominated for the Cashman Good Government Award because of the work I had done in transportation for streamlining the system and reducing its operating budget and redesigning it to be more efficient. I was a runner-up. It was nice to be recognized by the Nevada Taxpayer's Association for that work in reducing the cost of transportation, and therefore allowing more money to be available for the educational portion of the school district. In Nevada every dollar they spend on support services is money they can't spend on education. I took that to heart and used the same principles of

how I ran my successful businesses and molded them into the public sector and I believe, for the most part, I have been very successful at it.

I think the biggest barometer is the fact that they've broadened the scope of my work, and now I'm eight months into my added duties of managing and operating buildings and grounds, where I hope to be able to do the same thing.

RM: What are the challenges in doing the bus part of your job?

CM: There are all the typical challenges of bringing it together, trying to buy the products we need at the most economical prices. But here, it's also trying to balance the economics of transportation and the educational needs of transportation because they don't always align. Transportation in Nye County could be a lot more expensive because we could do a lot more things to try to get a lot more kids to ride the bus to make it more convenient, to be more flexible. But the economics just don't allow for that. Therefore, the biggest challenge has been how to present that and integrate it with the public and the parents. The parents call and they have legitimate issues.

RM: You mean you're picking little Johnny up too early or too late?

CM: Any of the above. They've got to walk too far. It's too dark. It's too cold. I have to work. I need Johnny to go here today, or I need Johnny to go there tomorrow. And, unfortunately, if those things dictate the system, then the system becomes very, very expensive and accountability becomes very difficult. The complaint when I got there was, "We have 26 buses running around with 20 kids on them apiece. They're 84-passenger school buses. Why do we have 20 kids on them? That doesn't seem to be very smart spending of taxpayer money." But you have to balance that because you can't be so rigid; you have to be reasonable.

RM: If you had to fill a bus with 84 kids, you might have to start at 5:30, something like that?

CM: There are some areas where that would be true. The demographics of Pahrump Valley are so different from other places. In some areas like Currant Creek, Duckwater, we provide a small bus for 13 or 14 students.

RM: And where do you take them?

CM: To our Duckwater school. For many years, we provided a bus for the high school students in that same area where we'd bus six, seven kids to Eureka High School. Now, because of economics, we've had to cancel that bus route. We have to do something different.

RM: What have you done with that bus route?

CM: We canceled it. Because of technology, some choose the virtual schools or Pathways or something like that. Some of the students choose to go to Eureka High School and the district pays them a travel expense and they have to get to school themselves. On average, a school bus in Nye County costs about $3.50 to $4.00 a mile for the entire system and we pay approximately 50 cents a mile to a parent to take their student to school. On the business end, that's where that conflict comes in. Looking at it from a business point of view, it's not economical to do it. The board of trustees, in their policies and procedures, has a mechanism to make that determination. We've cut routes; we've adjusted bell schedules so that we can get our school buses there. That's truly a tough one because the yellow bus is the safest mode of transpiration for school-age children to and from school by far.

RM: Safer than mom driving them?

CM: By far. There are less students, by far, hurt in school buses on a per capita basis than those who drive in their own cars. And let's not even talk about high school students driving to and from school with their friends. So you're balancing that—you're proving the safest form of transportation but you're having to do it within a set of parameters. That's sometimes difficult because, as much as I'd like to do what the parents want, I can't. I can't do it for all of them. I still have school buses that my boys rode in. They graduated in 1997 and '99 and the majority of my fleet are from the 1990s.

RM: I'll bet my daughter rode in some of your buses. She was in Tonopah in the middle '80s and they would ride to their games.

CM: We don't have any more 1980s buses. I just had to decommission our last 1989 school bus. Our buses are 1990 through 2010s. I remember when my boys were riding the bus; the system was able to be more flexible—fewer riders, fewer buses, a different environment than there is now. I've told the board of trustees individually, "I know what they go through" because I've been on their side of the dais. I often remind some of them who've known me for a long time, "If you ask me a question, I'm going to answer you as your employee. And I prefer that you don't have me editorialize my political viewpoint because you hired me to operate your system as an employee, not to create policy but to enforce and mange your policies."

I think that's allowed me to do a better job because I know that difference—I've been on the side of having to make a decision on a policy that affects a multitude of taxpayers. It truly is a different horse that you ride in and out on.

RM: Of course. Now, what are the challenges in hiring a driver? I always think that would be a tough job.

CM: In the ten years that I've been with the district, it's changed dramatically. It's so much harder now today because the expectations for a school bus driver are so much different. In the past, if you had a commercial license, you could drive a school bus. For example, there were athletic trips where your science teacher was also the basketball coach. After school, they'd pile into a school bus and your science teacher, now your coach, would drive you to the game and drive you back. But bad things happened doing stuff like that.

RM: You mean like accidents?

CM: Yes. Some were because the coach was too tired. He really hadn't been trained in driving a school bus. The licensing requirements for a school bus driver have changed and the hours of driving have changed. How you can make up those hours have changed. All of that has created a licensing dilemma that has made it very hard.

The second thing is that society has changed. When I rode the school bus, if I didn't behave, I was in deep doo-doo. Back then, my bus driver could throw me off the bus, and would; it was his right. Nowadays that's different. Society has turned—we hear so much of, "My child doesn't have to respect you; you have to earn his respect." Well, wait a minute. This bus driver's trying to drive your student safely along with 60 or 70 other kids. Get your student to get on the bus and sit and behave for 23 minutes. That makes it hard—many of the school bus drivers don't want to do it anymore because they see that that social change has not been good for them. So it's hard to recruit drivers. They can drive and do all the training and testing and reading that they have to do, but then they have to learn all the student management. And you've got to be so careful of what you say and what you do. If a bus driver hugs a student, it could be misconstrued.

All of that has been difficult.

RM: To me, the responsibility would just be overwhelming.

CM: People talk about overcrowded classrooms and how you don't want 40 or 50 kids in a classroom. Well, think about this: If you have 50 kids in a 900-square-foot classroom, you don't have to worry about running your classroom into the classroom next to you. But now, you have 40, 50, 60, 70 kids in an 8-by-40 room, 320 square feet. It's very difficult.

RM: Do you have trouble recruiting drivers?

CM: In the rural and the northern areas, we're having a very difficult time recruiting. It takes weeks and hours of training in both classroom and behind the wheel. We have 40 hours of training for the Department of Education to train them in student management, first aid, how to inspect the bus, all of the things that have to be done. In Pahrump, we always have a larger pool of people wanting to train, but there's turnover because we train them, we get them there, and we pay less than $12 an hour with no benefits. Lots of times, they don't stay long.

RM: I would find also the weather challenging—for instance, the snowy roads up in Smoky Valley.

CM: There is some of that, but drivers drive through that all over the country. It's mostly the socioeconomic issues, the behavioral issues. The drivers are from a wide range—male, female, some young. A lot of retirees. I don't know how old my oldest one is, but I know that it's in the 70s. Most of them do it because they really like the kids, they really like the interaction.

It is kind of cool, even at my level. I go out—I respond to bus issues, I respond to

schools. Unfortunately, most of the time it's because kids are not doing what they're supposed to be doing and one of us, an administrator, has to go and get something resolved so that we can continue getting the kids to and from school safely. But it's interesting. Vendors and other people come in and it boggles their mind when they ask me about the district and we say, "My office is in Pahrump, Nevada, but I have school buses that are 330 ground miles away from the office."

RM: That would be Duckwater?

CM: Yes, Currant and Duckwater. I have to go through two counties to get to those places. We take high school students from our ranching area in that part of Railroad Valley, Currant Valley, to Eureka. They could be on the bus one way an hour or a little over. I compare that to a bus in Pahrump where it has four stops within a two-mile stretch, and there's 60, 70 kids on the bus. So there's a huge range. It's hard for them to fathom the geographics of Nye County. We've talked about that before, but in the school district is the exact same thing. We have a one-room school house, K-8, where a teacher teaches the entire curriculum from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade.

RM: Where?

CM: In Duckwater. We have the Gabbs School, which is K-12, where we bring a diverse tribal background from the Yomba Tribe into Gabbs to a 62-student school. Then you go to Round Mountain, where we have a K-12 complex in a mining community where we go 35, 40 miles in different directions and pick kids up from the ranches and bring them in. So it's the diversity and the interaction between those types of lifestyles. And even in Pahrump it's the vastness. To be able to keep it running and do it economically, it's cool.

RM: It's amazing, actually. I'll bet there's nobody in the United States who has the geographical distribution and the distances and diversity that you have to deal with.

CM: I'd have to say you're correct because in Nevada, the school districts are the same size as the counties. Nye County is the second or third largest geographical county in the United States, and that's one district. In other places, there may be numerous districts in a county of our size. There are only 17 school districts in our state.

RM: And of course, the area from Yomba and Reese River down to Gabbs is a different world, and Duckwater is a different world, too. That's amazing.

CM: Absolutely. That's always been challenging, and we have to have the ability to go out and take care of those buses on site. I have a garage and two employees in Tonopah but when they have to go to Gabbs, it's 130 miles.

RM: If they need a transmission in up in Reese River, do you send guys up there or do you tow it to Tonopah, or what do you do?

CM: All of the above. It just depends on what it is.

RM: What do you do when a bus full of kids breaks down?

CM: In Pahrump, we put together rescue buses to help, but out in the areas up north, we're getting on a cell phone calling parents saying, "We need you to come out and get Johnny because the bus broke down." And we have more days up north where the bus can't run because of bad weather. It doesn't take a lot of snow to create bad conditions. There's a big section of the road that we use between Eureka High School and Duckwater that's dirt. There's a big portion of the Forest Service road between Yomba and Gabbs that we don't put the school bus on in bad weather. Those kids have to get together and come in four-wheel drives or whatever.

That's not even the biggest issue. In Pahrump I've had to call the superintendent because if there's a little bit of snow on the ground, we're not built to drive on snow. It's not that I don't feel comfortable with the buses and drivers, my biggest concern on those types of days is the 2,000 kids that are walking from their homes to their bus stops and all the other people that are on the road that don't experience much snow driving—that's a huge safety concern. So it's not just the school bus, you've got to consider the rest. It doesn't happen very often, but periodically I will call the superintendent at 4:00, 5:00 in the morning and say, "Sir, we've got to discus this because I'm not comfortable with the fact that we're going to have school buses on the road and we're going to have kids at the bus stops."

RM: You've got all these challenges of running this huge system of buses for kids and you've added keeping the schools, the physical plants, functioning. Talk about that.

CM: It's another challenge. Again, I'm grateful that they've got the confidence in my abilities. I do have some mechanical background. Before I came to Pahrump, as I told you, I worked in the mechanical plumbing and piping industry, HVAC work, and I was around construction sites and jobs and buildings. These new responsibilities weren't a perfect fit, but under the economics of it, it was decided that that was the way they were going to go. I had and have a good staff that knows what they're doing. So again, I was just applying my management style, my management and supervision history and experiences and performance, and shifting into the maintenance and operations level. As I told the superintendent when he asked me about it, there are a lot of things I don't know about and it's going to be a tough learning curve, but I'll do the best I can. But I agreed that I could manage the day-to-day stuff.

We brought the work into the same building we were using for transportation because they had wanted to close the building where the facilities maintenance staff were at and not fill the director of maintenance position. They laid off the secretary in maintenance so the staff in the transportation office took over that work too and added it to what they were doing. They laid off one of the work staff. And some of the maintenance and upkeep they were doing on what I call the green equipment——the lawnmowers, the caddies, the floor buffers, and so on—came into my shop. (I call the yellow school buses and all that the white fleet.) They consolidated it and what's happened is that it has come into an operational system that has shown it's worked. We're just modifying and tweaking it to include the function of maintenance and operations. I'm still learning all the things about custodial work and cleaning requirements.

RM: Are there a lot of laws regarding upkeep of that equipment?

CM: Not so much laws, but there are requirements and industry standards and things that you need to do. The very first thing in transportation is safety. The very first thing in buildings is safety and health. The relationship with the health department and health inspections, the relationships with all the fire and life safety inspections that have got to go on and the upkeep of those systems and are somewhat technically designed, but you've still got to do it.

How often you wax a floor, how you wax a floor, what products you use, how you disinfect the bathrooms every night, when and how often do you do high and low dusting—there are all kinds of things like that that I'm learning now. But the site staff know how to do it. What they needed is someone to continually support them so that

when they need something or have a question, they get an answer. If they need product, if they need supplies, if something's broken and they can't do it, then the M&O staff goes in and backs them up.

And if the M&O staff can't do it, I have to manage various support contracts, whether that be the septic pumping or HVAC or electrical contractors or plumbers or whatever. I manage that to achieve the goal of providing a safe and healthy environment. So a lot of the ways I do business and manage people and interact with employees and subcontractors just is an expansion. I think it's working pretty good. I'm hoping that as things get better, some of the help that was laid off and let go can come back.

RM: Are you doing a lot of deferred maintenance and everything?

CM: I'm having to prioritize life safety, health safety issues first, and then all the other things are down the road.

RM: How many bus drivers and other employees do you have in your system?

CM: I believe the number's just less than 50 regular bus drivers. Then I have about a dozen or so bus aides, mostly for the special education buses. Then I have a significant number of substitutes, people who come in on call. There's anywhere between 20 and 30 at particular times. That list expands and contracts all the time. I have an office with three routing dispatch specialists, but they also double—they're secretaries, clerical, and routing dispatch specialists. I have five bus mechanics in Pahrump and two in Tonopah. I only have five maintenance and operations staff, three in Pahrump, two in Tonopah.

Remember, every school site has its day custodial, maintenance, and night custodial people. They're not under my direct supervision. In the school sites, the principal supervises them. I support them but I don't supervise their daily activities. I

have two fellows that are electrical, HVAC people. I have a carpenter and two skilled maintenance people. They do the things that the site staff either can't, don't have the time to, or don't have the expertise to do.

RM: Do a lot of things going wrong with the school buildings?

CM: All the time. Air conditioners or a swamp cooler don't work, a blower doesn't work, lights don't go on, toilets back up, water leaks—all the time. In Pahrump we're very blessed that in ten years we've opened up a brand new 1,200-student middle school and we're opening up our third new elementary school. We're constructing a large high school voc-tech school out behind Pahrump Valley High School. We're just in the process of decommissioning the oldest school in Pahrump, Manse School, at almost 50 years old.

But in some of the other communities, we still have some of old schools. Gabbs is real old and Tonopah Middle/Elementary School is extremely old. The older the schools get, the higher the maintenance demand to just keep them repaired. And that's very challenging. Again, the maintenance fellow works in Tonopah and he's got to drive almost 100 miles to go to Beatty. He's got to drive 50 miles to go to Round Mountain, 130 miles to go to Gabbs. There's a lot of windshield time for the staff that handle the northern area and that's inefficient so it drives costs up. And it is so hard to respond in timely manners in certain things.

RM: What's your take on the budget and taking money away from the schools?

CM: I'm a pretty conservative guy, and Republican. In the past, I've been critical of school spending. But now as an insider with a little different perspective, I'll at least say in Nye County, I think the county has gone a long way to being a lean machine, to doing

more with less and doing more right than they've ever done.

I think it's going to be tragic down the road if this trend of decline continues. We will not just have a bump in a group of children as they grow, we're going to have a void. And that could be, down the road, very devastating for the United States in a whole. I don't want to knock educators, but many educators are not good managers. On the good side, I think there's validity in having dual control of schools, having a fiscal manager mix with an educational leader. It could be the best mix because I think, to its discredit, education has in the past maybe contemplated that they're the sacred cow.

RM: And you don't think they are?

CM: No. I think they have as much of a responsibility as anyone else to do their work as economically as possible and not just believe that more money equals better education. I don't want to paint the whole system with a broad brush here. There are many, many educators who are great educators, not because they're making tons of money but because they're great educators. Their work ethic, their drive makes them great educators. We need to support those educators with sufficient resources for them to maximize what they can do. But I will tell you that I have seen some poor educators where it wouldn't matter if you gave them $1 million a student; they wouldn't educate your student.

If anything good has come out of this economic issue, it's a better realization by more of the education administrators and the legislators that there is a difference. Not every teacher is good, just like not every bus driver is good, just like not every manager's good, just like not every principal's good, not every carpenter's good, not every bricklayer's good. I think this has allowed us to highlight that. I hope that we can get

back and can get more money returned to the school districts, but that the school districts will not just fritter it away, but they'll use it effectively and efficiently to bring back some of the things that I think are going to hurt society if they're not brought back.

RM: I read in I think the *Las Vegas Sun* within the last week or so that MSNBC did an analysis of the states and their educational system and Nevada came out 50th. What's your take on that?

CM: I've always believed that it's more than just the money. There are a lot of things in Nevada that created this positioning.

RM: I don't think it was just the money. It was graduation rates and things like that.

CM: Again, all that comes down to saying education is not just education. And that's the problem, in my mind. Money is important but socioeconomics are important, expectations are important. It's the same way with the logistics. You have the huge congestion and multi-racial issues of a dense urban area, and then you have huge spread-out rural areas of not just northern Nye County but Esmeralda, Mineral, Eureka, Storey, Lyon, Lander counties. I would respectfully agree to disagree with those who say it's all money-based. We're spending $6,000 plus or minus a student. If you don't correct some of the other problems, you can spend $12,000 a student and be No. 1 on per-capita spending and still have a piss-poor education.

RM: Are you concerned about education in the country in general?

CM: I am because I think society has turned to education to do too many things that society and the individual parents are not doing. I didn't buy my lunches. I had my lunches in a brown bag or lunch pail and my milk was in a thermos. The counselor counseled you on your educational future and your progress, not on your interpersonal

skills with Jill or John or all those other things. We didn't spend time, energy, and effort on programs where we have a room full of food and backpacks and our staff and our teachers, instead of educating, are packing backpacks so that Johnny and Jill can have food for the weekend. We have clothes lockers so that kids who come to school with the same clothes they had on all week can have a set of clothes. The school system is becoming the social equalizer. And we're drifting away from spending 6-1/2 hours a day teaching kids social skills and things that they should be being taught at home.

RM: But when they're not, what do you do?

CM: Start making the parents accountable.

RM: How do you do that?

CM: This is a tough one. Take the same mindset that you have towards teachers and administrators in schools and make the parent accountable. I don't know how to do that, other than we have all this money we're giving schools for performance. Maybe we've got to give money to parents for performance. Say your kid's got to be clean and they've got to be there. If you're not doing it, then maybe we need to redirect school and maybe we become boarding schools. Teachers are having to do many non-instructional things. If that's the case, then provide funding so that teachers can teach from when the bell rings till the bell rings and provide a social services portion that's integrated but separate so that teachers can teach.

I remember having participation from my sister-in-law who raised me and also those times that I didn't have that participation in my elementary years, and I can see the difference in how my education went. If the parents aren't concerned about homework, if the parents aren't concerned about the education when you get home, how can you make

that up during that six-hour period that you have those kids? If society doesn't want to change that, then we've got to redefine the traditional school idea.

I understand No Child Left Behind and I agree with the concept, but I also believe that all children don't end up in the same place. You don't leave them behind, but you help them take their path to success and educate them at a level and in a manner that functions for them. I don't believe that all kids are made to go to college.

RM: I don't, either. But I also believe we're putting college out of reach for too many people, and we're going to pay a horrible price for it, nationally.

CM: I would debate you and say that we're making college available to too many people because we've dumbed down entrance exams and requirements to get in. We haven't necessarily made college any better.

RM: I don't disagree, but what we're doing is putting it out of reach economically for large numbers of kids. I know I wouldn't be able to go to college in this environment.

CM: And I didn't go to college. In Nevada I totally disagreed when we changed the name "community college" to just "the college system." What an arrogant viewpoint on the part of individuals who said, "The kids will learn better if we call it the College of Southern Nevada instead of the Community College." Bull. We've taken away that community ownership of something.

We've created a system where kids can't get an education in three and a half and four years, now it's four years, five years plus. It's greed on the part of the system because of the tuition. Keep them in school longer so we have more money in the system. I would point my finger at you, Bob McCracken, and say, "I think you're wrong, respectfully." [Laughs]

RM: Certainly this interview is to get your opinions out there, not mine. But I think America is going to pay a grievous price for what they're doing now.

CM: But if society doesn't shift the pendulum back into what I consider more of a reality base, we're going to pay. Every time we dumb it down at one level, we're going to continue to dumb it down. I think that's a mistake.

RM: I agree.

CM: In Nye County, we can't overcome those vast logistical issues. If we had all these kids in Pahrump, we'd have fewer kids in a classroom, we'd have better control over the system, and we'd probably have a better outcome.

I hope that my contributions to the Nye County School System help influence my subordinates that we want to do our job correctly, we want to do it safely, and we want to do it for the least amount of money with the most efficiency so that we can contribute to the ability to provide financial resources for the classroom. And I hope I can continue to foster with my staff that they're the first person the students see in their educational day and that the whole bus ride experience should be positive and should be educational formatted.

RM: That's a noble goal.

CM: With the maintenance and operations side, it's the same thing—try to be as efficient as possible while remaining effective and giving the kids an environment that makes that learning experience better.

RM: That's great. One other little question. What's your take on the kids breaking into the Tonopah school last June and creating a skunk smell or whatever it was? That fell in your department, didn't it?

CM: I'm dealing with it now. We just signed a contract with Belfour Restoration. That little prank is going to cost taxpayers, through insurance and rates, over a quarter of a million dollars.

RM: Maybe they ought to make their families pay.

CM: Well, you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip. Fortunately, the insurance is covering it, but it was disruptive and it's interruptive, it's destructive. I was just there a few days ago and even after almost two months, the stench is horrid.

RM: Was it an artificial oil?

CM: As I understand it, that's what it was. Again, it comes down to all the things that society is somewhat responsible for because as we've gone along and become more permissive it's, oh it's just this or oh, it's just that.

RM: It's a prank that's over the top. Kids are prone to pranks.

CM: The second prank that happened there was no big deal—they borrowed somebody's car and got in the school, took the center post down, and set it in the quad. But they put plastic under the bottom so it didn't ruin the tile. When everybody got to school in the morning, there was a car in the middle of their quad. We had pranks when I was in high school.

RM: Bill Metscher told me that they went up and took down the Buckeye Bar sign and hoisted it up over the front of the high school when he was a student in Tonopah. That's been a long time ago, but that's a prank that was pretty harmless.

CM: But you get the ones like in Pahrump High School when they took Superglue and glued all the locks shut the one year. It's all part of this whole voyage that I've taken; I never expected to be where I'm at today.

RM: That's what's neat about life and about this conversation. You never know where the twists and turns are coming. And some people play their cards really wisely and other people don't.

CM: I go back to my time on the commission and that relationship with trying to provide funding for the schools like buying school buses for them, and for kids to go to Washington on the various trips that they take for government and things like that. One of the last things I did as a commissioner was grant money for the school district to buy seven or eight activity buses. I got the school district job in October 2001 and those buses were delivered in January of 2002.

RM: I have good feelings about the Nye County school buses because my daughter, Bambi, was a cheerleader in Tonopah. They took the bus clear down to a town south of Laughlin for a game and came back.

CM: When my boys were in high school Susan and I went to every game. We followed the bus there and back.

RM: I did exactly the same thing.

CM: Two or three times I fixed the bus on the road. There'd be a problem and I was there and we'd fix it [laughs] so the kids could get back.

RM: They took some long trips in those buses.

CM: Yes, 400-plus miles.

RM: My daughter's senior trip was to L.A. and I was one of their chaperones.

CM: We don't take senior trips in school buses anymore because of the changes in society. We can't use a school district vehicle for a non-school district function and senior trips are not considered school activities. They're after school's out and they've

graduated so they can't use a school bus.

RM: I think my daughter got a wonderful education—she went to junior high and high school in Tonopah.

CM: I believe my kids did, too. They graduated Pahrump High School.

RM: Then she went to UNLV and I think she got a perfectly good education at UNLV.

CM: My boys want to UNR and I say the same thing.

RM: Well, thanks a lot for all the time you've spent with me. This has been really interesting.

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