

CAMERON M. BATJER

Interviewee: Cameron M. Batjer

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Description

Justice Cameron McVicar Batjer of the Nevada Supreme Court was the native Nevadan son of a pioneer family. Born August 24, 1919 on his grandparents' ranch in Smith Valley, Nevada, Batjer grew up in a ranching family. His mother, Mary Belle Batjer, a teacher, was a large influence in his life.

A gifted storyteller, Justice Batjer talks in his oral history about rural life in the 1920s, the Great Depression, and World War II. He attended the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), graduated, and began a teaching career in rural Nevada schools. He met his wife, Lura Gamble, at UNR; they were married shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Justice Batjer enlisted in the U.S. Navy Seabees, worked in a construction battalion, was commissioned an ensign, and served on Gen. Douglas MacArthur's staff in the South Pacific.

After WWII, he returned to Nevada to teach, but was drawn to law school at the University of Utah. After working for the Utah Senate, he returned home to Nevada to begin practicing law. In Nevada, his family was growing, and friends and colleagues were fast becoming influential people in professional and public life. After serving as district attorney for Ormsby County (Carson City), in 1967, then-Governor Paul Laxalt appointed Justice Batjer to the Nevada Supreme Court. He arrived on the court at a time of dynamic growth in Nevada. He served until retirement in 1981, and was soon appointed by President Ronald Reagan as chairman of the U.S. Parole Commission in Washington, D.C., where he served for nine years.

Justice Batjer's stories are entertaining, engaging, and instructive. At heart, he was a teacher. The oral history interviews with Justice Batjer were part of the Nevada Legal Oral History Project, a joint effort of the Nevada Judicial Historical Society, the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society, and the University of Nevada Oral History Program.

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An Oral History Conducted by Brad Lucas
Edited by Patricia A. Cooper-Smith

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Introduction	xi
1. Early Years in Smith Valley	1
2. College and Teaching	11
3. Military Service	15
4. Teaching, Law School, and Early Law Practice	19
5. Public Office and Nevada Supreme Court	25
6. U.S. Parole Commission	37

PREFACE

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

INTRODUCTION

The adage “once a teacher, always a teacher” best describes Justice Batjer’s life. The native Nevadan son of a pioneer family, and son of a teacher, Justice Batjer instructed people in how to live their lives through example and by embodying a fair-minded application of the rule of law.

Born August 24, 1919, on his grandparents’ “McVicar Ranch,” in Smith Valley, Nevada, Cameron McVicar Batjer grew up in a tight-knit ranching family with extended relatives up and down the dirt road. These relatives were a resource when his mother, Mary Belle “Mabel” Batjer, was away teaching in nearby towns, often with her two young daughters in tow. It is easy to envision a Norman Rockwell scene of a family ranch, everyone pitching in with cattle herding and some “buckarooing,” something Justice Batjer points out was not his forte.

A gifted storyteller, Justice Batjer recounts tales of rural American life in the 1920s, the Great Depression, and World War II. His childhood and youth were filled with the ranch, family, friends, school, baseball, and

school socials—all of which led to college at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), teaching in rural Nevada schools, and law school at the University of Utah.

Smith Valley was small but forward-thinking, and the desire for knowledge was embedded early; Justice Batjer speaks fondly and appreciatively of his early teachers, especially his mother. One of his earliest friends, Mary Arentz, was the daughter of *the* U.S. Representative for Nevada At Large, Samuel Arentz—a connection that opened Smith Valley to the larger world. Justice Batjer’s recollections of an early trip to Reno and the impression the larger town made on him reveal that he was not destined to be a rural rancher.

UNR was a natural place for college and where Batjer met his future wife, Lura Gamble, also to become a teacher. They met at a social event, and married soon after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In the course of their long marriage, they had three daughters who now own the McVicar family ranch.

Batjer's military service began in the Navy Seabees construction force and segued into service on Gen. Douglas McArthur's staff—an honor for a newly-commissioned ensign. After service in World War II, he returned to teach school in McGill, Fernley, and Carson City.

Deciding against teaching as a career, Batjer went to law school in Utah. After graduating and passing the Utah bar, he worked as staff counsel for the Utah State Senate, returning to Nevada to teach while waiting to take the Nevada bar examination. Like the cinematic figure Mr. Smith, he went to Washington, D.C. to work for Nevada U.S. Senator "Molly" Malone. Returning to Nevada, he served as deputy district attorney and then district attorney for Ormsby County (Carson City). In 1967, then-Governor Paul Laxalt appointed Justice Batjer to the Nevada Supreme Court. He arrived at a time of dynamic growth in Nevada, as the court was increased from three to five members.

Justice Batjer's experiences with college, marriage, teaching, military service, law school in Utah, and into the practice of law appear effortless as if one phase of life naturally flowed into another. Whether reading or listening to this oral history, the reader will be struck by his intelligence, humility, pragmatism, and gentle humor.

Justice Batjer left the praise-making to others. After his death in 2011, his colleagues eulogized him for having "an even-handed temperament . . . [that] will be missed in today's partisan world" (Chief Justice Michael Douglas), and for being a "great scholar and jurist who understood the virtue of brevity, common sense and kindness" (Justice Kristina Pickering). Former Nevada U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt, who appointed Justice Batjer to the court, summed the man up as

a "native Nevadan who possessed classic Nevada values. . . self-reliance, perseverance and compassion."

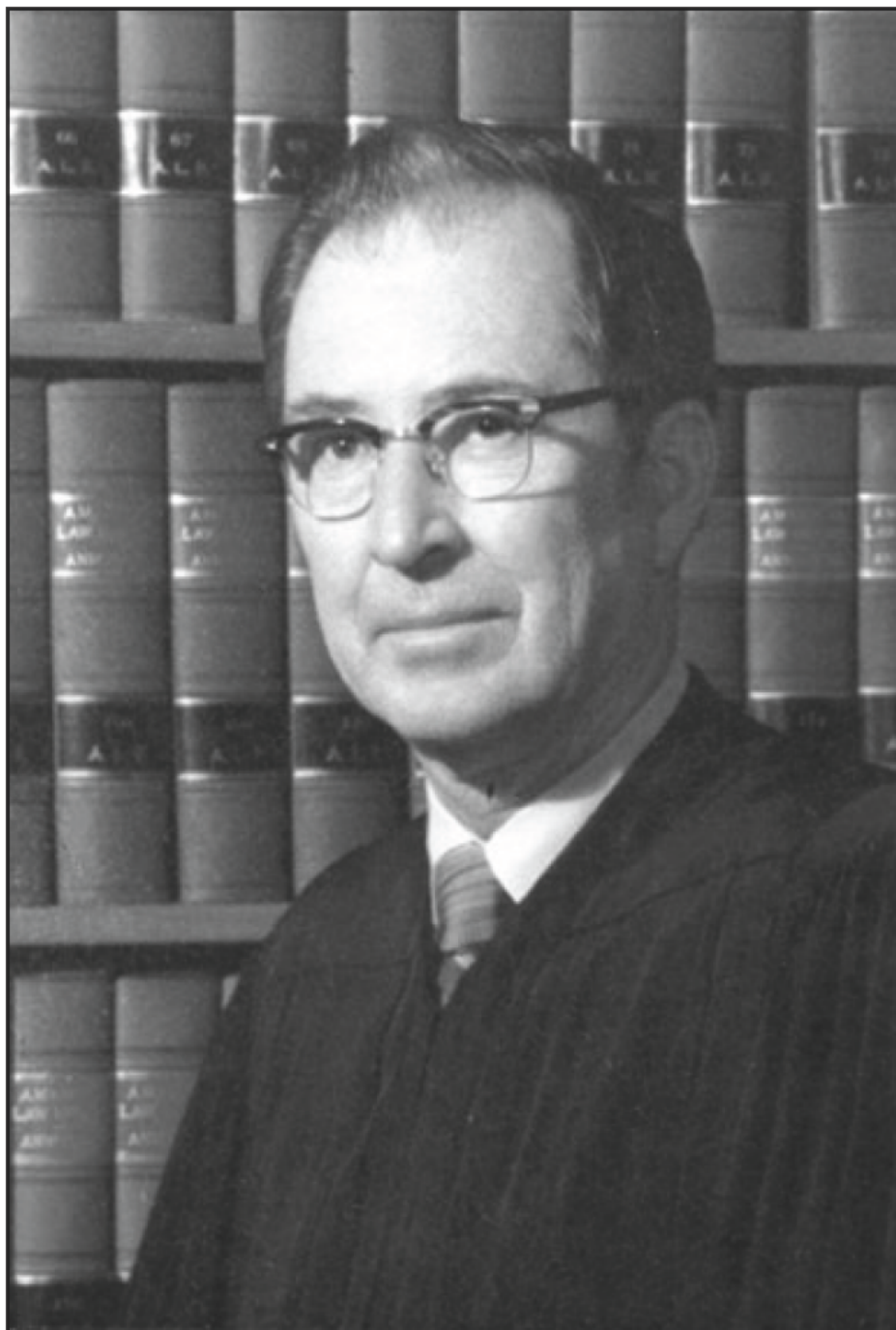
For readers who are interested in examining the unaltered records, copies of the recorded interviews are available at the Special Collections department of the UNR Library.

Brad Lucas conducted interviews with Nevada Supreme Court Justice Cameron McVicar Batjer during November and December 2002 at Batjer's home in Reno, Nevada, as part of the Nevada Legal Oral History Project, a joint effort of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society (NJCHS), the Nevada Judicial Historical Society (NJHS), and the UNOHP. Begun in 2001, the project was intended to record the life stories of leading members of Nevada's legal profession and to educate the public about law and the courts by making those stories widely available through various media.

Members of the boards of NJHS and NJCHS compiled and vetted lists of potential narrators, ultimately selecting representatives from both the state and federal benches and bars. The UNOHP, under the direction of Tom King and his successor Mary Larson, recommended interviewers, most of whom were professional oral historians, and donated equipment and transcription services. Brad Williams, of NJCHS, coordinated the project from its inception. Susan Southwick, of NJHS, oversaw that group's participation. Patricia Cooper-Smith completed the copyediting and introductions. Alicia Barber, Director of the UNOHP since 2009, supervised the project's final publication and dissemination. The project was made possible by a generous challenge grant from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, with matching funds provided by the U.S. District Court for

Nevada Attorney Admissions Fund, the Washoe County Courthouse Preservation Fund, and the Nevada State Bar. Thanks go to Susan Southwick and the Board of Trustees of NJHS, and Brad Lucas, who interviewed Justice Batjer.

Patricia A. Cooper-Smith
Carson City, Nevada
March 2013



JUSTICE CAMERON McVICAR BATJER,
NEVADA SUPREME COURT

EARLY YEARS IN SMITH VALLEY

Brad Lucas: Today is November 4, 2002. I'm in the home of Justice Cameron Batjer. My name is Brad Lucas. We're here in Reno, Nevada. Could you state your full name?

Cameron Batjer: My full name is Cameron McVicar Batjer.

When and where were you born?

I was born August 24, 1919, on my grandparents' ranch in Smith Valley, Nevada.

Could you tell me your grandparents' names?

My grandfather's name was John William McVicar, and my grandmother was Christiana McDonald McVicar. They were both born around Molesworth or Listwell, Canada, in Ontario. My aunt's husband, Robert McCall, was the first one to come to Nevada. He came out from Ontario and was one of the gold seekers. He came out in the 1850s and was around Downieville and places like that in

California, and then came to Nevada with some ranchers who brought their cattle back over because they wanted to have them graze along the West Walker River. And that's how he got here. When he was here, then, I guess, he sent for my Aunt Margaret McVicar, and so my grandfather, John, and his sister, Margaret, came out from Canada in 1869 in October. The railroad was completed in July, so in October right after that is when they came all the way by rail to Reno. Then they went from Reno down to the county seat, which was Washoe City, down in Washoe County, and that's where they were married, Margaret McVicar and Robert McCall. Then they started their ranch in Smith Valley. It's right in the center of the valley, and it was a very good piece of property.

About how large?

Well, he took up the 180, I guess, acres. Then his brother and his mother came by boat around Cape Horn, and when they arrived



Mary Belle Batjer and
infant Cameron Batjer.

they took up 160 acres. So together they had, what, 480 [sic], I guess, altogether. Then the brother became disgruntled and sold off all of his to a neighbor. When Robert McCall's mother died, or maybe before her death, he inherited or acquired her property. Then the McVicar ranch was half of it, after McCall died.

McCall was an assemblyman from Esmeralda County. In those days Esmeralda County went clear up to the south line of Douglas County. He was the assemblyman from Esmeralda and became ill and never got back home. Died in Carson. She was a widow for a while. My grandfather had gone back to

Canada. And so she persuaded him to come out to help her with this ranch. She'd give him eighty acres. So he and my grandmother came out. They were married in Canada. They came out and ran the ranch there where I was born. It's known as the McVicar Ranch. It's not a very big ranch, but we had cattle, and I had quite a number of cattle at the time I was born. Now my three daughters and I own it in a partnership. It's all the nut.

Still in the family.

That's the history of it. [laughter] I went to elementary school there—the old school that was right across from the ranch, but by that time my mother and dad lived up on a new area there, as I always refer to it “out in the sagebrush,” in the desert. Anyway, I went to school down there at the old grammar school across from the ranch. I went from first grade through fifth grade. In sixth grade my mother started teaching school in northern Washoe County. I was in the sixth grade there and went with her to various other schools and didn't go back to Smith Valley to school till high school—the Smith Valley High School.

Now, for those early years, first through fifth grade, how many families were in the area? I'm wondering how many people were in the school with you.

Well, there were thirteen in my first-grade class. There were two Indian girls and eleven white kids.

Right after I was born, my folks moved to southern Idaho, a place called Burmah. Until I was, oh, just past four and a half we lived up there, and then we came back to Smith Valley.

So were they still ranching?

Yes, always ranching. I went back and visited the area in Idaho a few years ago, and it reminded me of pictures I've seen with the rover on Mars. It's a pretty bleak area, north of the little railroad town of Shoshone. My younger years were spent in Smith Valley.

Now, did you have to do a lot of work on the ranch as a kid?

Yes, there was always work to do—some cattle herding and a little buckarooing. I was not much of a buckaroo. [laughter] I was bucked off a few times. I didn't really like it. I was always around horses. We either rode them or worked them. It wasn't until I was in high school, I guess, that we really started using motorized farm equipment. I was always around horses, but I never was horse crazy. [laughter] Some people just think horses are wonderful. I thought of it as work. You could ride them and if they behaved, you could herd cattle; you could put them on the wagon and work with them or on the mowing machine or whatever piece of equipment you were using. Yes, there was always work to do.

For the first three years in high school I lived with my grandmother and with my uncle on the ranch, on the same ranch that I own, the McVicar Ranch. We had a dairy there, so there was cow milking to do then.

Now, how many people were working the ranch?

Well, just my uncle, my cousins, and I, except in the summertime when there was haying to do, and then you'd hire maybe five or six other men to come in and help.

How many cousins did you have at the time?

There were two of us that lived on the ranch. I had two cousins. We had another female cousin. I had two sisters. My mother was teaching school away from Smith Valley, and in the summertime she and the girls would come back to the ranch. But my sisters were a bit younger. It was just a rural experience.

What were your sisters' names?

My oldest sister was Helene, and my younger sister was Naomi.

So you saw them mostly in the summers?

Yes.

Where did they spend the school year?

Weeks. Down on the Carson River at Weeks. There was a school down there where my mother taught. It was called the Fort Churchill School. So then when I was a senior in high school my mother came and started teaching in Smith Valley. She built a house there at Smith near where the Smith post office is now. So she and I and my two sisters lived there during my senior year in high school.

Did you attend school pretty regularly? I know sometimes with the farming life that's hard.

Well, we didn't get much time off for farming. The school people frowned on that. Most of the main work was *finished* by the time school started, but in the late fall of the year sometimes we'd take a day or two off to finish with the haying, or in the spring once

in awhile with the plowing. But no, I didn't take much time off during school.

Now, did you have much contact with other families in the area, other than school?

Well, at the ranch next door was my uncle and aunt. They didn't have any children, but we were fairly close to them. Down the road a ways my other uncle and his wife—they had one daughter—lived, and in the summers I would work for my uncles or some neighbors mowing and haying, harvesting wheat, and things like that.

Sounds like some intensive work.

Well, in the summer it was intensive, yes. I worked a lot for one of our neighbors, and I worked in the farming and the hay fields and the wheat harvesting. Each summer that I was going to the university I went back to the ranch and worked on the ranch and with the neighbors. While I was at school I worked as a clerk in a couple of grocery stores. The best job I had when I was going to school was working at a lumber mill in a lumberyard out in the east part of Reno.

Who would you say would be some of the more influential adults while you were first growing up, sort of early childhood?

Certainly my mother and my grandmother and my Uncle Roy McVicar—they were the three most influential. But we were sort of a close-knit family, so my other aunts and uncles were close, and a good influence, I guess. [laughter] Kept me on the straight and narrow.

I'm curious about some other things growing up. I mean, you had a lot of close family

around. Were you involved with the church at all?

Yes, my grandmother and my mother were very religious folks. My grandmother and, I guess, my grandfather also, where they grew up in Canada, were Presbyterians. But the only church in Smith Valley was the Methodist church. So, yes, we went to church almost every Sunday. I can remember going. In fact, probably the first time I remember going to church was after he came back from Idaho, so I was maybe just between four and five years old anyway. My grandmother had an old gray horse and a buggy, and she would go out and put the harness on and hitch up the horse, and she and I'd get in that buggy, and she'd take me up to church. [laughter] And then later on when I was in high school there was always some church activity. I wouldn't say that I was really very regular in church attendance, but I did attend.

So just to get a sense of the community a little bit, how many people would be at an average church meeting on a Sunday at the Methodist church?

Twenty to thirty at most. Less than that many times.

It varied, of course, right? [laughter]

Yes. Well, we'd have Sunday school, and then we'd have to stay for church. And so it seemed like a long, long day. We didn't go all the time, for sure. Even my grandmother didn't. She went whenever she could. Then when we were in high school my uncle sometimes would drive us, and when we got old enough to have a driver's license, why, we would meet, and one of my cousins would drive. So we probably went to church more then, because we'd take my grandmother.



Mary Belle Batjer and children: Helene, Cameron, and Naomi.

So you had Sunday school on Sundays, and the first through fifth grade you were in Smith, right?

Yes, right.

Well, did you have the same teacher that whole time?

No, a different teacher every year. My first grade teacher was a pretty young girl, young woman, at the time, and she just died last year—she lived well into her nineties.

What was her name?

Her name when she taught was Mildred Smith, and then she married a fellow by the name of Jack Burns, and so at the end of the year she was Mildred Burns.

Were there other teachers that were memorable?

Oh, I can remember all of them very well. [laughter] Lee Jones—her name was Lucille, but everybody called her Lee. She married a fellow by the name of Warren Simpson. I don't think she taught any school after that. She was my second grade teacher. Then my third grade teacher was a woman that I think I'd known all my life, or at least she was sort of a neighbor and a friend of my mother's. So I knew her from the time we came back from Idaho—forever. Her name was Ruth Wilson. My fifth grade teacher was Alexis Linton. And then sixth, seventh, and eighth was my mother, Mabel—Mabel Batjer. Her right name was Mary Belle. My daughter has the spelling Marybel, but mother is Mary Belle.

Now, I grew up having a parent as a teacher, too. [laughter] How was that experience for you?

Well, she certainly was a good teacher, and I learned a lot from her, but there were certain things that there was a bit of rebellion. [laughter] I rebelled on phonics. I didn't like phonics, and she was great on phonics. I remember when I was in the eighth grade, I got somewhat rebellious about English. I liked geography and history, and I wasn't too bad at math—I wasn't really good at it—but it seemed English and phonics were the things she and I had our clashes about.

Now, did she like that material in particular?

Well, I think she was very good at that, and she understood about teaching English probably better than, you know, other subjects. She was too strict about it. And I wish now—I've *always* wished—that I'd paid better attention, because it was so essential later on. But that would have been the best thing for me to pay attention to. [laughter] I was a bit rebellious, but not too bad.

So even before then, from first grade on, what were some of the subjects you were drawn to? Did you have a favorite?

Well, after I got so I could study *real* geography—not about coal or how coal formed or things like that—but about countries and states, I think I liked that the best. And then history was always interesting to me.

And English?

Well, it was something I did because I had to *do* it.

Yes. Now, it sounded like you traveled a lot in the region and to Idaho. Did you travel to other places when you were a child?

Well, not very much. [laughter] I remember the first trip after we got back from Idaho. I remember maybe once or twice going for some reason with the folks to the county seat at Yerington. I remember being in the courthouse. I was saying to somebody the other day that they had tile on the walls there, and that really impressed me. We didn't do much travel then. In 1927 my mother and I and my aunt and uncle, I think, and my sister—oldest sister—came from Smith Valley into Reno to go to an exposition. They had an article in the paper yesterday, or the day before, about this exposition that was here celebrating the completion of the two highways, the Victory and the Lincoln. That's when they built the California Building in the park, Idlewild Park. We came in, and it was a really eye-opening trip for me. I was seven years old, and coming up out of Smith Valley and then over into Carson Valley, I know we stopped a couple of places there. A friend of theirs owned a dry goods store there. We stopped to see him, and then we stopped at the old Minden Inn, because they had friends there, and over at the C.O.D. Garage. I can remember all these things at the age of seven. Something like that is big, and it really impresses you, and it *did* impress me. Then on to Carson, and we stopped and went into the capitol. I was over there the other day with Marybel, and I said, "You know, I still remember the first day I came in and saw all this marble." And it's still there. Also, I remember the pictures of the governors hanging on the walls. And then I remember when we came out of Carson, up over Lakeview Hill, there was this body of water, and that was the biggest body of water

I had seen, for sure. I said something like, “What’s that?” [laughter]

And my uncle said, “The Pacific Ocean.” [laughter]

My aunt and my mother both yelled at him.

So, then on into Reno, and I was really impressed. I remember, oh, Riverside Drive as the most beautiful drive, and I still think it’s one of the most beautiful drives you can have anywhere. We stayed at the old Golden Hotel, which was destroyed in a disastrous fire thirty years ago or so. We stayed there, and then we’d go down to the Reno Garage. All these places are gone now. The only thing that’s still there that was there when I came into Reno that August that I can remember—I know the courthouse is still there—was the Riverside Hotel. Well, that impressed me, and it’s still there. We’d go up Riverside Drive to Idlewild Park, and that’s where this exposition was. I was very impressed with the California Building and the exhibits that they had in there. They had some big tents out there, and they had different contests [laughter] of teamsters driving in competition horses, driving these wagons—how they could turn and get them into a narrow spot. We had several trips to the Woolworth’s, the five-and-dime store, and my mother let me buy something—some little toy—and that was a pretty impressive place. Those are the things I remember about Reno. [laughter]

But Idlewild Park was just a paradise. And we were coming in from out on a desert. That did impress me, yes.

After that we made other trips to Reno. Ringling Brothers came here maybe the next summer and had the circus out in a field there between Reno and Sparks. We went to that.

How long did it take to get from Smith to Reno?

If you went right steady, in those days about three hours. The only paved road was from Carson to Reno. There was a cement road—there’s a little section of it as you come up over Washoe Hill still there. So it took awhile to go on those old roads. The old cars didn’t travel very fast then. My aunt and uncle had an old Buick touring car, a four-seat convertible. [laughter] Yes, it was a long trip. But we did stop. We stopped and visited on the way. Then in later years growing up I’d come in visiting courthouses and things like that.

Did you have a sense that your family was tied to the community that way?

Well, yes, they were very active in the community. My mother was on the school board; my uncle was on the school board, things like that. It was a small community, and they did take part in community activities. But school, I guess, was *part* of it. All we children, young people, went to the schools, and that’s where we mingled. Then there’d be dances and other types of activities, and later on, yes, it kept the community together.

So after eighth grade you went to a high school, correct?

Right.

Which high school was that?

Smith Valley High School.

How many students were there?

I think around sixty. The seventh and eighth grades were in the same building, and they were separated sort of from the high school. But they were right there. So that made more. I don’t know. Maybe there was

only around forty in the high school. The total there was around sixty, sixty-two or three. But I think that included the seventh and eighth grades.

And did you find yourself interested in particular subjects as you got into high school?

Well, I guess I tended to be interested in history probably more than any other subject. But I was fairly interested and did fairly well in all the subjects, except algebra. [laughter] That was pretty bad. English worked out better, because there wasn't so much emphasis on the word structure of language, which there should have been. Why, that was the most important part of it. But the sentence structure, my *mother* emphasized that. We were more into, oh, studying Shakespeare and that kind of English, and also composition. I should have paid more attention to that. It was more important in later life than history.

Well, did you have an interest in the law back then, or did that come later?

Well, when I was a junior or a senior in high school, I think they taught a class in what they called commercial law. I guess that that's when I really became somewhat interested in law. So when I went to the university I took pre-legal courses, which included history and a lot of political science and economics and things like that. We had a course in economics when I was a senior in high school. I guess you could say, *yes*, through the subjects that I studied in high school I had an interest in the law.

Now, did the rebelliousness go away? [laughter]

Oh, yes—mostly. I like geometry, I like chemistry, and I like physics, things like that,

but I didn't like algebra. Those x's and y's didn't make any sense to me at all. [laughter]

It seems like the community was very small but pretty well integrated, and that you knew a lot of the people there.

Knew everybody.

Did you have particularly close friends who you kept up with throughout those years?

Oh, yes.

You want to talk about them for a little bit?

OK. Well, one friend I had, Mary Arentz—her father was the congressman from Nevada, and he lived in Smith Valley. So for a little area like that we had the United States congressman from the state of Nevada. In those days there was one senator for each county, and the senator from Lyon County lived in our valley. In the Smith school is where I met Sam Arentz's daughter, Mary. So Mary and I went all through *some* of the elementary school. Some of the years when they were in Washington, why, she'd be back there in school. But we went all through high school together and all through college together. She lives over in Chico, and I see her often.

Then I have another friend who lives in Carson, Marino Bianchi. He and I first met in the fourth grade, too. We went all through high school together. And then we've lived in Carson, and we've been real good, close friends over the years. Then a fellow by the name of Melvin Springmeyer lives over in Carson Valley, another good friend. And then there was my cousin, John McVicar. My friend Kelley is deceased now. A lot of

them—about half of the class—are deceased. There were fourteen when we graduated from high school, and there are seven of us left. But some of them I've stayed friendly with over the years. We were all good friends, like Ernest Grosso. It was a great place to go to school.

You mentioned dances. What other sorts of things did you and your friends do for recreation?

Well, of course, there was always athletics when you were in school. We didn't have football then. It was too small, and there was no six-man football, which they later had. Certainly, in the winter we had basketball. Those were some of the things other than dances and parties, social events. And then there was always Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, things like that where the family got together.

Now, you mean, your extended family?

Yes.

So how many would be at a gathering? You mentioned the aunt and uncles—cousins?

Yes, there would probably be about fifteen to twenty of us there at times.

Was there much contact with family in Canada, in Ontario?

Well, not a lot. There was some family in Detroit. My oldest uncle lived in Detroit for a while and finally moved to California. In fact, my wife and I visited him and his wife there right after World War II. But there was not a lot of contact with Canada. Two of my grandmother's sisters were married and

moved out to Portland, Oregon, or that area. Her brothers were still back in Ontario, but I only met one of them. There wasn't a lot of contact with the people in Canada. I know that my grandmother would write maybe once a year to one of her brothers. My mother had visited back there and saw my aunt and visited with my great-grandmother, Margaret Cameron McDonald. She was a story in herself. When she was a young girl, college age, she went to the University of Edinburgh and studied, I guess, like in England, the Inns of Court. She became a solicitor. But back in, say, 1848, 1850, along about then, no solicitor was going to have any *woman* in his office, even though she qualified. [laughter] So she took a job as a governess for some of the peers. I don't think it was anything close to royalty, but like a duke or something. Anyway, some of the peerage from England had an estate down in either northern England or southern Scotland, somewhere around there, and she took this job as the governess for their children. And according to my mother, they said she wasn't a very attractive young woman. She hadn't had very much attention from the males when she was going to college. I guess they sort of resented her. Anyway, this groom, Sandy McDonald, who took care of the horses—they got together, and she was certainly infatuated and in love with him. They got married. Well, this Cameron clan was *not* happy about that, at all. Those clans in Scotland were just unbelievable in how they resented some of the things each other did. Anyway, the Camerons looked down their noses at the McDonalds, and particularly a *groom* taking care of the horses. They apparently had some money because they bought them passage to Canada and bought them a farm in Ontario to get them out of Scotland. [laughter]

[laughter] Far away.

So, of course, she never did anything with her education, but it was amazing at that time for her to be able to accomplish as much as she *did*, education-wise, but beyond that she couldn't get anywhere.

When you got out of high school did you have any plans or ideas about maybe moving far away or going to a different city?

My only plan was to go to the University of Nevada. I'd gone up there with my mother, and we had walked around the campus when I was, oh, probably nine—eight or nine, ten years old. And that's where I was going. Then I did. Fortunately, I was able to do that.

Then, did any of your high school teachers have a big influence on you?

Yes, in fact, they all did. They were all very good, and they really did encourage me to go on further. No question about it; it was to the university.

So, how many teachers were there altogether in high school?

Only three. We had the principal, and he usually taught social studies. We had an English teacher and a science teacher, and the principal was the coach. The English teacher was the women's coach. That was it, three, all the time that I was in high school.

So you started to high school probably in 1934?

Nineteen thirty-three.

Did the Depression have any effect on life as you knew it back then?

[big sigh] Yes. Oh, we didn't have any money, but we lived on a ranch. We always had plenty of food. My mother was fortunate to have a teaching job during all that time. We didn't travel very far. We didn't do much, but it didn't have a really bad effect on us, I don't think.

In the summertime they had a ball team, baseball team, there. It was pretty good. One of the neighbors owned a garage and he was very athletically inclined and interested. So he would organize this baseball team, and that was something to do. We'd just go over to the ball field to go to the ball game. Dances and ball games, that was about it. But we didn't seem to lack a lot, you know. I didn't feel deprived in any way.

We'd walk to school and walk places, and somebody would have a car, and we'd gather up everybody and haul them places. My grandmother let us use her car once in awhile, and some of the neighbors would. So we just made out with what we had. We didn't feel really badly squeezed about it.

COLLEGE AND TEACHING

You said fourteen graduated from high school. Did many of them go to UNR with you?

Well, Mary Arentz did. Her name is now Mary Arentz Gibson. Eileen Angus went to the sophomore; she got married. Dale Jones went to a junior college in California. During World War II he was a fighter pilot in Europe, I think, mostly in Italy. Then he was called back up in the Korean War. His fighter plane was shot down, and he was killed. He's the only one that was a war casualty. I guess there were only three of us really who went to the university, went all the way through, and graduated together.

So not all strangers up at UNR then—a few friendly faces.

Yes. [laughter] Yes, it was an experience all right, but a good one. The second year I joined a fraternity and actually didn't like it very much. And then some of my close friends joined the Lambda Chi fraternity, and I went

with them. During my junior and senior years I belonged to that fraternity.

Did that have a pretty big impact on you?

I don't think so, really. But I've always been loyal to them. I go back to the house once in awhile and give money to various and sundry things, including right now they have a big house building or renovating project. But no, I don't think one way or the other it had a real big influence on me.

It sounds like you went from a pretty tight community there in Smith, then to go away to Reno. You were there for four years? Was that experience pretty easy for you?

Yes, I think so. My first year I lived with friends in Sparks, and then my sophomore year I lived in a boarding house over where St. Mary's Hospital is now. But I had friends around, and then the last two years I lived with friends who had come in from eastern

Nevada and were living out on Evans Avenue. It was no big change, because I seemed to be around people that I was friendly with.

You said you'd taken some pre-law courses: political science, economics, things like that. Did you start out wanting to study law? I mean, were you pre-law from the beginning?

Yes. I think I had that notion, anyway. I really don't know why. Jack Ross was our district attorney out in Smith Valley—or in Lyon County—and he was a friend of the family and a very fine, good lawyer. So that may have been something that I had in the back of my mind. I don't know. I just seemed to head in that direction. It seemed like a good place to go, I guess.

Were there any professors or classes that stuck out as being particularly interesting for you?

Not really. No, I seemed to like them all to a certain degree, but none of them seemed to be of any great influence on me. I wasn't very keen about the economics professor, but otherwise I liked them.

Now, did you meet your wife at UNR?

I met her there, but we didn't go together. Her sister, Ann Gamble, was in my class at the university, and she introduced me to my wife Lura.

As I was going through the university, it became obvious to me that we were going to be in this war somehow or other—World War II—and there was no way we were going to avoid it. I was color-blind. I couldn't get into ROTC with that, at least in the officer program. I was in the enlisted-type program for two years. I figured I have to do something



Cameron Batjer as a young man.

here, if I get out, to earn a living. And now I'd been around teachers. My mother was a schoolteacher. I knew other schoolteachers. I like schoolteachers. I knew it wasn't an easy job, but I took a minor. I had a major in history and a minor in education *and* economics. So I got a teaching degree, a teaching certificate, when I got out. But I had a low draft number, and it looked like I wasn't going anywhere except into the army. But right at the end of my senior year I had this bad cough, and so they put me in, not 4F but 4Y—sort of like a *temporary* medical deferment.

When I graduated, I went back out to the ranch and was working on the ranch. I came in to dinner or something, and my grandmother says, "You have whooping cough. You're whooping."

So then I did; I started that *whooping* and a *woohoo*. So that's what I had. I don't know how many people I infected with it. Nobody ever told me that I gave them whooping cough. Around that time there was a vaccination just for whooping cough, and I'd had the vaccination, but I guess it wasn't strong enough or hadn't been developed enough or something to keep me from getting whooping cough. But it did do enough to me that I wasn't really *down* and out.

But it did get me a 4Y, so it got me a deferment. Well, then you sort of went to the end of the call-up line. So I went in to see the head of my draft board, I guess, and he told me to go see the adjutant general. Why I needed to see him I don't know. This is in 1941, middle of the summer, or beginning of summer. They said, "They're only going to call you up, and if you get a job they'll give you another temporary deferment. So go ahead and get a job."

I got a teaching job out at Dayton in the elementary school there. I had four grades to teach and about twelve students, I think. [laughter] My future wife, Lura Gamble, taught English and Spanish, or she taught high school, anyway. And, you know, social events and things—they run a lot of them in Dayton. So we met and started going together. And so we were married. My daughter said, "How many times are you going to say, 'And so?'" [laughter] Anyway, we were married in May after Pearl Harbor. I was teaching there [Dayton] on December 7, 1941. It became obvious they would start calling people up. They did call me up in February, but deferred me till the end of the school year. She and I got married in May of 1942. I heard about the Seabees, a part of the navy. It was a naval construction battalion.

We went to San Francisco, I went in, and I went all through that, and they gave me a deferment on being color-blind. It was just slight, but it was bad enough that I could see the wrong numbers when they'd turn those pages. So they accepted me, and I was sworn in.

MILITARY SERVICE

[December 16, 2002, Reno, Nevada.] You were called up for duty in February 1942. And then you said you were married in May 1942.

Well, I had a low draft number, but they'd gone through the, what, thousand and some odd numbers, and then they were sending me notices again. I heard about this construction battalion of the U.S. Navy, that they were taking enlistments. So first part of June, school was out about the sixth, I think. Within a week Lura and I went to San Francisco, and I went to the U.S. Navy recruiting office for the U.S. construction battalions, and went through the physical process there. They said I was OK.

Later on that afternoon—or maybe it was the next afternoon—I did the old, as they say, “Step forward one step and raise your right hand,” and I was in the U.S. Navy assigned to the Twenty-Fifth Naval Construction Battalion, which hadn't yet been organized. This was something that was a new phase for the navy. In August I was sent to Norfolk,

Virginia, first to Camp Allen, where we were issued all our clothing and everything, and given the famous navy haircut—a crew cut. About two days later we went to Camp Bradford, a new camp in Virginia near Little Creek. We were the first battalion in there, first group of any military in this camp. The water tasted like pure chlorine. It was right out in the forest there, or right close to Chesapeake Bay. I went through the training. We were trained by a marine drill instructor, so they gave us some fairly—for a bunch of civilians—a fairly vigorous training. In the Seabees, there were many of them in there that were older men. They had experience in all kinds of construction and building. Some of them were up in their forties or even close to fifty years old. A few of them dropped out before we got through with the training. They couldn't physically take it.

We were there about six weeks, I think, and then we worked another month at what they called tent city, outside of Camp Bradford, and during that time we were given

a week's leave. I went to New York City and visited some relatives up there and saw the big city.

About a week after I returned to Camp Bradford, we were given the orders to be packed up and ready to go by that night on the trains. We, of course, didn't have any idea where we were going. There was all kind of speculation, because we headed south and went down through the southern states. Then when we got down as far as Mississippi we started heading north again. Well, when we were headed south everybody thought we were going to Gulfport, Mississippi, because there was a Seabee base, a port there where construction battalion people were sent overseas. We didn't go there. We headed north. We thought probably we were headed for Seattle.

Oh, for the shipyards?

There's all this speculation and guessing. When we got to Green River, Wyoming, we headed for Ogden and Salt Lake. Ogden—we thought, "Well, we're going to San Francisco or Port Hueneme in Oxnard, California."

No, then we went south into Mexico and then up into San Diego. Then we headed north again, through L.A., and we eventually did wind up at Port Hueneme. We were only there about a month, and then we were packed up and sent to Camp Elliott in California, attached to and became a part of the Marine Corps, Company C of the Third Marine Battalion of the Nineteenth Regiment of the Third Division.

But you were still part of the navy attached to a marine battalion?

Well, we were not so much navy that we were hauled down in a day or two to

downtown San Diego, down to the port, then the marine training base down there and fitted out in all of our green uniforms. We had to roll up and pack, and some of our navy gear was sent home. I think they allowed us to keep... they said, well, we would be able to wear our navy blues occasionally if the marine commander would authorize it, and they did from time to time. But we were in the Marine Corps. I was, I don't know, a private, I guess, at that time. Then we went through more training and more training.

Now, was this construction training, as well, or was this just general military training?

No, military training. Marching. We'd go out on maneuvers inland around Camp Elliott, and some of our companies were sent up to a naval base north of Camp Elliott, a marine base—I can't think of the name offhand. We were there from October to March.

In March we packed everything up and went overseas. As a Marine company we went down to the South Pacific and went to New Zealand. We arrived in New Zealand in February or March, and we were there training again, making landings, forced marches, et cetera, up throughout northern New Zealand until the middle of July. Then we packed up again and went to Guadalcanal.

By that time Guadalcanal, as the marine said, was secure. There were a few pockets of Japanese soldiers holding out north of where we were stationed, but all that was happening there was that the Japanese were coming in from Bouganville and New Britain every night, and they were bombing us. So we spent a good deal of time in the foxholes.

Then we geared up to go to Bouganville, but I had applied and gone through all the preliminaries for a commission, and that

commission came through actually before we left New Zealand. Since I didn't have a civil engineering degree I couldn't stay with the Seabees, so they transferred me to the staff of the Seventh Fleet, which was in Brisbane, Australia. We called it "MacArthur's Fleet."

When did this happen? When did you transfer?

About September of 1943. Nineteen forty-two was when I went in and by September, about a year later, I was in Australia. We were all in the same building there with MacArthur. I saw him every day. It took me about two months to get from Guadalcanal by island-hopping to get down to Australia, and I was there until October of 1944. They had some kind of a system. If you put in more than twenty-six months overseas you could apply to go back to the States. I had twenty-eight, twenty-nine months, so I applied to go back and came back to San Francisco, then went to some more schooling and training in the regular navy. I went to Tucson, Arizona, for couple of months. They had a training base there at the university, and then I was assigned eventually to the Mine Warfare Test Station in Solomons, Maryland, which was part of the Potomac River Command. I was there until I was separated, as they say, from the service. That's about it, a thumbnail sketch of my service duty.

So the last couple of legs of your service duty, do you remember when you were in Arizona?

From about October of 1944 to just before Christmas. We finished that course down there, and then they gave us leave to come home, like we came back to Nevada for Christmas. Then my wife went with me, and we went first to Norfolk, Virginia, and then from there I was transferred up to Solomons,

Maryland. I was in Maryland from January until November.

In 1945 the war was over. Well, Japan surrendered in, what, September of 1945, so I was separated from the service in the last part of November. They gave us leave, and by the first part of December, before Christmas, I was back in Nevada.

TEACHING, LAW SCHOOL, AND EARLY LAW PRACTICE

Were you ready to stay put for a while or...?

Well, the first week or two after I got back I was in contact with the Department of Education in Carson City. I knew the superintendent of schools, Mildred Bray, and she called around, and they needed a teacher in McGill, Nevada. I think I was out of the navy in about the middle of December, and right after New Year's I started teaching school again in McGill. I was at McGill for the rest of that year and the next year.

While I was there our daughter Lura was born in Steptoe Valley Hospital in East Ely. Then I've always been interested in athletics. *Not* a good athlete—a lousy athlete really—but, you know, I was interested. So they needed a coach at Fernley, and I was given that job. I had some good teams, but that convinced me to go to law school earnestly. [laughter] I'd been already admitted and put in one quarter at the University of Utah in the summer while I was living in McGill. That next summer I went to law school and did a quarter at Utah.

Now, why Utah? Did you apply to other places?

They accepted me. I don't really know. I think I did apply to Oregon and Washington. Salt Lake City was the closest place to eastern Nevada, Ely, and McGill. For those two reasons: they accepted me, and it was the closest place. So that's how I went there first. It was a good law school. It was difficult, as they all were. We had some professors we didn't particularly care about and others that were great. After I coached for a year at Fernley, in spite of being rather successful, I knew that was not in the cards. [laughter] So I went to Utah, and we lived in veterans' housing there—they called it Stadium Village—and I went to law school. I graduated in 1950.

Why go to law school? Why not just continue to teach?

[big sigh] I don't know. The *easiest* thing I've ever done in my life is teaching—classroom teaching, but I didn't particularly like it. I thought the law was the field to be

in. I'd taken a pre-legal course in college. It was sort of in my mind, although not a great burning desire. But it was in my mind to go to law school. So when I had the opportunity, I did.

When you started did you know what kind of law you wanted to practice?

No. I never did decide on any law in particular. I decided what I *didn't* really like was corporate law. It was too dry. Domestic relations and all kinds of criminal law—those things were all much more interesting and exciting tort law. And I liked water law, because of my experience growing up on the ranch and knowing how important water was. Things like that got my attention, and I liked things like that. But I just took a general course to get my degree.

Now, you go with law school and beyond. Was your family ranch still active throughout all these years?

Well, somebody was there, yes. It's still active. We still own it. I own it in partnership now with my three daughters. But, yes, we still have the ranch. Naturally, somebody else has had to farm it. [laughter]

Right. So, when did you start at the University of Utah for the law degree?

Nineteen forty-seven was the first quarter, but the fall of 1948 was when I went back and seriously went right on through then. I think I took one summer quarter off, and then graduated in 1950. Then after I took the bar examination in Utah and passed there and became a lawyer in Utah, I was hired by the Utah senate as their attorney for the 1951

session, which was very interesting. It was a good experience.

In Utah you don't have to qualify as a resident, but you had to be a six-month resident of Nevada before you could take the bar exam in those days. I left the Utah senate a week before they adjourned and came back to Nevada in about the first part of March so that I could qualify to take the bar examination that they gave in September.

Did you work with any one or two particular people when you were working for the Utah senate, or were you just doing miscellaneous work?

I would draft bills for them, look over some of the proposals that were made, sit with some of their committee meetings, and things like that. There was one of the senators in southern Utah, Senator Adams, who I liked very much, and he would have liked to have me come in when he was a lawyer out of one of those little towns in the county seat down in Blanding. I don't know what that county seat is or which county that is. But anyway, he'd liked to have had me come in with him and practice, but I had my mind made up to go back to Nevada.

Did you like Utah while you were there?

Yes. Yes, I did. I liked Salt Lake City, liked Utah. And these lawyers and the fellow that he went in with and a couple of classmates of mine went with Senator Adams down there, and they didn't practice much law. They got into the uranium business and, oh, sort of overnight they all became millionaires. They really did. [laughter] But I'm pleased that I came back to Nevada.

Now, was it just to be closer to family or...?

Well, yes, not only family, but this is where all my friends were and the people I knew and the area I knew and the area I liked. All those reasons. But I had to re-establish my residence, so I *again* called Mildred Bray, who was the superintendent of education, and she said, "Yes, if you can get here next Monday you can go to work." [laughter] And so I got here in Nevada on a Friday, and the next Monday I was teaching school in Carson City.

Now, were you still teaching history classes?

There were always jobs open [laughter] in the elementary and junior high school. Now, they didn't call it that then. It's just the upper elementary grades, like eighth grade. Clark Russell and Virgil Bucchianeri and some of these guys that are well known in western Nevada were in those classes. Ed Allison, George Allison, some people who are, you know, well known in western Nevada now were all *students* of mine at the seventh and eighth grade when I taught in Carson. [laughter]

I took the bar exam, Nevada bar, and passed it and was admitted in November, but



Cameron and Lura Gamble Batjer with daughter Lura.

I had signed a contract to teach so I taught through the rest of the year till June. And then during that time I had contacted Frank Gregory who practiced law there [Carson City], and he wanted me to come in with him, which I did.

So this was 1954?

No, 1951, 1952—June of 1952.

That's right.

I was with Frank Gregory in that period of time. But after the elections in 1952, when Senator George W. “Molly” Malone was elected senator from Nevada, and my friend, Pete Kelley, was his administrative assistant, Pete persuaded me to go back to Washington. There was a position there as the attorney for the subcommittee on Mines and Mining of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, and below him was the chairman of that subcommittee. He was the second or third-ranking chairman in the Senate. That was the year that Eisenhower was elected. The Republicans took over and were a majority in the Senate, a majority in Congress, for the first time since I don't know when. Since forever.

Now, how did you know Pete Kelley?

He and I went to the university together. Pete and his wife, Carolyn, and I were all in the same class together at the University of Nevada. So I took the job and went back there, and that was an experience—whirlwind experience. [laughter] The one thing about it is that now we had all *new* people in *charge* of everything back there. The Republicans were in charge, and they were heads of the

committees, and they didn't exactly have a grasp on some of the things that they were supposed to do, but they had an idea that they were going to *do* some major things. Well, the Democrats had some ideas about how to block it because they'd been there forever, so it was an experience. I got to know Lyndon Baines Johnson, a senator, as he was the minority leader then. He didn't like that very much. He *had* been the majority leader for a while.

So, from some standpoint it was very interesting. Judge Guild, the judge of the First Judicial District in Nevada retired and then Frank Gregory, who had been associated with the practice of law, was appointed judge. Frank was in touch with me, and he wanted me to come back and take over his practice, which I had promised him I would do when I left for Washington, D. C. But there was no indication at that time when I left for Washington that this was going to occur. *But* I'd made the commitment, so I did. After the session, when things would have calmed down a good deal in Washington, D.C., and maybe I would have been able to enjoy it a little bit, I'm packed up and headed back to Nevada.

I took over Gregory's law practice and associated then for a while with Dick Hanna, who later became district judge. The legislature created another two divisions in the First Judicial District, and Hanna was a judge, he and Gregory both. Well, then I became very well acquainted with Paul Laxalt and the other attorneys, but particularly Paul, and he was the district attorney there [Carson City]. His father-in-law, Jack Ross, was appointed [a federal judge]. They [Congress] created another federal judgeship in Nevada. And because he was one of the stalwart Republicans he was

recommended, nominated, and appointed the new federal district judge in Nevada, in Carson City. Judge Foley handled southern Nevada. Paul Laxalt took over Judge Ross's law practice. Paul had been the district attorney, so he had appointed me as his deputy probably in April of 1954.

PUBLIC OFFICE AND NEVADA SUPREME COURT

Had you known Laxalt before this?

No, I really hadn't. I knew who he was and everything, but he was somewhat younger. When I was a senior in high school, he was a sophomore, I think. He was a very good basketball player. On the years that Carson won the state championship, that's the first time I knew who he was. He was married to Jackie Ross, and I'd known the Rosses. They had known my family, but from Lyon County. Jack Ross was the district attorney out there as I was growing up, so I knew the Rosses, and I'd known Jackie ever since she was a little girl. So, more or less through her, I got well acquainted with Paul. When he [Laxalt] resigned to take over Jack Ross's law practice, I was appointed by the county commissioners to fill out the remainder of his term as D.A. And then I ran for the office. I guess nobody else wanted it, because I had no opposition. [laughter]

It wasn't that easy a job, or the salary, of course, wasn't very good, but you could have

a private practice on the side. There wasn't much time for that, but you did have a little bit, supplemented your salary. I was the district attorney of Carson City, and as district attorney you're also the city attorney of Carson City. That was a curious job, because the county commissioners and the city trustees were not exactly fond of each other personally. They had conflicting demands and desires over almost everything: law enforcement, *roads*, streets, school, anything you name. And then, of course, there was also the attorney for the school district. I put in some *very* long hours.

When the school board was meeting, they were in the throes of trying to build a new high school and a new elementary school. Carson was starting to grow then. Paul Laxalt, as D.A., started the project to pave the streets, and so I had that thing, doing it by wards of the city. There were two wards left to be paved, and it was a demanding job.

Did you like it better than your work in D.C.?

It was different. *Yes*, I did. I really did like it. I didn't like it back there much. A lot of the things that were done in the Senate and the procedure back there didn't seem to be *real* to me. I'm sure they were. They were jockeying for position. They were trying to get an advantage either one way or the other. And that's what you ought to do, is try to develop legislation, help with speeches, et cetera, try to point out some kind of a program or a view that didn't seem to be going anywhere. So, yes, I did like it, even when it was terribly more demanding being D.A. than it was being the attorney for the subcommittee. As D.A., I handled *everything*: the *civil* end of it—the civil problems between the city council and the board of county commissioners—and then, of course, the criminal cases, and there were plenty of them.

I hadn't been in very long when we had a prison break. Now, anything that happens to the prisons is handled by the attorney general. They weren't handled by the attorney general when I was there; they were all handled by the district attorney of Carson, of Ormsby County. So we had this prison break, in which the milk truck went into the prison yard, and three of the prisoners jumped into the truck. One of them was driving it, and the driver of the truck was in between them. They put the truck in low gear and started out through the gate, knocking the gates down. They were successful in doing that, but the guards started firing at the truck from the guard towers. And, *yes*, they did hit the truck. And they killed the guy, the guard who was driving the truck, but didn't touch the three prisoners.

Later on that day they were captured out in the hills near Carson, and we tried them for murder. Now, there was a special law that if you had anything to do with the death of a warden, a guard, or somebody connected with the prison, it was a first-degree offense,

subject to the death penalty. Well, you know, being new and young and maybe a little bit eager—I don't know—I should have just charged the guys with kidnapping or larceny or something. *Oh*, no. I had to go for first-degree murder.

Oh Jesus, that trial went on—after we finally got to trial—it went on for weeks. And why it should, I have no idea, but it did. They were finally found not guilty. And if I'd been on the jury I would have found them not guilty, too. They didn't pull the trigger; they were caught trying to escape, and they were driving the truck. So, of course, lost that one.

Now, had you done any criminal trials before taking this job?

No. Not really.

So it's quite a change.

Yes, it was. I'm talking about being thrown into an ice-cold lake and not being able to swim. That was about it. I lost that one.

We had other murder cases that were successfully handled. The one other one I was thinking about was this socialite from Philadelphia—she was from very wealthy, influential family back there—who was out for a divorce, and during the time that she was establishing residence she met this fellow who had gotten a lot of his training at various and sundry prisons around the country, including Nevada State Prison. So when he got out on parole or whatever, they got married. Well, he was a schemer and, of course, that's what had happened to him, what he'd been caught and been in prison for. They were living in a motel there, and he went to southern California on some kind of a scheme and was arrested down there for some misdemeanor of some

sort. It wasn't anything *big*, but he's down in prison, in jail, in California. So she's now running around with some other guy who, I think, had some kind of a prison record. I don't know what happened, but anyway, he strangled her and threw her in the closet there and left. Her body was discovered a few days later. Of course, it was in May and warm, and the body was decomposing. The murderer was off somewhere. Well, I found out that he was from New Hampshire or Vermont—back East somewhere—and that he was headed that way. A warrant was out for his arrest. When he got wherever he was going in Vermont, I think, the police were waiting for him. He was arrested, and we extradited him. Eventually, he pled guilty to second-degree murder, but there was all this publicity—banner headlines in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* like “Socialite Murdered.”

Now, what was her name?

I don't remember. I don't remember any of the names. But there were newspaper reporters from *all* the big newspapers out here. I remember this fellow by the name of Gold who was out from one of the New York papers. Not the *Times* but one of those other papers. He and our local publisher got into an argument down there. [laughter] This is at three or four o'clock in the morning. The phone rings. The police say, “You better come down here. There's been all kinds of trouble going on, and they're going to louse up that murder case that you're working on.”

The police come up, and I get out and we go down there, to one of the bars. The place is just—this is three or four in the morning—jumping with the court reporters and people shouting in unison. The publisher of the *Nevada Appeal* got into a row with this fellow from the New York paper. And the

local publisher hauled off and hit him and knocked him down. He's looking around. Somebody said, “Well, what's the matter?”

He says, “I'm looking for my glasses so I can go file a complaint.” But, you know, that's the kind of side effect that was going on. Finally, the fellow had a pretty good case on him. We had to bring in a forensic doctor from Seattle to finally determine what the cause of death was.

The locals here said, “There isn't enough.”

But this doctor from Seattle said, “Yes, she was strangled.” And he would testify to that fact. Anyway, the guy pled guilty to second degree, and he was a trustee at the Nevada State Prison. I'd see him around town in Carson. [laughter]

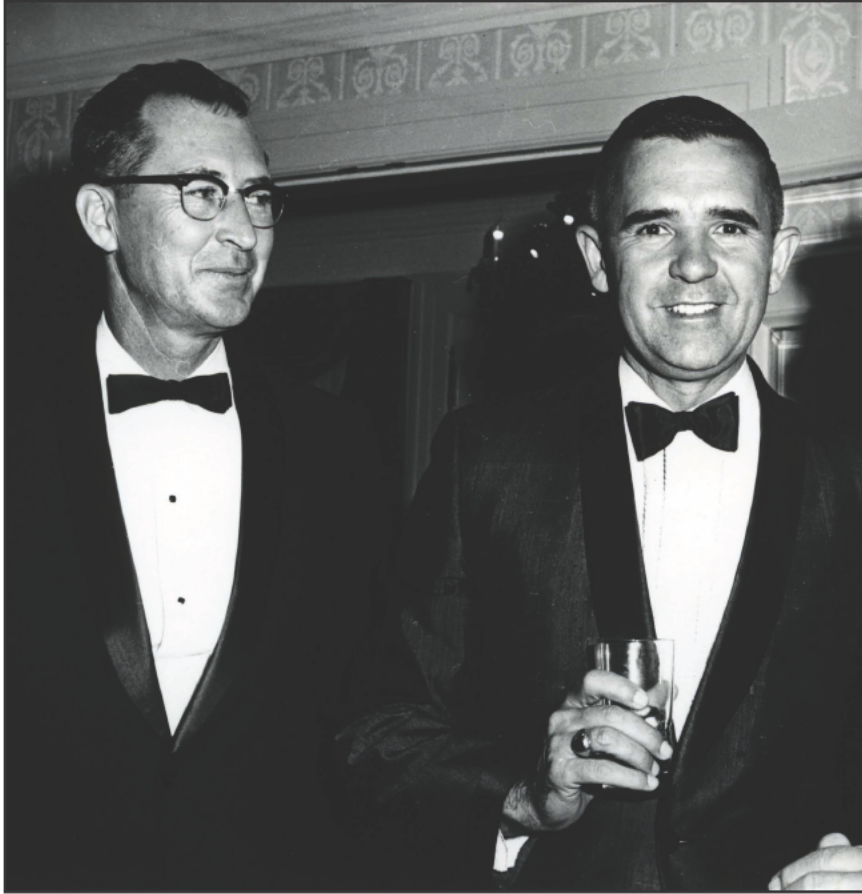
That was one thing about Carson City with the warden in those days. The guys that were, you know, not too bad, they'd let them come uptown and do jobs uptown and work in the yards and work around the capitol and so forth. From time to time you'd meet these guys that you'd sent out to prison. Anyway, those are the couple of cases I handled.

Did that happen right after you started, or was this later on?

I don't know. The prison break was not too long after I started. I had started in May and that was, I think, in October. This other socialite murder was later on.

It sounds like you were having to deal with not only the government officials but all the newspaper folks. And I assume really just basically everybody in the state legislature was probably coming in and out of Carson City at that time.

Yes. The legislature. [laughter] Even some of the legislators were doing some things they



Cameron Batjer and U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt.

weren't supposed to be doing—never a dull moment.

Sounds like a pretty exciting job.

Never a dull moment. [laughter] Anyway, I was there for the rest of Senator Paul Laxalt's term, and then four years. So I was there until 1959, I guess. I went into private practice. I was associated with Paul Laxalt in my private practice. We weren't partners; we just *associated*, had offices next to each other.

Now you also ran for attorney general, right?

Yes. In 1958 I ran for attorney general. I was still district attorney. So I don't have enough

to do with the jobs I've been describing as district attorney night and day, but I'm stupid enough to be convinced that I should run for attorney general.

Now, how did that come about?

Well, I'd been active in the Republican Party, and the registration in those days was about four-to-one and five-to-one in favor of the Democrats. There were no Republicans running for attorney general. In the supreme court there was a case that came up out of eastern Nevada where somebody had wanted to file for office on the last day, and that last filing date fell on Saturday. The courthouse was closed, so they couldn't file. The supreme

court said it had to be open the next Monday. So the next Monday I'm stupid enough to be down there at five o'clock filing for attorney general. No money and no predictive support base of any kind, particularly none in southern Nevada. I was running against Roger Foley, and Roger was the son of the federal district judge, Roger Foley, and well known in southern Nevada. We went to the University of Nevada together. We were fraternity brothers.

It was no contest. One nice thing about it, though, we were friendly to each other and civil to each other. It wasn't like some of the more recent cases.

I didn't learn anything that time. And four years later, in 1962, I ran for attorney general *again*, this time against Harvey Dickerson, who had *been* the attorney general and had not run for re-election. That was when Roger Foley and I ran to fill the vacancy. And then Harvey ran for governor and was not elected. Then *he* ran in 1962 to be elected back to his previous position of attorney general. I knew more people by then and maybe had a little bit of base. Didn't have any more money. It was absolutely a stupid move, but I did it—party pressure and all. The Republicans needed somebody to carry the torch. So I did.

It sounds like there were people who were behind you, though, right?

Oh yes, the Republican Party. I probably got most of the Republican votes. But when the Democrats' registration is four or five to one, why, that's a little dismal.

Now, I assume you knew Dickerson pretty well, too?

When I was D.A., he was the attorney general, and we had things we did together

and differences of opinion about things. Yes, sure, I knew him, and very well.

So that was a pretty friendly race, too?

Yes. In fact, back then there wasn't any of this vitriolic attitude that seems to have cropped up in the last few years, that everybody that runs for an office has to be nasty and mean about the opponent.

And all this time you were mostly doing work for your private practice in like 1959 up until 1962 and such?

In 1962, yes. Right. I continued the private practice till Paul Laxalt was elected governor in 1966, I guess. In the 1967 session of the legislature they authorized the supreme court to be increased from three to five members. That provision had been in the constitution, I guess, forever, but no previous legislature had felt that they needed to have extra judges or justices. They increased it, and Paul Laxalt appointed me and John Mowbray to the two vacancies. That was in May of 1967, and we were sworn in in October 1967.

Tell me a little bit about that process. You were doing private practice?

Yes.

Just a variety of clients?

Yes. Criminal cases and civil cases. Just general practice.

And then Laxalt invited you to consider the position?

Well, he just invited me, I guess, called me and said, "You know, this is opening, and I'm

thinking about appointing you,” or “want to appoint you.”

I said, “Well, if you appoint me I’ll accept the position.” Since then there has been created this judicial selection commission. In fact, after they created that, one member of the supreme court was supposed to be on it, so I was on the selection commission before I retired, for awhile. And it’s a rigmarole. But fortunately, I probably wouldn’t have made the grade if I’d had to go through that process. [laughter] Who knows? Who knows?

I assume the private practice was less dramatic than working as the district attorney.

It was certainly less dramatic, but it is demanding, too, because, well, you have to have people that want you to handle the cases, you know. And then it all takes time, particularly tort cases. You have to do investigating, and any time you’re away from the office doing something like that things pile up back there. It was less demanding, but not really so—not that much.

But the practice of law was very *hard*, demanding work—the general practice anyway. You hear about all these cushy jobs that some lawyers have, where they’re out playing golf most of the time, but nothing that I ever knew about. There was work every day.

What was your first reaction when Laxalt brought up the idea of being a supreme court justice?

Well, I thought that it was not only an honor, but it was something that I thought I’d like to do. And I did. After I became appointed I liked being a justice. I liked doing the research and writing the opinions. Of course, I always had help. You always have

a law clerk. That helps you a lot. And I had some good ones.

Were you surprised that he asked you? Or did you think that this might be a possibility for a while?

Well, we’d been good friends for a while. I don’t know. I just was *not* all that surprised, I guess. I was pleased, I think.

You were sworn in in October then of 1967?

Yes.

You were sworn in and started to work immediately?

Yes.

Are you allowed to keep your private practice then?

Oh, no. That was all behind me. In May was when the appointment was made, so I had from May to October to try to wind up the practice and to get some other attorneys to take over some cases, but I was through with the law practice.

Did you turn over much of your private practice to any particular people?

No, not particularly. Some of the local lawyers around town. William Crowell was one of the attorneys there, and Dick Hanna was back practicing law. He was helpful. John Ross and Paul Laxalt’s brother, Peter, John Squire Drendel, and Milt Manoukian are some of those who took over some cases that I had pending. But it worked fairly smoothly.

I don’t remember any of the cases that we first heard that session. It was probably two

weeks or three before we actually sat on a case—where the five of us sat—that would be assigned to me. I don't have any recollection of what first case I wrote an opinion on. I remember we had one case when Jon Collins was the chief justice. It was a divorce case out of Washoe County up north of Reno. The husband and wife in the throes of the divorce lived in a house that was built right on the California-Nevada state line. The living quarters, the kitchen and the dining room and that part, were in Nevada; the bedroom was in California. So they just couldn't go and get a divorce. No. They had a fight about it. So *he* filed a divorce in Nevada, and she was served, but then *she* filed a divorce proceeding in California. Well, the Nevada case was heard first, and it seemed to me that *res judicata* applied, but California went ahead with the case over there anyway. There was nothing Nevada could do about that. They affirmed the Nevada case. But the thing I remember about it, that was an unusual fact, was that she was in the courtroom during the arguments, and so she reached into her handbag, and Collins, who was chief justice, saw her reach in that handbag, and he ducked behind the bench. [laughter] And when he did that, *I* did too. I don't know what the other guy is doing there. Well, she was just getting out a Kleenex or a handkerchief.

Jon Collins, some years before, when he was a district court judge in White Pine County, had been assigned a case in Reno, and they were holding a late session. This defendant—a male—had a business around Reno, a sand and gravel business, aggregate. He whipped out a gun, and he killed two attorneys and wounded another one. The other one was the wife's brother, an attorney from Nebraska. Then, the last shot he winged it off at Collins. They had this sort of temporary courtroom there, and they had

kind of a big decoration up behind the bench, up behind the chair, and the bullet went right through that. So he was a little gun shy. Later on this guy, of course, wound up in Nevada State Prison. He didn't get the death sentence, and so he came up for reduction of sentence from life without possibility of parole to life with the possibility of parole. Of course, Judge Collins recused himself on that case, but he *told* us about the experience. [laughter] We knew what had happened anyway. The sandman didn't get any consideration for that.

The members of the supreme court with the governor and the attorney general make up the Pardons Commission in Nevada, so that's why that particular case was before us.

So you and Mowbray came in at the same time?

Yes.

Were you sworn in together?

Yes. Well, we were sworn in separately, but the same day. I don't remember who went first.

Right. And then the standing court at the time, the other three justices—who were those three again?

Justice Gordon Thompson was the chief justice, Justice Jon Collins, and Justice Dave Zenoff.

Of those three, which one did you find probably the most helpful as far as helping you adjust to your new position?

The chief justice, I think, did.

And did you know all these four people beforehand?

Justice Thompson and I had gone through our undergraduate years at the University of Nevada together. I knew Collins as an attorney and also as a district court judge. I'd known Dave Zenoff also as a district court judge. Actually, I knew them better than I did John Mowbray. He was a district court judge in Vegas also, but I had never had any cases before him as an attorney. But I had before the others.

What was the first most memorable case?

[sighs] Well, I don't know when it came along, but the one that gave us more trouble than any other one was the Tom Bean case. He was accused of and convicted of murdering Sonya McClaskey. She was an Olympic skier that represented Great Britain and stayed over after the Olympics. I think she was a nurse, or maybe she worked at a hospital. Anyway, he got into her house and murdered her, and it was a gruesome thing—he had cut her up. The case had been heard and tried in district court before I was ever on the supreme court. The case that came before us—think it was moot. The reason we gave for reversing it was that the death penalty was improperly imposed because prospective jury members were excused after admitting upon questioning that they were opposed to the death penalty without further questioning by the trial court in violation of the *Witherspoon* case, which had just come down from the U.S. Supreme Court. Collins dissented, and maybe Mowbray, on reversing it on the fact, but I guess I thought there wasn't any wiggle room there. If I had it before me now I think I would have ruled the other way. But I don't know if Thompson and Zenoff and maybe Mowbray did too, but anyway, we reversed it. Well, it was such a bad case and such bad publicity about it and everything that, of course, we

were *really* castigated by the press. You know, not just a little bit—but a *lot*. They felt that we should have affirmed the case. They said it was too much of a little technicality, and that maybe *Witherspoon* could be read differently. And I think maybe it could have. I don't know. Hindsight's a wonderful thing. Not only the press castigated us about it, but so did Bill Raggio, who was the district attorney. He was going to have to retry this case, and so he had some rather *harsh* things to say about the court.

Justice Thompson was very upset about it. I don't think I personally was very upset. I thought, you know, that's sort of human nature. But he used some rather strong language, [laughter] not to us—not individually or anything—but to the press, and they published it. We not only reversed the case, but decided to charge him [Raggio] for contempt of court. And we had a hearing. The whole thing in my estimation, *looking back*—hindsight—we certainly came out looking bad on the whole thing, the whole way around. It was bad enough to reverse this case, but then, to get into this contest with the district attorney. But anyway, we cited Raggio. I don't know what we did. We suspended him or something for a short period of time. And then eventually we rescinded all of that. But it was a traumatic time, and we were not too well thought of by the *whole* community. [laughter] I mean, a lot of people didn't understand *Witherspoon*, and they didn't see any reason why you couldn't ask a person whether or not they believed in the death penalty, and they didn't have to *delve* into why they didn't believe in the death penalty, and all those things, were later decided. Eventually, they got to go in and try to find out if this was such a formed opinion that it couldn't be altered one way or the other by the arguments and by the evidence and so forth. Just flat out before they'd heard

any arguments or anything about the facts or anything, to ask me, “Are you so opposed to the death penalty?”

“Yes, I’m opposed to the death penalty.”
“Excused.”

And so when did this decision come down?

February 1970.

So you’d only been on the court for a little more than two years.

I thought it was earlier on. Well, maybe when we heard the case, that was when the decision came down, I guess, in February of 1970. I wasn’t *on* the court when the case was decided. It was a three-judge court. But Ted Marshall, who was the district attorney in Clark County, made some remarks about the court that were thought to be inflammatory and in contempt. He also was cited. I don’t remember whether he was cited before Bill Raggio was or afterward. It was right about the same time.

So we have a fight going with the D.A. in Clark County and in Washoe County, and in hindsight it was something that we *shouldn’t* have done—absolutely should *not* have done—but we did.

It sounds like you had experience dealing with the press, too, right?

Oh, yes.

It’s different somehow?

It is not blaming the court. I don’t know whether we could have ruled the other way in the *Bean* case or not. I don’t really know, because the case involving Ted Marshall was in the first three-judge court. But then it’s a

five-judge court, and Marshall’s making these statements, and then he’s being cited. Those are some of the cases that I remember.

Now civil cases—one of them was the Carson River case in which we ruled that the Carson River was navigable, and that if it was not navigable, then the abutting landowners would have control. If they owned land on both sides of the river they’d then have control of the riverbed all the way across; or if they were one side of that, then to the middle of the river if it was a non-navigable stream. So we became very unpopular up in Douglas County, but where the Carson River is flowing through those ranches up there we declared it navigable. A lady named Mrs. Springmeyer had written a book about the pioneer days of the hauling of logs and the mills and the mining in early Nevada and around Carson Valley. [laughter] And in her book she has this picture of this float—a log float—as they would do it; they’d bind the logs together upstream, and then when the water came up in the spring so they could float, they would float them down and use them in the sawmills in Carson and cut up the timber that they used in the mines at Virginia City. So, she had this picture in there showing a little cabin on this raft of logs, and here was the smoke coming out of the cabin. Well, California had decided any stream that will float a log was navigable and that you could use it if had property on it. I didn’t write the case. I didn’t author with the case. I think Dave Zenoff did. But that line of thinking was supporting our position. I don’t know whether it was unanimous, or whether we had a dissent on it, but a number of the people in Carson Valley and around Carson were upset with that ruling that it was navigable, because then they didn’t have the control. The state had control of the river from high water to high water.

Then another case that I think I did write a dissent on, was Winnemucca Lake. When I was a youngster in that part of the world, Winnemucca Lake was quite a big lake. At least, it looked big; it probably wasn't very deep, but it had quite a bit of water. It had a lot of water in it in the spring, and there were a lot of geese and ducks and wild fowl on the lake. I remember in 1936 driving up to Gerlach, and part of the road, instead of going up higher, cut right across the old lake bed. The thing was *dry* by that time. That was in about five years. I saw it the first time in 1931 when there was quite a bit of water in it. And then by 1936 or 1937, perhaps 1938—somewhere along in there anyway—it was dry. The people who owned the property around the perimeter of the lake, and particularly this cattle company, filed on property that abutted their land out to the center of the lake. I don't know why they wanted it, because it wouldn't grow anything. But the rule of reliction was applied, and I based my dissent on the fact that the state of Nevada had declared Winnemucca to be a navigable stream, navigable lake, navigable bottom water. Now, based on the Carson River case, which was decided before the Winnemucca case, they had decided that that was a navigable stream and by law had *created* it to be navigable, and therefore the State of Nevada owned that lakebed, and not the abutting land owners. But I lost that one too. I think it was a dissent I wrote in there on the basis of the Carson River case. You know, we can't be for Carson River being navigable if the legislature, at the time they enacted the legislation, decided Winnemucca was navigable. I was probably wrong, but at least the *court* told me I was, anyway. [laughter] Those were the two water cases I can remember.

I didn't write very many dissents that I can recall—not very many. You know, the

supreme court is supposed to be a collegial body, where you get together and hear the arguments of the lawyers and then the position of the judges and come up with the best answer. And that's my position. But I've always had a dissent on the basis of punitive damages. I think that's a penalty. I took the position that if you go out and speed, or you commit some kind of an infraction in justice court or district court, you're fined. The fine goes to the distributive *school* fund, after the criminal case should happen and the civil case. I think there was a case in Illinois that I relied on that it was wrong for it to go to the litigant, who had already been compensated for the damages—the actual damages—whatever it was: pain and suffering, hospital fees, loss of wages, all of those things. They're already compensated. Now we go and penalize the offender—corporations usually. I dissented in those cases. But later on, on the position that, well, now you've decided that punitive damages are here to stay, then I decided a case which is, you know, cited by law students and some people like that, in which I supported punitive damages. But I still think I was wrong on that one. I still think that punitive damages would best go to the distributive school fund. They said, "Well, who would go through that?"

"Well," I said, "it could be done. Lawyers get compensated lots of times on the basis of the work they do. And if they have a good case, and they win some money, and it goes into distributive school fund, it could get a fee." But that fell on deaf ears.

Another case I remember quite well—we call it the "Eagle Thrifty" case. It involved this Raley's store down here on the Hunter Lake. The people that owned Eagle Thrifty wanted to build that store there. Well, there was a petition, and it went through whatever legal process to stop them. One of the arguments

was that there'd be a lot of traffic around there, and it would be bad for the children in the school. The Eagle Thrifty people lost in district court, so they appealed to the supreme court, and we heard the case, and we affirmed. Well, of course, there was a *hue* and a cry through the press and otherwise about the decision and petition for rehearing. So we granted the petition for rehearing. As one of the justices said to the attorney, "If you'd made that kind of argument in the first case, you would have won it. We wouldn't be here." So we reversed our position. At least *I* reversed my position. I switched. [laughter] I then voted for a position that Eagle Thrifty be authorized to *build* their store there.

The eyes of Nevada were on the court.

[laughter] Yes. Right.

Now, was it all five of you from 1967 on, or was there turnover?

Oh, yes. See, in 1970 Justice Collins, Jon Collins, decided to go back to private practice, and so he didn't run for re-election. And at that time then, Al Gunderson—E.M. "Al" Gunderson—and Harold Taber ran for the vacancy, and Gunderson won. Then Dave Zenoff retired from the court, and that created a vacancy. Milt Manoukian, through this judicial appointment commission and submitting names to the governor, was selected. Gordon Thompson didn't run for re-election when his term ended. Charlie Springer and a district judge from Las Vegas ran—I can't remember his name—and Charlie was elected. Then after I was off the court, I guess, Cliff Young ran against Manoukian and won.

U.S. PAROLE COMMISSION

And you left the court when?

I retired in 1981. I had enough time to retire, and so I took a position in Washington, D.C. I was appointed by President Reagan as chairman of the U.S. Parole Commission. I took that.

Now, you were in the state supreme court from 1967 to 1981, which was probably the period of largest growth in the state of Nevada.

Oh, I don't know.

I mean, those were very dynamic years. There was a lot happening.

Yes, there was.

What would you say from the court's perspective is probably the busiest time or the most challenging time while you were on the bench?

I don't know; it was all challenging. I enjoyed writing and researching the law

with the help of my law clerks—that part of the position. We, the court, received a good deal of criticism on our activity, our *duty*, as pardons commissioners. I recall one case where they convicted a man for murder. There was a newly married couple at Lake Tahoe, and he got in the car some way or another, and anyway, he killed the husband and kidnapped the bride. Finally, she somehow or another escaped, jumped out of the car in Carson City. He was convicted and given the death sentence. During the hearing to reduce the sentence from death to life without possibility of parole he was in before the Pardons Commission. The argument made by his attorney was that he had been sniffing glue, and he was so under the *influence* of that that he didn't know what he was doing. Now, of course, that had been brought out during the trial, and that was in the transcript. The question in my mind was: if he had been under the influence of alcohol, he probably wouldn't have been given the death sentence. Probably hindsight would have meant for me to do something different, but I voted for the



Cameron Batjer with President Ronald Reagan at his swearing in as Chairman, U.S. Parole Commission, 1981.

reduction of the sentence, from death to life without possibility of parole. Well, that—at that point—tied the vote. It's either the governor or the attorney general that breaks a tie. I think Thompson and Zenoff both voted on this same basis about the glue sniffing, to reduce it from death to life without possibility of parole. So the tie throws the burden onto the governor, and my friend Paul was not happy with me. He had a vote. Well, he voted to sustain the conviction and the sentence, to go ahead with the execution.

Well, about that time, or in that era, the United States Supreme Court was making a lot of decisions. They had decided this case out of Georgia—I used to know the name

of it—that the death penalty as assessed throughout the United States was wrong, cruel and unusual punishment, and set aside all death sentences—*all* of them. Eventually, the Supreme Court set that one aside. They also set aside the one on the *Bean* case that I mentioned earlier.

After we sent the case back, Bean was again tried and convicted. His attorney, who was appointed to defend him, was not well. Everybody knew everybody. It was common knowledge, at least in the bar, and I think throughout western Nevada, that his attorney was not well, was terminally ill. He was a good attorney, but he probably could have done a better job defending the guy, although they

came out with the right result. Of course, it's appealed to us again, and we get the *Bean* case a second time around. The big issue there was the inadequate representation by counsel, but we didn't listen to that, and we affirmed it. Then he came under this Georgia case. The United States Supreme Court set aside all death penalty cases. So, once again, Mr. Bean escapes.

Then, finally, on our own motion—not only *Bean* but all of those whose sentences were death—after the United States Supreme Court had ruled, we made this ruling that really outlawed all death cases that had been decided prior to their decision. We took them all under consideration as the Pardons Board and reduced them *all* to life without possibility of parole. The last Pardons Commission meeting that I sat on—Bean was before us for some reason. I mean, he'd made an application to get from “without possibility” to “possibility.” And, of course, he was denied, but this very gray-haired man, wearing glasses, looked quite dignified, spoke very well, and in his own behalf.

Another mention of the Pardons Commission, well, the justices of the supreme court, the governor, or the attorney general, any one of those seven people—and now it's two more—could put a name up for consideration, even if that person had been *denied*. Usually it came through the secretary, or his office or his staff, or some procedure through that. They would file application to the warden through the secretary of the commission. I think the secretary of the commission is also the secretary of the Parole Commission. But, anyway, you could put a name on it. Well, I seldom did, but I did it one time. In fact, I can only think of once. This woman came in. She is very attractive, very well spoken. She came in with kind of a vita

of her accomplishments. She had, I think, a doctorate—at least a master's degree—from the University of California at Berkeley in psychology. She was certainly well spoken and convincing. They had denied her husband his application to come before the Pardons Board. She had been one of these do-gooders out of the University of California in the social department. She had gone down to Soledad to meet with the prisoners there and try to be helpful to them. Oh, and when this fellow got out—I don't have any idea what his name was; they called him “Mr. Blue” because he had so many tattoos on him—anyway, when Mr. Blue got of Soledad they got married. He had such a bad record he was on parole, and they went to Las Vegas. While down there, I guess, he was scheming and dealing. But, anyway, he came upon the opportunity to buy this antique pistol, so he did. Well, they knew who he was, and he no more than got *out* of this pawnshop, or wherever he was, and the pistol was admittedly inoperative—I don't think it was plugged—but it was inoperative. It was an antique. He was arrested on possession of a firearm.

He went to trial on that—convicted, but he was out on bail. She'd finagled some way to get him bail. She not only had a degree; I think she also had money in her own right. I'm not sure about that, but we'd gotten that impression. So, when Mr. Blue was on his way to the district court to be sentenced on this firearms case, he stops by a Seven-Eleven store to get a pack of cigarettes and, as he steps in the door, there's a robbery taking place. Well, you know, Blue is an old, tough guy. He has been through everything—in prison in California and everywhere *else*, I guess. So, this guy with this peashooter, it was not going to bother him, and he attacked him. Well, the guy shot Blue, not once but a couple

of times—maybe three times. The robber was apprehended and convicted. Guess he and Blue were proud about serving together out in that spree. [laughter]

Blue went to the hospital for a long time, and this was all written up in the paper. He was a big hero. The attorney general, Harvey Dickerson, at that time even wrote letters and made a speech to the court about how they ought to give him consideration on his sentence. Whoever the judge was it fell on deaf ears, and he gave him whatever the max was on the firearms case.

I put Mr. Blue's name to be considered for a time served sentence, because I thought, "Well, you know, he deserved it, and she made a hell of a good case." We came up with the Pardon Board hearing, and she made a very good speech, and I think he was on his way to time served. Mike O'Callaghan was the governor, and Mike asked him if he had something to say. [laughter] Well, the chairman of the Parole Board was there, because the Parole Board had *denied* him and turned him down on his application for parole.

He said, "That son of a bitch over there is no good."

Mike tried to calm him down, "Now, now. No, we don't use that kind of language!"

He ranted and raved on there, and finally Mike says, "I've heard enough. Take a vote." I voted for him, and Gunderson voted for him, and the rest of them all voted against him. And then Mr. Blue went back to NSP. [laughter]

Well, you can see that the Pardons Board did give us a little bit of a burr under our saddles.

When you started with the supreme court it sounds like you got along fairly well with the other four justices.

Oh, yes. Fine.

But with these changes with Gunderson, Manoukian, Springer, did you find that it was increasingly difficult to get along?

I got along with all of them all the time, I think. I never had any problems personally, but *they* did among themselves, and, of course, particularly when I was chief justice, I had to try to keep things under control. But, personally, I had no problems.

Now you became chief justice fairly early. Was it 1978 too?

No. Instead of being chief judge in 1972, when I should have been, I stepped aside for Dave Zenoff, but I was chief justice in 1976 and in 1978. Just for two years. At the same time I was a member of the Chief Justice Conference of the United States, and I was the deputy chairman. I was away at meetings and things like that at times. Two years before I became chief justice, the constitution of the State of Nevada was amended to specifically make the chief justice the head of the Nevada court system. When I became chief justice I said, "If I'm head of this court system I'm going to find out about it." [laughter] I made quite a number of trips around the state to various different district courts and justice courts. I liked that. That was pleasant. Some of them thought I was spying on them. [laughter?] It was fact finding, I assured them, and I bought them lunch or dinner or something that assured them that, no, I'm just fulfilling my constitutional obligations.

That's right. Yes, to see the whole state. Then you left the court in 1981 for a federally appointed position?

Right. I was appointed by President Reagan as the chairman of the U.S. Parole Commission in Washington, D.C.

Now, is that something you were interested in for a while, in working in the pardons commissions?

I suppose that was some of the background that made me eligible. You had some of the same kind of cases all right.

Were you asked to take on this role, or did you need to apply at that point?

I was asked, but I certainly didn't turn it down. Yes. I may have hinted that I would like it. [laughter] It wasn't specifically that one, but once again, I thought I'd like to go back to Washington and sit in the midst of things.

Had you known Reagan before?

Well, when he was governor of California I had met him the first time. *But*, of course, Senator Laxalt was a number-one friend, so that was very helpful being my friend and his friend.

How long were you on the Parole Commission?

Nine years.

That was mostly working out of Washington, D.C.?

Oh, yes. When I went on the commission I was the chairman. There were six districts, I guess: Atlanta, Dallas, Burlingame, Kansas City, and Philadelphia. They each had a commissioner in those districts. Then there were three commissioners in Washington

besides the chairman, and they formed the National Appeals Board. It was a *very* interesting job. The work was fine; the politics were terrible.

[laughter] *And things haven't changed in D.C., right?*

No. No.

Well, this might be a good point for us to end the interview. Thank you very much.