Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with Zenna Mae and Eugene Bridges

June 12, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disk 1.

Mary Palevsky: *OK, so why don't you begin, Mrs. Bridges, by telling me something about your family background, and I'm curious to know the history of how your people came to be in this part of the world.*

Zenna Bridges: OK. My father was raised in Switzerland, and they decided to come to America. They wanted to come to Zion. They had been converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [LDS] And first of all they sent one son—no, they sent two daughters over. One was eleven and one was sixteen. They stayed with people in the area of Bern, Bear Lake [County], Idaho with different people until their family could get enough money to come themselves, because this was what they wanted to do. And the next year they had a seventeen-year-old son that they sent to the United States. Then the following year the missionaries wanted to have my father go. He was just ten years old, and his mother said, No, I have three children that have gone. I may never see them again, and so I am not going to let Robert go. But somebody put money in the perpetual immigration fund, which was a way that they were helping new converts come to the United States and come to Utah and Idaho. Enough money was raised so that the rest of their family could come. And there was Mom and Dad and I think three children that came at that time.

About what year approximately would you say that was?

Zenna: That was 1886. Eighteen eighty-six, because he was born in 1875. A lot of your Swiss people settled in this little town in Idaho called Bern, Idaho.

Were they generally the Swiss converts?

Zenna: Yes, they were all the Swiss converts at that point in time. My father didn't come from Bern [Switzerland], but a lot of the people did come from Bern; that's where they got the name of Bern. He came from Berg Am Irschel, which was by Zurich, I believe.

And he was a cowboy. His parents were worried that things might not be good for them to just live in the little town that they were at, so they bought a place out in the mountains called Slug Creek, and it's still there. These boys stayed there with their parents for many years, growing and doing the things that boys do, but then finally my father was asked to go on a LDS mission back to Switzerland, and he did go. He was about thirty-four-or-five years old. They usually go at nineteen.

Yes, that's what I thought.

Zenna: Yes, but it was 1914 and it was the First World War, so he was only there just a very little while and then they sent him to Montreal, Canada to finish his mission—also Burlington, Vermont and Sharon, Vermont areas there. Then he came back home to Idaho, and he was very soon called to be a bishop and go and reside in Bern, Idaho instead of Georgetown. But he wasn't married and President [David O.] McKay, who was not president at that time, asked him, What do you have against marriage? And he said, Nothing except I just haven't found the right person. And so he told him he needed to think about it seriously. And my father went down to general conference which was in Salt Lake, and at that point he was introduced to a young woman by the Seagull Monument on Temple Square. They shook hands and acknowledged each other and when they went home they both felt inclined that they wanted to get married. Now he had never talked with her, he had never dated her, but they corresponded for about six months and she indicated that—and he did also—that they had fasted and prayed

and they felt that it was the right thing for them to get married. So that winter in terrible snowstorms she went by train **[00:05:00]** up to Soda Springs, Idaho. He met her there and then they traveled to Salt Lake where they were married in the temple in Salt Lake. And I think that would be really hard to do! But the following year she had our oldest half-sister, and then the next year she had twins, and the twins and she all died. My father was very devastated, but they didn't have a lot of help for people in those days. Lots of moms died. My father tried to fool her as to, you know, both of the children being alive—one had died—but she was pretty smart. And for a year he was so devastated. He wrote about seventy journals, and at that point in time he didn't write much in his journals. I've got fifty-nine in here. [gestures to study]

So anyway, at that point in time he had heard about a lady whose husband had died in the First World War, and he wanted to know more about her. He said, `I have a feeling when she comes home from her mission, that I will marry her`. And my mother was told this by my aunt and she said, `There's no way that I'm going to marry that old man.` He was forty-nine years old and my mother was twenty-eight. But when she came home they were married within six weeks.

Now, what was your father's first wife's name?

Zenna: Conra.

And your mom's name?

Zenna: And my mother's name was Nellie. But her first husband had died in the First World War with dysentery. They had only been married six weeks. There were no children involved.

And so anyway my parents started their life in a little four-room house with an attic in Bern, Idaho. And there were ten children born to that union. I had wonderful parents. They were very, very, very good with us.

That's great. And so you were born in—?

Zenna: Nineteen twenty-eight.

That's great. Well, you've given me some great background. And where are you in the family? You have an older half—?

Zenna: I have an older half-sister, and I'm—Anna, Bobby, Alice, Dorothy, Zenna—I'm five.

You're the fifth.

Zenna: I'm the fifth, in the middle.

So Anna is the half-sister or your whole—?

Zenna: She's a sister-and-a-half.

OK. All right. That's great. OK, why don't we sort of do the same with you [Eugene Bridges] up to when you come into the world and then we'll take it from there.

Eugene Bridges: Well, you want me to start at the furthest end or start with my parents and work back?

I'm curious about—although we didn't get this part of your story, Zenna, of your mom's family.

Zenna: I know. I know we didn't.

Let's do that a little bit.

Zenna: Shall we do it now?

Yes, let's do that now, because that's just your dad's family.

Zenna: OK. OK. In my mother's family, her father and mother came from England in about 1895. My mother was born in 1896 in this country, and she was the oldest child. But they also had come for the Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints].

So they were in England—her father was in England.

Zenna: Her father and mother.

Were converted and then came.

Zenna: Yes, and his parents, my great grandparents, and their children came. I think there were about twelve children in that family. And they settled in a little town called Lanark, which was about eight miles from Bern in Bear Lake County. They were all converts to the Church. And I think Mother had about nine brothers and sisters. And it was a good family. Their mother died when my mother was about thirteen, with cancer, with liver cancer, I believe is what they said. They didn't live a long ways away from us. But we didn't have a car. We never had a car in our home until a sister whose husband was killed came back to live and she had a car. So then we learned to drive and get around without the horse and buggy.

Amazing. It's amazing.

Zenna: I know. Can you believe that?

[00:10:00] *Good. OK, that sort of fills that out. I'm just fascinated by these kinds of stories, so we have our historical purpose connected to the historian's curiosity, so yes, sort of how the family got here.*

Eugene: So shall I start with my parents or—?

Well, let's go back to the immigration to the country. That's interesting.

Eugene: My first ancestor to migrate was a young man, he was twenty-one, I think, wasn't he, Zenna?

Zenna: You mean—?

Eugene: Charles Henry Senior?

Zenna: Yes. Yes, he was twenty-one.

Eugene: He and his family had been converted to the Church. They lived in Birmingham. And he came by ship from Liverpool to the New York area.

Zenna: Alone.

Eugene: Alone.

About what year was this?

Eugene: This is 1856. And the interesting thing was that we knew nothing about him until we started cleaning out this little old house in Dingle and we found an autobiography, just a two-page, very synoptic autobiography, about him that he had written. But he made it to Iowa City. And at that point in time in Mormon Church history they had decided that there were so many people coming from European countries and migrating that were on their way to Zion or Salt Lake City and most of them had no funds of their own. And it just got to the point where the Church didn't have the funds either to buy wagons and supplies and horses and oxen, all of that. So at that point in time they started what was known as the handcart companies. Have you ever heard of those?

No.

Eugene: No? OK. What these were is they were literally a handcart, the two-wheeled handcart. You were allowed, I think, seventeen pounds of luggage, food; everything that you had could not exceed that. And there were usually five people assigned to a handcart. And they pulled and pushed those from Iowa City to Salt Lake City. We had not known this. And he recounts a couple of experiences he had as they came west, which I won't get into here. Anyway,

he came with the first handcart company in 1856, and they arrived in Salt Lake in September. They left in June from Iowa City and arrived in September. And there were two handcart companies that came later. They got caught in storms and many of them died. But fortunately my grandfather's company had good weather for the most part.

And how old of a person was he at this point when he's—?

Eugene: Twenty-one.

He's twenty-one when he's doing this.

Eugene: Yes. So he was really my first ancestor. And he lived in Salt Lake for about ten years and then he moved to Bear Lake into a little town, the main little town in Bear Lake, Montpelier. And bought some property and had some I guess you'd call it farm ground back in those days. It was arid country and so you relied on Mother Nature to provide the rain, the moisture that you needed for your crops. So it was a gamble every year, but anyway he settled there. One of his sons was Charles Henry Jr. He and his wife, they bought a piece of ground out in Dingle. And he built **[00:15:00]** a house there which is the one that we have renovated. That was in 1889 and 1890. And he built it in two stages. The first stage was just the front part of the house, the way it stands now, which had a bedroom and kind of a living room and an entranceway. Living, sleeping, eating, everything took place in those two rooms.

He had two children, and in the spring of 1891 one of those children passed away. At that point the Church called him on a mission to Samoa. And by the time he left, well, they discovered that his wife was expecting another child. So in this short, compressed period of time in 1891 he lost a child, they still had a child, and another child was coming. And he was called on this mission.

Another treasure that we found in the house up there were his missionary journals, and we have transcribed those. And that's quite an interesting insight into him as a person and into the people of Samoa, because at that point in time things were still very primitive in Samoa. Just as a sidelight, it was interesting that often back in those days they went without purse or scrip. In other words, they didn't have any funds. They relied on the members and on their own abilities to secure food and lodging, and it was very interesting then that many times they would bathe in a stream coming down out of the mountains or they'd have to bathe in the ocean. A lot of times their food was coconuts, bananas, or oranges which grew naturally on the island there.

"Without purse or scrip." That's what you said.

Eugene: Yes. In other words they didn't have any funding provided like the missionaries do now.

Correct. Yes. You just would—?

Zenna: Not even a second coat. I mean they just basically had just a few clothes and that's how they went.

Amazing.

Eugene: But it's quite an insight into the history of that period, since he was a very meticulous record keeper. Kept track of every penny that he received and every penny that he paid out and for what. And suits I think were what, about five or ten dollars? Something on that order then. Things like that. And that was just—.

Had the house been empty for a while or—?

Eugene: No, his wife continued to live there. And the theory was—the concept was that the members of the Church in that area would help provide for her, for her and the children. The

downside of that was that those people were just about as worse off as Grandfather and Grandmother. And so there was some help provided, not a great deal. It was a difficult time.

So she's there with two children, the one that she was carrying and the one that had survived.

Eugene: Yes. And then my father was the youngest of, let's see, eight?

Zenna: Ten.

Eugene: Ten? Ten children in that family.

Wow. And he was born when?

Eugene: And he was born in 1906. He, for early years that I remember, he did odd jobs, and this was during the Depression time and jobs were hard to come by. And one of the main sources of work **[00:20:00]** in that area was the railroad. Montpelier was a terminal for the Union Pacific Railroad. And he applied for a job there and he got a job. But it operated on a seniority system so it took a few years to build up to the point where he had fairly steady work.

And what was his name, your father's name?

Eugene: His name was Aldon Marcell Bridges.

And then my mother's family: if you go back to what would be my great or great-great-grandfather, her line was the Nebeker line, which came out of Germany.

Nebeker. N-E-B—

Eugene: Nebeker. N-E-B-E-K-E-R is the English spelling of it. The German spelling is a bit different.

OK. All right. That's fine.

Eugene: But there were five sons in the Nebeker family that were converted to the Church. And that was in this country. They were very instrumental in the initial migration of the Mormon people to the Salt Lake Valley. One of them was heavily involved with the second company that

came into the valley, and then they were—two or three of them were heavily involved in going out and rescuing wagon trains when they got caught in winter storms.

But they were kind of "up and at 'em" people. My great-grandfather was asked to go to the south end of Bear Lake in Bear Lake Valley to settle there, and that area was a trading area between the Indians and the fur trappers. So my grandfather became—he could speak the Ute language just about as well as English because he grew up with Indians, his friends and playmates. His father, my great-grandfather, I don't know how these people did it, but he was then asked by the Church to take his family and to settle in an area called Shelley, Idaho. A little place up south of Idaho Falls. And after several years then he was asked by the Church to go settle in Rexburg to help build that area. And then several years later they brought him back to this little town called Laketown on the south end of Bear Lake. And then they were starting to settle Wyoming, and so they asked him to go to Star Valley, Wyoming to settle over there, and that's where my grandfather and grandmother settled then.

My memory of course is going back to visit them occasionally. Our first trips there—Dad had an old Model T, and you'd go over mountain roads to get there. And it'd take the better part of the day to get there because you were traveling like ten or fifteen—sometimes you could get up to twenty miles an hour. Very different. But that route, I can still remember that there was a what they called a halfway house which was halfway between Star Valley and Bear Lake Valley. And there were wagon trains that still traveled that route and they would stop over at the halfway house to sleep and eat and then they'd travel on the next day. But it was a two-day trip for the wagon trains.

[00:25:00] My mother's family, I think that catches some of it.

Yes. It does.

Eugene: I could tell you some *real* interesting stories about my mother's progenitors but I don't think you—?

You know what? If we have the luxury, we can go back and do that. Nothing would make me happier than to sit here and talk to you about that. But we'll try to sort of stay focused on how you came together and then your family, you know, grew and how we're related to what happened at the testing. But this is all wonderful information.

Eugene: That's background on both of us. How we came together, you want that?

Yes, let's talk about that. Now just before we do that, so you are where in a family of how many children?

Eugene: My mother and father had two children. Me, I was the oldest. Nine years later they had a daughter, and so she's nine years younger than I and she lives in Idaho. Nampa, Idaho.

And your mom's name? I can't remember if I asked you your mom's name.

Eugene: Her name is Estella Evelyn Nebeker and she was born about 1908.

Zenna: After your dad, yes.

And so if I knew more about Mormon history, Nebeker would be a name that I would recognize?

Eugene: Yes.

Zenna: To say the least, yes.

OK. So now I know a little more about Mormon history than I did when we sat down. OK, so yes, why don't we—and you can talk at the same time if you want, as long as we try not to talk over each other, of how you met and where you both settled. I mean I guess you settled in Salt Lake together.

Eugene: Well, I want you to know at the outset that it was all her fault. It was interesting. I worked in a grocery store while I was in high school during the Second World War. I knew her father and I knew two of her sisters, but I'd never met her [Zenna]. And on the first day of high school we were in our orientation room and it was pretty filled, and all of a sudden here comes this gal waltzing through the door, cute white blouse and red slacks, wasn't it? And she had her hair braided and then brought up and fastened on the top of her head. Sparkling brown eyes, vivacious, just alive. And I thought, Man, I've got to find out who she is. So even though it was scary, I located where she had her locker. A dance was coming up fairly soon, and I asked her if she would go to the dance with me. And that's what kind of started it all. That was in our freshman year.

And this is where? You're in—?

Eugene: In Montpelier, Idaho.

You're in Montpelier, Idaho. OK.

Eugene: At the Montpelier High School. We ended up going together all four years of high school, and then I gave her an engagement ring the night of our graduation and she accepted it. And then my mother and father—there were several things that were staring us in the face. One was going away to school because—.

Zenna: No money.

Eugene: No money, yes, military—these were all considerations. My mother and father had had—each of them had had a kind of a heartbreak in their early courting life and they just didn't want to see us separated. And in September of '47, they had taken me down to Salt Lake to go to school. I'd registered at a business college down there, and so they said, Well, we'll help you out for a year if you want to get married, and so we did.

That's great.

Zenna: That was really nice of them to do. They were just so afraid that we would have a **[00:30:00]** heartbreak like they had, and that heartbreak seemed to stay with them all through their married life, and they just did not want that to happen to us. And we had $145 and the promise that they would help us each month, and so we—.

Eugene: And no work for either one of us.

Zenna: And no car. We had friends who drove us to Salt Lake and we were able to get into an apartment with a cousin, because apartments were just nonexistent. But we didn't like that relationship and so Gene went out and found us a room. It was about—well, it held a three-quarter bed and a table and a chair, and you did your cooking out in the other part of the house on a hot plate. And we said We didn't care. We just wanted to just be by ourselves and make our own decisions and not—their lifestyle was just not ours. We needed to do—.

This apartment, you were with other people in the apartment.

Zenna: Yes, and we needed to do what—.

Eugene: It was a large apartment. It was a double apartment.

Zenna: It was nice but—.

Eugene: So we had privacy and things like that but everything was geared to their life.

Zenna: To play. An awful lot of playing. And we just had things we wanted to do that were more important to us, so we didn't care if it was one room or a half-a-room. And then we made about three moves within the year and finally ended up at 520 First Avenue in Salt Lake City, and that's where our first child was born.

Eugene: That's where Lonnie was born.

Now were you in school for a while, or how did that work?

Zenna: Fifteen years.

Eugene: Oh, Mary, as I look back on it I don't really quite know how we did it. I had gone to work for First Security Bank in May of 1948. I soon realized that if I wanted to do anything in that career, that I needed more schooling than what I'd had from the business school. So I started classes and for several years I had a class early morning before I went to work at the bank. I had a class at noontime, lunchtime, and then about three days a week I had an evening class, and then I started working part-time on off-nights between school. So it was a pretty full agenda, but we were optimistic people and we felt like we could do it and we *did* do it. And the thing was we both felt that it was very important that Zenna be home with our children. And when we first went to Salt Lake—well, you tell them about your work.

Zenna: Well, when we reached Salt Lake his parents had said they'd really like to see us both continue in school, and as we checked things out we could see that that was not going to be an option. I had a sister in Salt Lake and she worked for Firmbuilt Clothing, and the next store to that was Zinik's Sporting Goods and Zinik's Sporting Goods was looking for a secretary. And so my sister talked with them to see if they would like to interview me and so I got a job right away, which was helpful. And I was able to keep that job until I was four-and-a-half months' pregnant with Lonnie, and then you had to quit. You couldn't keep working. But that was really helpful to us and it was a growing experience for me. I had done other work but this was a real growing experience. And we were just happy to be together.

Sure. A "growing experience" in what sense? That you had more responsibility or—?

Zenna: Well, I had never really done very much as a secretary. I had taken the classes in school.

Eugene: But on the other hand, if I may interject, she did court reporting, shorthand court **[00:35:00]** reporting in Montpelier when they'd had a case come up there in the, I guess in the county really. They would call over to the high school to get someone to come record the proceedings, and they didn't have the recording machines like they eventually got but—.

Zenna: Well, and Gene had more confidence in me than I had in me. We were not very old. We were nearly nineteen.

Eugene: But did an outstanding job. She was a very accomplished recorder.

You know, I wanted to ask you something I'm just curious about. This is 1947 and so it's just a couple of years after the end of the war. I'm wondering, you were both too young—you were just too young, you told me at the table, to have been able to fight in the war.

Eugene: Missed it by a week.

You missed it by a week. But in 1947 in Salt Lake, was there a sense, a certain sense of energy or relief—I don't want to put words in your mouth—but postwar, I'm very curious about that era right after the war. You must have known people that had fought in the war, had families—?

Zenna: Yes, who had died in the war.

Eugene: Fought and died.

Zenna: And we were really thankful that the war was over. We had been—you know everything had been rationed: shoes and clothing and sugar and gasoline. And I can remember we'd go months without buying a stick of gum or an all-day sucker or candy bar or anything because if we had ten cents it went into our—into the war stamps.

Eugene: Savings stamps.

Zenna: Savings stamps. But I think it felt really good to have the war over because it had been a really dreadful time. Because for a long time we didn't know exactly where we were going to end up—the country, that is.

Eugene: I think in an emotional, psychological sense that whether it was real or not, I think the people, at least in the area where we lived, and I think it was pretty much across the country, felt that it was a "do or die" war. You either won or you were going to lose big. And it wasn't just property and things like that. It was lifestyles. What you held dear on a personal basis was no longer going to exist if we lost. And so there was a sense of total commitment to the war, recognizing that it was possible that death could be the outcome. It was just accepted.

Zenna: People were so united.

Eugene: And they were.

Zenna: They were *so* united.

Eugene: As the war ended there was great jubilation because now we could start living again and experiencing and having some of the things that we hadn't been able to have during the war, but there were still kind of unknowns. I remember—as somebody just entering into the workforce in 1947—I felt that there was a heavy competition in two ways, because I was competing with a lot of servicemen that were now out of the military, going to school. They were getting their schooling paid for; I was having to pay for mine. And these were still the people that I was going to be competing with for jobs, and there was a bunch of them. And I really didn't have any idea what it was going to take to get a job, and I had great concerns for that. But sometimes things work out, you know.

Zenna: Yes, they usually do.

Eugene: I went to interview at First Security [Bank] through a job placement program that the business school had, and they had two positions open. I interviewed for both of them and decided I'd like to try the Trust Bookkeeper position. But it was literally entering into a whole new world of **[00:40:00]** education again because how they kept their books was just the opposite of what I had learned in business school—because you were on a fiduciary basis instead of an owner basis—and it took me a couple of months to get into that. One day I heard one of the Assistant Trust Officers remark to the Manager of the department, and I just happened to be close enough that I heard him say, Oh, I don't know that he's ever going to make it, and I thought, Yes, I am going to make it. And that really motivated me. And I did. And in short order, well, I was starting to even receive promotions, so sometimes you need to be jarred, I guess, a little bit.

"Be jarred," yes, I think so, especially at that age, don't you think?

Zenna: Yes.

Eugene: Yes.

Like the real world starts presenting itself to you.

Eugene: Yes. But that was a big concern.

Yes, and I'm curious about one thing. Back to the war, when you're saying "the way of life," are people thinking concretely, if the Germans, for example, win the war, that they will—or no, you're thinking the American way of life will be impacted because we will be conquered, we will be—I mean is it specific or is it just a generalized fear?

Eugene: No, it was a very specific fear because it didn't take very long to see what Germany was doing to the occupied countries in Europe. And if that were to be brought to the

United States it would totally destroy our system of government, our philosophies politically, personally, religiously, just about every way you can think.

Zenna: Well, the same thing with Japan, what they had been doing. In the *Life* magazines in 1939, the pictures and things of how they were slaughtering the Chinese people—which was just terrible—and you think, Boy, we certainly don't want those people over us. And so it was a real concern and there, for a period of time, it was real touch-and-go.

Well, you brought up the aspect of religious freedom, and this is just occurring to me as you talk, as members of a religious group that had been persecuted in this country, is that a particular fear that you have there as far as religious freedom is concerned that you might think other populations in the country might not have? I'm asking; I don't know.

Eugene: Yes. Actually the impact would've been totally—it wouldn't have made any difference what church you belonged to.

That's my question.

Zenna: Yes, I think it would've been for everybody.

Eugene: It would've been for everybody. It's just like how Russia, they just put thumbs down on any religious thing. Germany was the same way, and so for all practical purposes it would've wiped out organized religion of any kind. But human nature is interesting. It perseveres even under adverse circumstances.

Zenna: Yes.

So that's great. That will help sort of understand the era in which you two come of age and start your family is right postwar. And so then you start your family.

Zenna: OK, you want me to take it from there?

Yes, that's good.

Zenna: Well, it was—I came from a big family and I really wanted a big family. Eugene came from a small family and I think it was a little terrifying to him, but he became a part of our family from the time he was about fourteen or fifteen. And he loved my brothers and sisters and they really loved him. He was called "Brother Hugger" because he really liked to hug, and if not me he would always give my sisters a good hug. And they still call him "Brother Hugger." But my younger brothers and sisters think that he really was a brother in the family because he grew up with them.

[00:45:00] But we had just bought us a new bedroom set and we knew that that was probably the wrong thing to do because within a month of that time or right about the time we brought it home, I realized I was pregnant. And you know the rhythm method works really well, occasionally. And we were excited. We were really excited to have a baby. And I was able to work until about August of the next year.

And Lon came into the world with a really—he just about didn't make it. He was about beat to death by the time he came. He was pretty black and they put him right into a humidicrib and with oxygen. And I don't even remember hardly seeing him for a day. But he did survive and he was a beautiful child. And we were thoroughly delighted with him. We thought that we would wait a year or two before having another child, and if you nurse you don't get pregnant, you know? Well, that's a fallacy because I got pregnant very soon again, and our Julia was born a year later.

And they were the greatest of friends. He just always was such a good friend to her. He always would hold her hand when they'd go anywhere or put his arm around her, and he very often would tell, if some of the boys called to want him to play, he'd say,

Well, I have somebody.

And they said, Well, who? you know.

And he'd say, `Well, I have Julia`.

And they'd kind of scoff. But they were very good friends. They were *extremely* close. They were almost like twins.

And it was a good time. We had them, we went three years, and then we had two more children and they were a year apart, and they weren't always good friends. But they have learned to be good friends as the years go by. So we had Lonnie and Julia and Melissa and Kevin at that point. And that takes us up to—.

Eugene: Nineteen fifty-four.

Zenna: Nineteen fifty-four. OK.

Eugene: Oh no, no, it's more than that. It's 1955.

Zenna: Nineteen fifty-five. Kevin was born, so it takes us to 1956.

Eugene: Yes.

Zenna: Yes, and this is the year that Lon became ill. And we didn't—he had always been a happy child. In May or June of that year he started having *terrible* nosebleeds and he would just bleed and bleed no matter what we did and then he'd swallow it. And we'd have a dishpan like this [demonstrating] and finally by the time he was through it almost filled the dishpan with what he had thrown up, and the doctors had no idea what it was. They didn't know. As you read about fallout, that's one of the first things that people do is they have extreme bleeding from their noses. We talked with the doctors and they just didn't know what it was. And in the fall he became very agitated and cranky, and it wasn't normal for him. We talked to his school teacher and she said, `Well, you know, seven-year-old children get like this. They do this`. And she said, `Just help him more with his studies and things so he'll feel better`. He thought he was too little and not smart enough and he was just in a real slump. And

so we did help him. My brother Marvin was living with us and all three of us helped him more with his words and flash cards and things. And he had gotten a bicycle and all the boys and girls could ride their bicycles but he couldn't. If we put him on the bicycle he could pedal, but he could not get on or off of a bicycle. And it was very distressful. We didn't know what was the matter. And he said, I just can't. My leg just won't do that. It won't go up over the bicycle. And of course we didn't realize at that time he had a large growth in his abdomen. And so we said, Well, we'll put the bike away until next spring. And so we did. We put the bike away and you know we took them in in October for their final shots that they get and we told them, you know, Once you get these shots, you're not **[00:50:00]** going to have to worry about any diseases except, you know, maybe leukemia, which was just in the back of *my* mind a lot that fall.

Eugene: I look back—.

Zenna: He didn't want—let me just finish that a little bit. He didn't want to have his shot. He screamed and yelled and he said, I don't want any shots. I can't take any shots. But we finally did get him to take the shot, and then he felt bad because he had been so irritable about it. But we did go on home and I think we both had some difficult feelings about him that summer and in the fall. I'll let Gene tell you the one that he had with him.

Eugene: Well, at this period of time that Zenna's talking about, leukemia was—.

Zenna: Getting rampant.

Eugene: Kind of coming on stream because there would be obits of children periodically.

Zenna: Weekly.

Eugene: Yes, fairly frequently.

In your—the Salt Lake area?

Zenna: In Salt Lake.

Eugene: In the Salt Lake area, yes. And so it was one of those things where we knew that there wasn't any cure for leukemia, but we had done shots for everything that we could do for all of the other diseases that they normally tried to immunize against.

The other incident that Zenna was referring to was I did pheasant hunting. And this was something that Lon had wanted to do going back probably three years before, when we were living in an apartment on North State Street, which was about halfway up the hill toward the capitol building. This would've been about 1953. I'd gone pheasant hunting and I hadn't got anything and when I got home

Lon said, Daddy, did you get some birds?

And I said, No.

Daddy, didn't you get even one little bird?

But anyway in November of 1956, I took him on the first pheasant hunt with me. We had hunted the fields throughout the morning and then we had some friends down in the area, whose property we hunted on and they'd fixed a nice big lunch for us, and so we went and had lunch. And then after lunch, well, I said, Well, let's go out and do a little more hunting. So we started out and I was explaining how the birds would hide and what you had to do to get them out and all of this and he said, Dad, I'm too tired. I think I need to go back to the house and lay down for a while.

And I said, OK, Lon, that's fine, because trekking all morning through fields is a tiring proposition. But I just had the thought come to me that I probably would not be hunting with him again. And you know, you have thoughts pop into your mind and a lot of times, probably most of the time, they have no real relevancy. But this one was just kind of—you try to get this kind of

thinking out of your mind, you try to think of other things, but it was one of those pervasive things.

Yes, I know what you're saying.

Eugene: So I'll let you pick up. **[00:55:00]**

Zenna: OK. We would've liked to have gone to Idaho with our family for Thanksgiving, but our car didn't have good tires and it was stormy and we decided that we would just have to stay in Salt Lake. We had a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner and we were all together. We decided that was what was really important. And then in the afternoon, our daughter Julia became very ill and started running a high temperature and I thought—well, I just kept having this feeling that one of them was going to go. And I told my mother and she said, No, she said, don't do that, she said, You lost a sister at this– You—I lost a sister at this particular time also when I was eight years old and her name was Julia.

So anyway it took about two weeks for Julia to get better. She was *very* ill. And Santa Claus was coming to town and the children wanted to go see Santa Claus and I said, Well, your dad, he was either at work with the car or whatever, and I said, There's no way. I can't leave Julia here alone and Lon, I said, We'll just have to—maybe there'll be another time we'll get to see Santa Claus. And he says, Mommy, he said, I know if I don't see him this time I'll never see him again. And I thought, What is going on, you know, with this little boy?

But about a week later, it was my birthday on December 2, and we were having company for dinner that evening and he started throwing up. December 2 was the beginning of the last little while for him. And he just threw up and threw up and we went through a bottle of Amitrol and ice chips and everything. And our company did come. He did do pretty good for a couple of

hours and then he started up again after they left. And we went from December 2 to December 6 and it was just up and down.

He said, `I'm feeling better this morning.`

And I said, `Then jump off the bunk bed.`

And he said, `Mommy, I can't. I can't do that.`

And he had—they call you different things at different times, and he had started calling me Mommy instead of Mom or Mother. And so I helped him. And then when he got off the bed, he just fell to the floor. This went on for several days, and he was pretty good and then not good, but he threw up so much. And finally on December 6 he was really bad again and I said, `Well, I've got to take him to the doctor`. But it had snowed a lot and I just—I was so distressed. We had two little children that the neighbor lady would take care of, and Julia had gone to kindergarten, but I needed to take him. And for one thing—I had my hair up in curlers—and he was so sick, I knew I had to take him *then*. So in my pedal pushers and my hair up in curlers, why, we called a cab to go up to the doctor. And he says—it was Christmas money that we had to use to call the cab—and he said, `Oh Mommy, he said, I'll have to pay that money back`. And I said, `No, don't worry about it`. Our children were always conscious of money. We didn't have a lot of money, but they had their little allowances and they did things to earn money. They didn't suffer, but they didn't grow up in an affluent home where there was all the money that you need. And so when we got to the doctor's office and they did the white count, the doctor said, `Oh, you know, there's something really wrong here`. He said, `I need you to go over to the hospital to see Dr. P.M. Howard`, and they called and made the arrangements. And we went over. We took a cab again, went to the hospital, which was not very far, and the doctor said, `Jump up on the table`. And he said, `I can't`, and the doctor

was really gruff with him. And I thought, you know, You don't need to be gruff with a little boy that can't climb on the table. But as soon as he examined him, I could hear him talking to someone else and he said, Oh, he said, this appendix is as big as a big **[01:00:00]** lemon, and you know appendixes aren't big as lemons. But he came out and he said,

We need to do surgery immediately.

And I said, Well, I don't want to do surgery here. I want to go to the hospital I *normally* go to, which is the LDS hospital.

And he said, I do my surgeries here. I don't go to other hospitals.

I didn't realize that he was the head doctor there and so the doctor called and talked to Gene and I thought, Oh, if I could just get home and get straightened up. I don't—you know I'm in curlers. But they told Gene he needed to come. We thought the surgery would be about an hour, and after two hours we were just beside ourselves, and finally a doctor came and said,

You need to come and talk with Dr. Howard.

And we said, Well, is everything OK?

And they said, You just need to talk to the doctor.

So when we went in, on a table, on a slab, was this big mound of what they had taken out of him. And they said that he was very ill. This was a lymphosarcoma that only grows in adults, never in children. And they said, He does not have very much chance to live. They were very, very point-blank with us.

And they said, Now if it hasn't gone through the bloodstream he might have, you know, maybe a 25 percent chance to live.

And I said, Well, do you know if it's gone through the bloodstream?

And the doctor, he pointed to another doctor and he said, He can tell you.

And he said, Yes, it's gone through the bloodstream.

And they really suspected that there would be a high case of leukemia also. So they said—he had closed off so that they couldn't even get a straw through his intestines. This was what was causing the extreme illness and throwing up and weakness. And they said that they had taken out, what? They had taken out the lymphosarcoma.

Eugene: Well, and then a section along the bowel and taken out the growth. And they sewed that back together and then they were doing the other testing for if there was leukemia and what kind it was.

Zenna: So they told us to go and wait in his room and he would be back, but they didn't think he would be able to live through the night, which was devastating. We couldn't even look at each other. We'd cry. But we did go back to the room and eventually they brought him back and he was all fixed up with all kinds of paraphernalia. And he did live through the night. We have a wonderful family. They all came around and supported us and helped us. And Eugene's father said, `You know that's strange`, he said, `I dreamed last night that I saw Lonnie on a cloud that went by`, and he said, `There was a three plus four on the cloud`. And I thought, Well, Lon's only six, but what he was thinking was that Lon was going to die. And different ones in the family would do some staying with him. He was pretty much comatose for several days. We were in there on the sixth. He didn't want shots. He was terrible about shots. He would just say, `Please don't give me shots. I'm too tired. I'm too sick. I can't take shots anymore.` And he had never been like this. The doctor wouldn't let us to do anything that would indicate that we thought he might die or do things that would indicate that we were going to do something for him early for Christmas, because he said, `He's a smart little boy.` But my sister had taken the other three children to see Santa Claus.

Eugene: Had one downtown at one of the department stores.

Zenna: And all of them were very—the children were kind of weepy and sad and they asked him, you know, because children should be happy when they sit on Santa's lap. And my sister who is a nurse told him that their brother was in the hospital with leukemia and would probably **[01:05:00]** not live very long. So the Santa Claus called the hospital and said he wanted to come and see Lonnie and bring gifts to him and they said, No, he cannot. He can come and see all the children. Then if he wants to send the gifts to the house, fine, but he has to treat all the children the same. And Santa Claus did come and Lon said, I didn't think I'd ever see you again. But the children were all happy in the room because he went around and spoke to all the little children, and he told Lon he would be sending him some things, and I don't know what he told the other children.

By the seventeenth he was starting to do a little better, but the doctors said, you know, Get him a TV and let him have whatever he wants to eat. Eugene's mother was a marvelous cook and she came and made buttermilk pancakes for him, but he couldn't eat them. He could eat the pumpkin pie, but things that he'd be just *wanting* so much he just couldn't do it.

And the nineteenth was his birthday and we decided that we needed to do a little party up there. We got cookies for all the children and he had—.

Eugene: And didn't Anna do a cake?

Zenna: And Anna, our sister that's a nurse, did a beautiful cake. And then we didn't know what to do for him for his birthday. What he'd *really* wanted was a bow-and-arrow set, and he was only going to be seven and we didn't think that that was appropriate but we had one. Eugene had already bought one for him. And we decided, you know, what the heck? Let him have his bow-and-arrow set. And so we took the bow-and-arrow set and the children gave him a boat that you did in the water, a big boat, and he was *so* delighted with that. And his little brother gave him a "Happy Birthday To You" thing you wind up, and Lon couldn't believe it. He says, That

says Happy Birthday to Lonnie, and we said, Yes, it really does. And the children had not been able to come in to see him but the doctor said they could stand out at the windows and say hi to him, which they did. And they were really excited to see him. They had been staying all month with my sister who's—well, not just with our sister who's a nurse but with a neighbor lady across the street who did our laundry and everything else.

But Lon was really quite good. He was getting off the bed and moving around and when the doctor came in we said, Could we take him home? And he said, Sure, why not? Of course I knew that there wouldn't be a lot of days. And so he said, Let us take the stitches out and then you can take him home. So we were able to load him up and take him home on his birthday, and it took about three or four trips because he had had so many things sent to him. And Gene drove down by the Christmas lights and everything, and he was *so* surprised that he was going to get to see the Christmas things because he had been afraid he might not get to do that. He had no idea of his condition. But the little neighbor boy from across the street that was his best friend, Cory, came and their family came and visited, and Lon was happy to go to bed in his own little bed.

And he had the most marvelous prayers that he gave. It was almost incredible, the type of a *person* that he was. He didn't want to do any wrong, and he gave wonderful prayers so that other children would know what Christmas was all about, and it was really quite unique.

Then a couple of days later a neighbor man came to the house and he just very loudly said, There's no reason that child has to die! We can take him to Texas. We can get him on the grape diet. And Lon was sitting there and his eyes just went huge and he stood up and that was the first that he knew that he was going to die. And we'd've liked to have throttled that man. **[01:10:00]** And I think probably the next day or two in the morning, when

Gene took him in, he started the throwing up all over again the next day. And he asked Gene, he said, `Daddy, am I going to die?` And Eugene said, `You know, Lonnie, we're all going to die sometime.` And that's all he wanted to know.

And he had wanted a little train for Christmas. As he said, he didn't need a big one, he just wanted a little electric train, and we did have a train for him. And so Christmas morning when they got up, why, he said, `Could you and I go do the train for a while?` Everybody else was still asleep. He had been throwing up. And so Gene went in with him and they played with the train for a while.

We had spent Christmas Eve with my sister out at Magna and her husband—they had fixed a lovely dinner, but Lon was in *such* pain, he kept trying to pull his teeth out. I mean he was disintegrating, and was trying to pull his teeth out. And we didn't stay very long. And there were times when all he could eat or drink would be like lemonade, pink lemonade, or root beer or a piece of meat and he'd call, `Meat! Meat!` you know, and it would seem to relieve him. But he reached a point by Christmas that he wasn't consuming much of anything and he became very bloated. And we had gone to my brother's home but he couldn't eat.

We took him home and I think the following day we still had him home. He wouldn't keep any clothes on. He was just very, very sick. It shouldn't have been progressing like it did, according to the doctors. They thought he'd live for several months. And so we called the doctor and he said, `You'd better bring him back`. And when we got him in there he talked with us and he said, `You won't take him home again`.

So he lived from—I mean the illness when it was real apparent was from the second to the twenty-ninth of December, which is not many days. And when they did the autopsy, everything had exploded in his stomach, in his internal—it disintegrated, all his internal organs.

And the doctor said, We've never seen anything like this. We don't know what this is. But as the months went by, then it became apparent there were children in southern Utah, but Lon hadn't been in southern Utah, so there was no way he could have this, according to everybody.

There were children in southern Utah that had the same things happening to them?

Zenna: Had the same things happening to them. But Lonnie hadn't been there, so there's no way that he could've been affected. So you know you think there has to be a relationship, but nobody was owning up to any relationship.

And it was interesting when our children went in to see him in his casket, the one little girl that was three said, Oh, he's not gone anymore. He's right here. He's right here. And she used to talk to him on the telephone. She would play and she would talk to him, and after about three months, why, she said, Oh, you're not coming back. And she had this little conversation: OK. Goodbye. Everything's OK. You know, little children are very interesting.

We told our children that he was fine, he was in Heaven, everything was OK, we didn't need to cry. And that was our biggest mistake because we had told them we didn't need to cry. So if we started to cry, they'd say, well, you know, We don't need to cry. He's OK. So then we didn't—we couldn't hug them without crying, so we quit crying and we quit hugging. And that was a terrible disservice to our children, because you shouldn't do that. You should cry until you're tired of crying and let them know it's OK to cry. But there wasn't any help in those days.

No, it was really a different time, wasn't it?

Zenna: Nobody helped you. You just had to be strong and go on.

And people really believed that then that, you know, that that showing of emotion somehow made **[01:15:00]** *it harder for the suffering person, for the people that were upset that loved them. It was just really a misunderstanding, but we all did it. Everybody was like that then.*

It was a terrible misunderstanding. And Gene was not able to deal with it, which a lot of us don't.

Zenna: And so he shelved it for about forty years. And he was always a wonderful father, great with me, great with the children, but it's a terrible burden. It was a terrible burden to have not grieved and worked this out with our children, but we didn't know. And so you do the best you can.

You do, and I mean the wonderful thing about you, I can tell already, is that you're doing something different now, which some people never do. And you're honest enough to be able to look at it squarely in the face, which is unusual, I would say.

Zenna: Well, I don't know. Our daughter, the one who lives here in Las Vegas, took our Christmas movies from 1949 to 1990 and she did just the Christmas and the births of the children, which all kind of came about the same time as Christmas because we would do one roll of film a year or something like this. My brother would loan us his camera. But she wanted all the children and the grandchildren to know the order of this family, that there was Lon and Julia and Melissa and Kevin and Cindy and Laurie and Jonathan, because nobody—the three younger ones, and actually Melissa and Kevin didn't remember a whole lot. But she did this so the children could see his birth and right up to the time, the day or two before he dies. And Eugene had taken some pictures on Christmas Day and I thought, Oh, that's a bad thing to do because everybody will know we are devastated, we are so sad. And you know what? The pictures are lovely. And we were not looking devastated and sad, because people can't see into your soul all the time.

No, they can't.

Zenna: No. But it was interesting. We had a nephew that died a few years ago at age five, and we suggested they get counseling for their family and she said, `We don't need it`. A few years later she said, `Every one of our children have suffered. We should have had some help`. And we know children die. I mean we know children die. We just don't want them to die due to somebody not doing what we felt should've been right where the fallout was concerned.

Let me stop this here because we're getting close to the end.

Zenna: OK.

[01:18:02] End Track 2, Disk 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 1, Disk 2.

UNLV Nevada Test Site Oral History Project, interview with Zenna and Eugene Bridges, disk number two, June 12, 2004, conducted by Mary Palevsky in Las Vegas, Nevada.

[00:00:17] End Track 1, Disk 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disk 2.

OK.

Eugene: Her father, my grandmother's father, Grandmother Nebeker, her father was Lanfear—Ernest Devere Lanfear was his name—and for many years all we had was a story by word of mouth of where he came from, which was back in Iowa. And one year I got the bug to see if I could locate anything on him because the only other thing that we had besides oral history, so to speak—which was not very accurate but you don't know that at the time—was a letter that he had written to his wife. And it was the most—the sweetest letter. It was during the

period of time when he was prospecting for gold on a little tributary that went into the Snake River up in Idaho. But he was separated from his family; his family was living elsewhere.

Anyway, I did some research and I just couldn't find him. I couldn't find any record of any kind indicating that he was in this Marshalltown, Iowa where he was supposed to have been born. Well, I kind of set it aside, and then Zenna started taking a class on genealogy and as their final project they had to do an original research thing.

And I said, Zenna, why don't you research, see what you can find if anything on this great-grandfather of mine.

[Zenna] Well, I've got some ancestors I'd like to work on.

And I thought, Well, I know but I just feel that this is kind of important to do this. So she consented to do it and started researching and man, this woman is—when she commits to something, well, she does it. Anyway, she came up with a binder full of notes about that thick [demonstrating], about an inch-and-a-half thick, and couldn't locate him.

So we had a friend that was a professional genealogist, and so we made arrangements to get together with her and told her that we had this letter that he had written to his wife. And she said, I'll come down. And she did, so we went over this.

Zenna: The letter said—.

Eugene: The letter was addressed to "My Dearest of Wives."

Zenna: "My Dearest and Most Precious of Wives."

Eugene: And she said, Have you looked at any other possibilities of other wives? And we hadn't. But she said, I *really* think you're going to find that he had other wives. Now he was not a Mormon and he was not into polygamy. Well, Zenna went back to the records and guess what? She found him, located down in central Utah in a little town

down there, but married to a different woman. When she researched that out, she found that there were descendants from that first wife that lived in Salt Lake that were our contemporaries. And so she prepared a list of questions and located these people in the telephone book and started making calls, and you pick it up there.

Zenna: Well, the oldest one that I talked to, I think his name was Orlando and he said, Well, the youngest one is into genealogy; you should call him. His name was Eldon Carter. And I called him and I asked him all these different questions that I had and I wanted to write down and make sure I'd covered all the bases.

And when we were done he said, You know, he was my **[00:05:00]** grandfather. And he drowned in the Colorado River. And we said, Well, our grandfather drowned in the Snake River. And we did more research and we found out that he had had another wife in between, and with that one he had drowned in the Green River. The thing is, he was an expert swimmer and diver, and when he got tired of what was going on he would pretend a drowning; they would never find him. And then he would move on. The first two women felt that he was alive, and the first one invited the second one, who had two boys, to come live with her and her three girls, but they didn't ever do that.

Eugene: They'd settled in California, hadn't they? Ultimately.

Zenna: I think the second wife. But we then contacted quite a number of the other people on that genealogy sheet and they all had different stories to tell us about this wonderful grandfather that drowned. He was taking a ferry across the river and he drowned, but he had moved on. Now when we told the family what we had found, they were very irate with us because they had had him on a pedestal. They didn't want anything to look bad, and they were a little bit distressed with us.

Eugene: Yes, we had some that were very distressed.

Zenna: We kept searching and we never found *him* after the Green River, but we have been able to go back about four or five generations. We found his father who was in the early part of the Civil War and then we went back two or three more generations. It's been interesting. It was, you know, *so* interesting. He was a talented man, but he married Mormon women and they didn't like his drinking and finally he would get tired of them nagging, so he would move on.

Eugene: He was a man of many talents in that he did a lot of prospecting.

Zenna: Gold.

Eugene: He was musically inclined and made his own guitars. He was a—.

Zenna: He made shoes.

Eugene: Made shoes. So he could do a number of different things but he lived a very different lifestyle from what society would normally accept.

Zenna: I located him and his first wife in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and in the Catholic Church records I found the daughter, Caroline. Through this we were able to move on. But he was prospecting for gold. The records from some of the family said he had a lot of gold and three Mexicans jumped him to try and take it.

Eugene: This is when he was coming back to Santa Fe.

Zenna: And he killed all three of them. So then when he got to his home, he got word that a mob was after him, so he loaded his wife and the child in a wagon with a horse and a cow pulling it and went into—.

Eugene: Back up into central Utah.

Zenna: Into central Utah.

What a story.

Zenna: We have quite a number of wonderful stories on him. But anyway—

Wow. The marvelous thing—well, many interesting things about that story but the way you said it, well, he drowned in this river, and then he drowned in this river, and then he drowned—that's so amazing that he did that. That's really amazing.

Eugene: Well, that was his way of escaping and—.

Zenna: Moving on. Moving on.

Eugene: Moving on, and you didn't have to move very far on to start a new life.

Zenna: But you would've thought he'd have changed his name but he didn't.

Maybe he didn't need to.

Eugene: We have been trying to locate him since his supposed demise in the Snake River. And we haven't located him yet, but if we ever get to the point that the census data comes to light within certain periods of years, then we think we may be able to find him. But at this point that's not part of public records yet. And I have a sneaking suspicion he probably moved on into Oregon. Who knows? **[00:10:00]**

Interesting. That's interesting. OK, well, thanks for that. You know, one thing that just strikes me talking to you is how much family history there is connected, you know, to the different parts of the territory of what we call the West and the Southwest, so that adds to that.

There were a couple of things we had left before we took our break. You had begun to talk to me about how the forty years before you started thinking about your son's death again. There were three things that struck me. You told me a little bit about how the doctor told you to write things down. And then you had begun a story, Eugene, about some things related to the Church, I guess. You started a story about that, something that happened after your son's death?

Zenna: Oh, you were talking about the gentleman in our sister ward.

Eugene: Oh. Oh yes.

So let's start with that and then I want to sort of pick up those other things.

Eugene: All right. Well, as you can appreciate, you have strong emotions, strong feelings following the death of a child. And it's one where I suspect that most everybody comes down to the question, `Why? Why did this happen?` And it becomes particularly pertinent if it's not due to natural causes. We didn't know whether it *was* due to natural causes or something else, but we *did* know that there was an epidemic of leukemic deaths in the area. But the bishop of this other congregation that met in the same building that we met in, one day after Lon's death I was talking with him and he said, `You're just feeling sorry for yourself. He's OK and so shape up.` And it just really hit me. He was a man that was very—kind of an abrupt person, very much in charge type of person, and he told it like he saw it. And that didn't particularly set very well with me and I thought, Well, maybe if it had been *your* son instead of mine, maybe you wouldn't feel that way. But it was just one of those passing things and I didn't dwell on it or anything like that but it was kind of a little bit of a shock in the sense that everybody that we'd encountered was very—everyone was very solicitous, very compassionate. He was just the opposite of that. And so it was one of those life experiences.

Those are hard things to deal with, I think, those kinds of things when people say things like that.

Zenna: It's a lot better to just give a person a hug or just say, `I'm sorry,` rather than to offer them a lot of advice. Although I do remember very clearly my mother-in-law saying, `You know, this is hard but you will have things that will be more painful than this in your life.` And I said to myself, `Not if I live a million years.` But you know what? She was right. There *were* things that came into our life that we didn't have control of

either that were painful. It happens in everybody's if you have a big family. But it's better if people don't offer such cryptic things.

Yes. I'm curious about you're seeing that there are leukemias reported and so this is 1956, is this right, 1956, '57?

Eugene: Yes, starting along about '55 there began to be—.

Zenna: All the time in the paper.

Eugene: Frequently obituary notices of children dying from leukemia and it was obvious that **[00:15:00]** something was happening but you didn't know why. There was nothing forthcoming from the health authorities, either statewide or federal government-wide. There was nothing coming from the political world. There was nothing coming from the Church. So people were in a vacuum.

Are you thinking back then—you said a couple of minutes ago, this notion of whether it was natural or there's some cause of it. Are you thinking that way back then when your son dies, that there something—?

Eugene: Well, the first indication of that was when the doctor said, Hey, we haven't seen this before. We don't know what's causing this, you know, if it's background radiation or if it's some other kind of carcinogen. We just don't know. We've never seen it.

But he didn't use that *language, did he, or—did he talk about different carcinogens?*

Eugene: No, no, he didn't. He just said that we have medically—both doctors said, We just haven't seen this kind of thing in a child before.

And I guess if you're the parents grieving that death, you're looking for some kind of explanation and answer.

Zenna: Answer!

Eugene: Yes, because you are asking that Why? Question. And like I say, if it's something that's beyond your control that is occurring naturally, then you have to accept that. But if it's something that is *caused*, then that's a different—.

When he asked you, Zenna, to write things down, what do you think—why did he do that, the doctor do that?

Zenna: I know exactly why he did. I had a read a little story in the *Reader's Digest* of an illness and the people had written the events about it, and I was very impressed with this and I mentioned this to the doctor. And he said, Yes, it would be really important for you to keep notes and write down what occurs here, you know, it will be helpful to you. And I learned that over and over again. If something's bothering you or if there's an event, the thing to do is to write it out and then you can put aside. But I would go through all the events of his life, you know, daily and then pretty soon I thought, Well, you know, I don't remember some things. So I really need to write them down. And I did take time. I've got the little notebook yet that I wrote all of this down, and it was a help to me even though I would read it maybe once a year and then it was too devastating. And Gene never wanted to read it. My mother wrote a beautiful little story about Lon and a horse that died at the same time, that the children all had loved this horse named Babe, and she wrote this story down, and it helped the cousins to think that not only did Lon go but Babe went and there would be some comfort in this.

Our children had lots of good questions and answers, but as I've said before we didn't know how to deal with it like we really should have dealt with it, which would've been helpful. Gene said that if he had tried to deal with it at that time he would've burst into a million pieces. He had to shelve it because he had to earn a living. He had to finish his education. He had to take care of all of us. And so he just had to put it aside until the time came that he could think about it. Thirty years after Lon died I went away for—was it thirty years or ten years? Well, about

thirty years. I went away for two or three days and wrote again. I wrote my memoirs, and they're included in the book [*The Forgotten Patriots: The Abuse of Power During the Cold War*, Unpublished]. I did this, thinking about what had happened, how strong I'd been then, what I needed to do, and my feelings, and how the children were reacting and what I felt was, you know, detrimental. And then our daughter—all of our children except one read the story, and the one never—that was David Kevin. He would never look at it. My one son-in-law said, You **[00:20:00]** know, you really need to send this in to *Reader's Digest* or something. And our daughter and her husband, he borrowed the book.

Eugene: Eldest daughter.

Zenna: Oldest daughter.

Eugene: Julia.

Zenna: Julia and her husband. They borrowed the book and then he wrote it up and put it in a lovely folder for her, because she was trying to figure out, you know, why she still felt like she was lost. She had come to us and she said, You know, Mom and Dad, I didn't just lose Lon; I lost both of you. And she said, you know—and we thought we did the best job we knew how and we didn't feel that we lost her, but she stayed in a state of depression well into her teenage [years]. She never laughed anymore. Lon and Julia were the laughingest kids, and all of our children were. They were happy and laughing and they just really had enjoyed each other, but she felt that we weren't there for her anymore and that's because we didn't hug her anymore, or not very much, and we didn't talk about these things and she wanted to talk. But they had said, If everything's OK, then we'll just move on. But he did this very beautifully for her and he brought it to our house on Christmas Day in 1996. And everybody

looked at it, and they didn't all read it but they all looked at it. And then Eugene decided that it was time for him to look at it. Do you want to take it?

Eugene: Yes. I did make that decision that it was time to look at it. One thing that helped me following the event was in 1957 my boss at the bank asked me if I would be interested in attending a graduate school of trust banking. And there were three of those schools across the country and the one that I was concerned with was the one at the University of Washington. I said, Yes, I would be interested but I don't have my undergraduate degree yet. I have my business school and I have taken all these classes. He said, Well, let me see what I can do. And between my work experience and what schooling I had, even though I didn't have the diploma, they were able to get me into that graduate school. And that was one that kept me involved very heavily. There was a two-week residency session, but in between every month we had to address certain problems that the instructors would send out. And there were instructors in various areas of the school of the trust business, so it covered investments, it covered fiduciary responsibility, and on and on like that. Finally, probably by 1958, the heaviness that I felt finally started to lift a little bit. And by 1959 when I graduated, I was beginning to feel like my old self. But I still didn't have any inclination to go back and relive that event. And so when our daughter Julia and her husband brought this over, this book over, on Christmas 1996, at that point in time, I decided that probably **[00:25:00]** I could address it. And so I spent the rest of the day reading it. I read it that afternoon and—.

Zenna: Cried the whole time, which was good.

Eugene: Decided that I probably ought to write my memoirs, my impression or impressions of the event. And so I did that and even though our daughter and her husband had

done a masterful job in putting this into book form and into a binder, a beautiful binder and everything, I saw areas that needed a little editing.

Zenna: Oh yes! He's so good.

Eugene: Not to change anything but just editing from the standpoint of spelling, grammar, punctuation, that type of thing. So I asked both our daughter and Zenna if it would be all right if I went through it and cleaned it up a little bit, which they consented to my doing that. And as I went through that—well, let me backtrack just a little bit. In 1977 Dr. [Joseph L.] Lyon at the University of Utah did a study on the relationship of the radioactive fallout and the death of children in Utah. And they called us and requested approval to include Lon in that study.

In 1977.

Eugene: In 1977. He did another study in '78 which was really to confirm what he and his staff had come up with in 1977, because he didn't believe initially that there was any relationship. And a lot of that belief was undoubtedly founded on what was coming out of the AEC [U.S. Atomic Energy Commission]. But their study very graphically showed that there was a relationship. So in seventy-eight he went through the entire study personally and came up with absolutely the same conclusions.

He concluded that there was a relationship?

Eugene: Yes. And the only thing that we knew, of course, was that he had requested to use, to have Lon as one of the people in that study. But it then kind of triggers your thinking, Gee, I wonder if there *could* be a relationship? Well, we never got the results of the study. As far as I know, nobody did. It wasn't until one of the local newspapers up there came out indicating that Dr. Lyon's study was showing that there quite possibly was some relationship between the

fallout and leukemia deaths of children. Well, typical to form, the government came out with a refutation of that position. And for many years there was a—.

Zenna: It was just a see-saw. It was just a see-saw.

Eugene: Yes, for many years there was a denial by not only the AEC but by the Public Health Service, the federal Public Health Service, that there was any fallout that came over Salt Lake. And then they finally said, `Well, yes, maybe there was some fallout but it was minimal, it would not have any effect on the people`. Then, as we got down the line, there're just little bits and pieces like this that got us wondering. And when our daughter came to us in 1997, Julia, she had **[00:30:00]** done a paper for a class she was in at the University of Utah on the nuclear fallout from the Nevada testing. And she came to us and said, `Are you aware that there may have been a connection between the fallout and Lonnie's death?` We said, `Well, we've wondered about that over the years but we've never seen anything definite one way or another`. And quite frankly we had not made any positive effort to try to locate anything either. But if you have something of that magnitude affecting the public, you kind of anticipate that *somebody* in the government—federal, state, health services, political—somebody's going to bring this out. Never happened. It just never happened.

So she gave us the names of some books that she had picked up from the library that had a lot of information on this. So I checked out one book. It was a book by [John Grant] Fuller entitled *The Day We Bombed Utah* [New American Library,1984]. And I read that and—

Zenna: What did you do with the book, dear? He was so angry, he just—.

Eugene: I became so incensed at what I was reading.

Zenna: At what we were reading, that he just threw it. Yes, he just [threw] each of the books.

Eugene: Because it was—essentially Fuller's book covers the sheep men's tragedy of the loss of their sheep. But if it's happening to sheep, it's happening to people.

And anyway there was that, and then in 1997, the National Cancer Institute came out with a study, not voluntarily but only because it was found that there was a study going on and somebody had leaked the information to the press. And the public picked up on that, like the Downwinders and—well, that was the main group, I guess, at the time. Anyway, they published a study and we wrote and requested a copy of the study. Well, we received a summarized report from the National Cancer Institute and it showed several things. One was that Salt Lake *did* receive a substantial amount of fallout. Overall it was probably the heaviest hit in the entire state, and consequently in the entire country. Now, the thing you have to gauge that by is the fact that fallout—we tend to think of things in a finite sense and there are different types of fallout. Initially in short distances away from the test site, the heavy pieces of the particulate that's in the fallout will come down, and that's what happened to the St. George area, for example, and even up into Cedar City. As you get further away, then you're dealing with the finer particulate, and some amount of it is just like mist. That is still radioactive and it still has the same power as the other fallout and as the other particulate. So what was happening to Utah, and Salt Lake City in particular, was while St. George may have received the initial heavy fallout material, Salt Lake was receiving the finer material. But Salt Lake happened to be on the established track that the AEC used when they fired a shot. In other words, they had made a positive selection that the **[00:35:00]** shots would not be fired unless they were going north, northeast, or east.

The wind, you mean?

Eugene: Yes, because of the wind. They didn't want to contaminate Las Vegas, they didn't want to contaminate Los Angeles, but it was OK to contaminate Utah. And as you look at your

trajectory maps, there's one map that covers all of the shots that had atmospheric fallout, and Utah is nearly totally blackened by that fallout.

Now the Salt Lake area is critical from the standpoint that they had a number of shots that dropped fallout on Salt Lake and it was within relatively short periods of time. Now radioactivity is cumulative. And I found that you have four major radionuclides that exist in fission fallout, and you had fission fallout from the first bombs and then you had fission fallout from the hydrogen bombs, because fission bombs were used as triggers to do the hydrogen bombs.

So anyway, after getting this report and seeing how the National Cancer Institute was viewing this, Salt Lake was a very heavy fallout area. And what they addressed further was the fact that iodine-131 was a critical radionuclide in this fallout. The thing was, there were three other major—or you could even say four, but three in particular—major radionuclides in this fallout that they didn't even address. One of them was strontium-90. Another was cesium-137. Another was plutonium, and there were about three isotopes of plutonium that were dangerous. OK, the iodine-131, as you may or may not know, it gets absorbed very readily into the thyroid and particularly in children, for some reason the—children's thyroids, I guess, are more active and they absorb it more than adults. Strontium-90, it replaces calcium in the bones. It has a characteristic to do that. Cesium-137 does somewhat the same thing; it replaces potassium. Plutonium, that one is very insidious and what it does, it goes into the tissues and destroys the tissues. Hence you have a disintegration of the organs.

So it didn't address any of those and so there were a lot of questions between our daughter and her report and this report that we received from the National Cancer Institute. I then made the decision, I've got to find out then if there is, number one, what was the nature of the fallout that came over Salt Lake and was it really dangerous? If it was, was this a possible

contributory factor to the death of our son? If these things exist, the public is in a vacuum as far as knowledge of what has happened, and the public ought to know of this. And quite honestly, when I started out on this there was no intention of doing a research project. I did write up about **[00:40:00]** a dozen pages that were reactionary pages to what I had read in Fuller's book. But then after I cooled off and started looking at things more objectively I decided, Well, I probably ought to look further and see what else is out there and see if I can determine a little bit of just what happened.

And so I started that basically by going to a couple of other books. One was Carole Gallagher's book [*American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War*, MIT Press 1993] where she had done a seven-year oral study of people that ostensibly were affected by the fallout. And interestingly enough, when I looked at that book, there were two people in that book, one that was a close friend and another one that I knew that were involved in it. And I knew they had health problems but I didn't know the nature of their health problems. And so anyway, that was a little bit—.

First, when you said about the reaction you have to Fuller's book, so reading it you're thinking that you're really seeing some sort of correlation? That's your immediate reaction or—?

Eugene: Well, I'll tell you what upset me was the arrogance of the government people. You see, when those ranchers finally got what sheep were left to Cedar City, there'd been aborted births, there'd been outright deaths, and they were still dying in Cedar. They lost over forty-two hundred head of sheep. When it was first looked at, it was looked at by local veterinarians and by two *government* veterinarians who all concluded that, yes, radioactivity from shot Nancy contributed to this. The government was not satisfied with that, so they released their two government people and sent out another team that was headed up by a fellow by the

name of [Paul B.] Pearson. And this was the thing that just really upset me. These men were talking to ranchers that had been in the sheep business all of their life, and they were trying to tell them that it's not radioactivity; it is the range conditions and it is malnutrition that's causing this. Well, you don't have the kind of reactions like sheep just all of a sudden standing there and all of a sudden just keeling over from malnutrition. If it's malnutrition it comes on more slowly and it comes differently and you don't lose all the wool off the— It was so ludicrous for those people to make those kinds of statements, and that became the official position of the government, that it was malnutrition. No connection at all with any radioactive substance. And [pause] you know even for a lay person to read that kind of garbage, and then for these scholarly, inexperienced vets from the federal government to try to tell men that had been in the business all of their life that—it was unbelievable almost. But they made it *stick*. They made it stick. So I don't know, does that answer your question?

That answered my question. That was question number one and you answered it just—that was my curiosity, what made you angry about that. And then earlier you—let me back up just a little bit. When you're up in Salt Lake in the 1950s raising your family, are you aware that there's testing going on in Nevada, atomic testing?

Eugene: Oh yes, but at that point in time—.

Zenna: We always read the paper.

Eugene: We got the same story up there that they were feeding to the public down in southern **[00:45:00]** Utah and Nevada, and that was that, `Hey, this is history in the making. You should be out there participating in this.` And they encouraged groups of schoolchildren to stand out and watch the shots because you could see them from a great distance, and in fact you could see them even up into the state of Washington.

Wow, I never have heard that far. Really.

Eugene: Yes. But a lot of times in St. George, Cedar City, some of those small towns up in central Utah, the teachers would take the students out to watch the blast. And we were getting the story up there that it was history in the making but it's not dangerous. It is not dangerous to people. And that simply wasn't true and they *knew* it wasn't true.

Yes. And then earlier before we started recording, I guess I was saying something to you about beginning to get a sense of how much the Mormon people had settled this area and how big a part of the culture it is in this part of the world, which is a new thing for me. And you seemed to indicate, let me see if I understood this correctly, that that was also part of the reason things happened as they did in the testing.

Eugene: It probably was because, you see, Mormon people as a group of people, number one, from birth they are taught that you respect the government; you abide by the laws of the government. And you're taught that you were to be patriotic. If you are required to provide service to the government, you do that. In other words, people are not conscientious objectors. So in that environment, the Mormon people throughout the Intermountain West, they were taking whatever they were told as gospel. It was if the government said it, then that's the way it was. So they were very trusting people. And that became the downfall of the people in the area because in being trusting they were being deceived. Intellectually and psychologically they probably could not believe that the government would, on purpose, deceive them. And especially as time went on and it was becoming obvious that there was some kind of a cause and effect between the fallout and the deaths and illnesses that were occurring. There were still people like one mayor in St. George, he said, Well, if the AEC said it's this way, that's the

`way it is`. So almost blindly trusting the government that they were going to do the right thing for the people, but that never happened.

It's just like this K. Z. Morgan who stated a case, and I think I showed that to you very well, where there were military people in particular, there were scientists, some of them, not all of them, and there were political people that felt that national security was *the* number one objective. And this became the syndrome that these people operated under, that anything was OK because it was protecting national security. [See *The Angry Genie* Karl Z. Morgan and Ken M. Peterson. University of Oklahoma, 1999]. But then you say, `National security for whom?` Here you've done a selective process. These people are not going to get the benefit of national security because they're going to be the recipients of the fallout. You want to move the testing back east? You want to move it to central America, to the central states? It all depends on whose back yard **[00:50:00]** you want to shoot these shots off in. And the deceit of that was so evident when they were considering a continental test site, and as you alluded to earlier, Mary, the government got under a lot of pressure because of Korea and then all of a sudden the Chinese coming into that conflict. And Truman felt that they had to do something and do it fast, and so it's something that kind of got pushed through even though there were people that objected to using a continental test site for that type of munitions. And unfortunately it happened and so you had a situation of where you had the government issuing, or misinforming the public, and particularly the public who was going to be affected by the fallout. And again, getting back to K. Z. Morgan, when he testified at the 1979 congressional hearings, it was a situation where he frankly not only admitted but stated that that was something that they had to look at, was the risk versus the benefit. And not only he and other scientists supported that position, but there were politicians that supported it and people that were responsible for conducting the testing, they

were *totally* committed and they were not going to let anything interfere with the continuance of that testing. But there was the flip side of that in the—well, K. Z. Morgan stated that while you had to measure the risk and the benefit, you also should *never* be in a position of not informing the people of what was happening. But that never happened.

You see, no notices went out on a public-wide basis. Occasionally, and I emphasize *occasionally*, the AEC would inform some of the miners and ranchers that were close to the downwind side of the testing, `You probably ought to stay indoors today because we're going to be conducting a shot, doing a test.` But it never went beyond that and it didn't even get to them all the time, and sometimes it did get to them but after the fact.

Yes. Your point about the risk-benefit, I guess because from the story you told this morning of what happened to you, it makes it, you know, risk-benefit is a concept, but then when you're saying what is the actual risk, they're obviously talking about risk to human health and what that actually means. I mean they must have worried. Have you thought about the fact that people then had to worry about if they were *informed, then they might not want it.*

Eugene: Well, if the public had been informed, the testing, the continental testing would've come to a halt. I'm satisfied that would have happened.

I had a question that was in my mind a few minutes back and I want to ask you. And you all have to tell me if this is a bad question because I really don't know that much about the history of the Mormon people in this country as I should if I'm doing this research, so you're helping me understand that. But my understanding was, and we were talking about Nauvoo a little while ago, was that one of the reasons there was this movement west was because people weren't *being accepted, the religion wasn't being tolerated.*

Zenna: They were being murdered.

*Right. So this is my question. Was there intolerance on the part of the federal government itself or was it people in different communities that were—?***[00:55:00]**

Eugene: Let me back you up a little bit over the period.

And let me just tell you why I asked that question. Because it's this notion that there's this deep inbred patriotism but why in my mind do I think that there was actually—well, you've brought up the issue of polygamy too. There were issues, from my limited knowledge of the Mormon Church, that the movement westward had to do with maybe not *being so under the federal law, and yet by the time we reach this era, the forties and fifties, there's this deeply ingrained patriotism. Do you see where I'm getting here?*

Eugene: Yes.

And that's just my own ignorance that that question comes from.

Zenna: Oh yes. Because you wonder why they would care at all.

That's my question.

Zenna: Wonder why they would care.

And not only just care but a generational movement and devotion to the federal government.

Zenna: One of our articles of faith states that we will protect our country, that we will honor it. There are thirteen of these and they're all very important, but that's something that even the children learn.

So it's an article of your faith.

Zenna: It's an article of faith in that you—oh, that's what you've got. [Hands Mary Palevsky a card with *LDS Articles of Faith*, written by Joseph Smith.]

Oh, thank you so much.

Eugene: Here. This was in response to a question asked by a reporter from back East to Joseph Smith, who was considered the first prophet of the Church.

Yes. Yes, I know who Joseph Smith is, yes.

Eugene: OK. Now—

So these are his thirteen—

Zenna: Is that number ten? Isn't that number ten that—?

Yes. This is about the gathering of the tribes.

Zenna: No, then it's eleven? "We believe in being subject—."

OK, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." So it's your twelfth. OK, so that's in the religion.

Zenna: And that's something that the children are taught right from the time they're that high [demonstrating], and so I think that's one of the big things. I don't think they really wanted to leave the East but they were murdered and robbed and raped. And the thing that happened is, and Gene can probably explain it better, these were really very up front, good people and they moved into areas and they would become very powerful and the people there were so afraid that they'd become so powerful they'd take over. And so they would run them out and then they'd go to another area. And the Mormon people also were probably pretty arrogant, they were pretty self-assured, they felt like they knew what they were doing, and a lot of times they were in areas where people were just kind of making it, you know, and people didn't like it. So it wasn't just the fault of the mobs but it was the fault of the Mormons too. They needed to be somewhere where they could not have to try and outdo anyone but just live their own religion.

Yes, but it's paradoxical in a sense, isn't it?

Zenna: Yes, it is.

And then that article of faith remains even through persecution, and like all people who are righteous it's very easy to become self-righteous, and so then—.

Zenna: That's right, and that's what happened a lot.

Eugene: You see, as the Church began to grow, a lot of the growth ultimately was coming through the source of proselytizing, missionaries, and this was particularly true in Europe and England, and so you had a lot of converts, and at that period of time converts wanted to come to Zion. Gather in Zion. That was the objective. So as you had the numbers increasing in particular areas, you had a concern of the locals from the standpoint of politics, from the standpoint of economy, and religion was there and it was a very different religion, very different from the popular concept of religion at that time. If you take the Catholic dogma, if you take the **[01:00:00]** Protestant dogma, it was very different from both of those, which were the mainstream of religion at that time. And so you had those three factors, though: politics, economy, and religion. And what was recognized by the locals was that it didn't take too much intellect to see that if you get a group of people that are organized, and wherever they went they were organized, they were *really* organized, and they were able to make things happen. You take the city of Nauvoo, for example. That was a swamp at the time the Mormons moved into that area. They drained it; they built a beautiful city there. At one time I understand it was probably the largest city in Illinois at one time.

Really.

Zenna: Yes, it was larger than Chicago.

Well, and just what they did in West, in this part of the country where no one wanted to come.

Eugene: Well, in their move west, the thing that the Mormon people began to realize was that no matter where they went, they were going to be a threat to the locals. And so early on they

decided, `Well, we probably ought to go somewhere where we can do our own thing and not be a threat to the locals and not have them be a threat to us.` And there was kind of a mutual agreement, and I don't have any insight into any actual documentation of this but my understanding is that you have to remember that the West at that point in time was an unsettled country.

Zenna: It wasn't part of the United States.

Eugene: Well, it did become part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase. But the problem was, you had the Mexicans on one side that wanted to move up into that unpopulated area, you had the British from the other side that wanted to move into that unpopulated area, and so there was kind of a mutual understanding between the Mormon people and the government that they would be able to move out to the West and that would accomplish two things: they would populate the area to prevent incursions from either the British or the Mexicans. And then of course as far as the Mormons are concerned, it would be an area where they wouldn't have to feel threatened by the locals. So does that kind of provide a little bit of insight?

It does, and it provides insight into the, as you said, that it's part of something that you're taught from being very small that you have this—we all get it in school and then you're also having it through your church, and I think all churches to a certain extent.

Eugene: Oh I think so, yes.

Zenna: Oh I think you probably do. This is just something that all of our people learn and live by. I've known them a lot of times but do you think I could quote it right now when—?

You always get a little nervous when you're being recorded.

Zenna: We had so many men that were killed. There were so many women and children that had no one to help them, and I think this is one of the reasons for the polygamy, because the other men would take on two or three or one or two other women and their children and provide for them because they were destitute. So many of the men had been killed.

Eugene: Well, and another factor that influenced the polygamy situation was that many of the converts, there were more converts that were women than men, and so you had a lot of women coming to Zion and the likelihood of these women finding a husband was pretty slim.

Zenna: Or being able to harness the horses or the oxen and take a wagon across the plains, and **[01:05:00]** yet some of them did. They were powerful women. This is when a lot of them really got to find out what they were made out of.

Yes. I've read and seen documentaries about that as well. So maybe that took us a little off track but it helps to understand what—.

Eugene: You know, polygamy was something that was not a particularly favorable thing for many of the Mormon people.

Zenna: Women or men.

Eugene: And that was one of the big hang-ups with the federal government. In fact they did *not* allow Utah to become a state in the union until polygamy had been abolished.

Zenna: Polygamy was only observed by 5 percent of the people.

That's interesting.

Zenna: Yes, it was not a large number. You had to be asked if you could do it. Now they had a few that took advantage of the situation. They thought it was great. But the majority—I don't know who would think it was great. Gene didn't want—.

Eugene: Well, don't hit me.

Zenna: But there were not a lot that were involved in it but actually there were probably a lot of families involved but the percentage, they say, is about 5 percent.

Right. But I guess my key question there, and I think you've given me some insight into it, is this—because other people have said to me when talking about the downwind situation, southern Utah, or the testing and this whole era—have said, you have to understand that that those of us from here wouldn't question our government. We would trust our government. It would be sort of outside our way of looking at the world to think that the government would lie to us? And because of the way Mormon people are raised and the patriotism they have. And so that's helped me to understand that a little better. So was there anything else you wanted to say about that?

Eugene: There was but it has slipped my mind for the moment.

Zenna: I'm sorry, I probably interrupted.

Eugene: No, that's OK. It'll come back. Go ahead.

So I asked you if you knew about the testing, and that's interesting what you said about—

Eugene: I know what I was going to add.

Great. Go ahead.

Eugene: This is unsubstantiated and so I'm a little reluctant to even mention it, but Illinois and Missouri were two states that the Mormons were chased out and the mobs gathered and there was all this mayhem that took place. There has been a suggestion, and again I emphasize that I have nothing to substantiate it, but President Truman was from Missouri and there has been—I've been told that he didn't have much love for the Mormons and that it didn't concern him greatly that the Mormon people were going to be subjected to the testing. But you may want to delete that. [laughter]

That'll be your choice.

Zenna: He was a good president.

Eugene: Well, he was. He was a take-charge type of person and he got things done and you have to admire him for that. I don't agree with the decision that there should be a continental test site, and in his typical fashion he made that decision there was going to be. But interesting thing, Mary, and I don't know whether you've picked this up or not, is that the type of government that we have, the checks and balances between Congress, the executive, and the judicial part of the government, during this period of time, it became moot in the sense that there was no check and balance. And if you follow this all the way through, you find that every branch of government to **[01:10:00]** some extent was part of this illusionary national security thing. And what was really happening was that the people that were, on the administrative firing line for conducting these tests and everything, they were the ones that were developing the policy that fed up to their superiors and then it would get regurgitated back to them as policy from on high. And so as a result, there was a period of time that these were the people that were really conducting that part of the government.

The people that were involved in the testing were dictating the policy that would then be given to them, you're saying?

Eugene: Yes.

So it was like a closed system, basically?

Eugene: Yes, it was like that. As I say in our book [*The Forgotten Patriots: The Abuse of Power During the Cold War*, Unpublished], it was like the golfer that fills out his scorecard before he plays. And that was one of the detrimental aspects of the test operation, and that continued on for a considerable period of time until it got so bad that they had to do something different.

We're at the end of this one [CD]*, and it's hard to talk for this long, so I'm thinking maybe we should probably break and I should come visit you again in September. But I had one question and I don't know if we could answer it before I have to change this [the disk] but there's some point at which you make the judgment that you're convinced that this testing was in fact the cause of your son's illness and death. And this is from the reading that you do about the different kinds of diseases?*

Eugene: Well, it's a combination of things. First of all, and I don't know if these are going to be particularly in the order they ought to be, but you had a study done by a couple of researchers, [John] Gofman and [Arthur] Tamplin. You're familiar with those?

Yes.

Eugene: OK. And their studies indicated two things: one, that low radiation was harmful. Another was that there was no safe level of radiation. Then in the 1979 congressional hearings you had legal counsel from the Public Health Service that said the same thing. OK, so if you then accept that thesis, now add to that the statement in the minutes of the Dugway testing, the Army Corps of Engineers, that gamma radiation will in effect enhance every type of normally contracted disease.

Then you take into consideration, OK, where did Lonnie live? He lived halfway up the hill toward the capitol, just a short distance from the capitol. Now Dr. Pendelton when he and his students got dusted from shot Sedan [1962], well, at the time their instruments went off the map. The next day he took readings on his lawn; he lived above the capitol. And again the readings were off the map. From that research, it was kind of determined that fallout followed the same type of meteorological patterns as snowfalls, rainfalls, that your foothills get it heaviest and first, your valleys get it last, and anything that's left gets into the **[01:15:00]** mountains. By the time it

gets to the other side of the mountains, there's not much, if anything, left. So anyway, from his research and the positions he took, the area where we lived was a heavy influx area.

Now consider Lon's environment. We were not a smoking family or a drinking family. To our knowledge there were no carcinogens from insecticides or anything of that nature. So you say, well, here's a little guy that plays outside a lot, and it's quite possible that from 1953 fallouts, which were heavy, that he got exposed at that point in time. You see, there are three different ways you can become exposed. One is by breathing in the fallout. Another is by the food chain, like cows' milk. And another is being exposed just from whatever is on the ground and in the growths around you. So in all likelihood, because of his condition, he breathed fallout because as far as I can determine the only explanation you have for what happened to his internal organs was due to plutonium exposure.

You add to that, then, what is the gestation period for leukemia? Well, it runs from two to five years. On average, it's about three years. Well, it fits the pattern if you say he got exposed with the fifty-three shots; that's why he died in '56.

So they're just pieces from a number of sources that you have to put together. It's like a puzzle. And the reality is, Mary, and I'm sure you know this, is that you cannot say, Here is a definite cause, here is a definite effect, and they're absolutely connected. You can't do that. And what I have likened it to is the same process that you went through with the cigarette industry that went for years on this concept of cause and effect, direct cause and effect, and that's what the government has used with the people in filing claims. Now you know here's another thing that is appalling. It was 1990 before the government finally recognized that there were some people that were affected by the fallout. And that was limited to a 200-mile radius of the test site. And it was limited to just certain diseases. And finally in the year 2000 they enacted some

amendments to that act which included counties in Utah up through central Utah and eastern Utah.

We're going to be right at the end [of the disk] here. I'm going to run out of time, so if this is important, what you were going to say, I'd want to stop it and put a new disk in.

Eugene: Well, it is.

OK, then let's just do it now.

[01:19:14] End Track 2, Disk 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 1, Disk 3.

Eugene: The thing that happened with this compensation, if you take 1990 when it was first enacted, you're talking of from 1951 to 1990. That's almost forty years. Say thirty-five years to give allowance for exposure over the first few years of the shots. That is almost unconscionable that the government would take that long to recognize those people. OK?

Now let me add another factor to that. The area that's covered, by both the initial act and the amendments, covers about 10 percent of the state of Utah's population. It does *not* cover anybody up along what is called the Wasatch Front, which includes Salt Lake, Ogden, Provo. Your major population, probably 70 percent of your population, resides along that Wasatch Front area. They're not included. Now if you look at what happens with fallout, distance is not really relevant. Even types of diseases are not really relevant if you accept the statement in this Corps of Engineers minutes. Actually there are many other diseases that are enhanced or caused from gamma radiation than just cancer and leukemia. That's just where the majority of things have been apparent. But you take what has occurred with the government, they are still not acknowledging the depth of the effect of the radiation. And to my knowledge they have *not* done *anything* to try to identify people that could very possibly or probably be affected.

We attended a meeting in January of 2002 in St. George that was conducted by representatives from Senator [Orrin] Hatch's office and from the Department of Justice, because the Department of Justice handles the claims. This meeting was quite an insight to us from the standpoint that people that we had been writing about, now we were seeing firsthand. And the *aura* of that meeting was very disturbing.

Zenna: It's probably the worst meeting I've ever been to in my life. You could have just cut the air with a knife. These were angry, angry, hostile people trying to get a little bit of money to take care of surgeries that were coming up. Some of them, it was too late now. One of them had as many as seven in the family with cancers. One man didn't have a tongue anymore and wasn't being acknowledged for—because it [his illness] didn't fall into the right categories. And it was so terrible at that meeting, I was just shaking all over and I know other people were too. Lindsay was with us and she was remembering that meeting that we went to that day—

Your granddaughter?

Zenna: Yes, the one that's here. And I was so sick. We needed to eat afterwards and I was so sick, I thought, you know, there's no way I can even eat food. The anger in that room was terrible. Gene, I'm sorry, but—.

No, no, I wanted to hear what you had to say.

Eugene: No, no, no, that's fine.

This is the anger on the part of the people that are sick and is it—?

Eugene: Some of them are second generation.

But is the attitude of the people that are running the meeting part of the problem, or are they being open to what people are saying? When you said someone wasn't being—? **[00:05:00]**

Eugene: Well, let me cover that. What came out in that meeting was, number one, they

were very solicitous in helping these people that had *not* had claims approved to look into them further, to see if they could be approved. Another thing that came out of the meeting was it was stated that there was going to be an appropriation of monies made available to do research, to find out how extensive the problem was. Bear in mind, this is two-and-a-half years ago. To my knowledge, that has never happened. And I mentioned the meeting in our book because if in fact it had happened, then that would be some indication that the government was seriously considering the impact of this. You see, what has happened, Mary, in the overall sense, is we can recognize victims of terrorist acts, like immediately. Here we are fifty years down the road and many of the people that were affected by the fallout have never been recognized in any way, shape, or form, not even that it happened in most of these areas. That doesn't speak well of our government process.

Zenna: Eugene, we probably need to check into it. I think they had another meeting this year.

Eugene: They did.

Zenna: *We* were not invited this time. We were invited last time and we don't know why we were invited, other than we've been in touch with Senator Hatch's office on different things to do with this. But hopefully, maybe they are progressing. You would really hope that they were. A lot of these people were sick, they were on crutches, they were angry.

What was the name of the meeting? What were the kinds of people that would've been invited? I guess is the question.

Eugene: All the people that had ostensibly been affected by the fallout.

So did the government say, `You are radiation victims`*, or they wouldn't use that kind of language, would they, or—*

Eugene: No. What they were saying was that, If you have filed claims, then we're here to help you process those claims. That was the one thing.

OK. And this was in—?

Eugene: January of 2002.

OK. So it's right after, close after September 11, 2001.

Eugene: Yes. In fact someone raised the question there. He said, `You know, I have a hard time understanding how a victim of the 9/11 incident can get 1.7 million dollars and if we finally get our claim approved we get fifty thousand dollars.` And fifty thousand dollars in today's world does *not* go very far toward covering medical expenses. Anyway--

You've given me a lot of information. I really appreciate it. Let's see if I have any other— well, we should stop. You've given me a lot of time and you did a lot of work yesterday [the Bridges had been interviewed for the Atomic Testing Museum]. *So unless there's anything else that's come to mind that you want to sort of add now, we, you know, we'll see each other again, I hope, and you can add things.*

Zenna: OK.

Eugene: Should we contact you when we get back in September and see if there's anything further that you want to do to round this out some, or—?

Sure.

Eugene: I could get copies of the contents, the bibliography, of our book to you if that would be of any help. [*The Forgotten Patriots: The Abuse of Power During the Cold War*, Unpublished].

That'd be great. **[00:10:00]**

Eugene: There's quite a menagerie of material that we finally ended up with from a lot of different sources and you know—is this still on?

Yes.

Eugene: OK. One thing that—and I showed you the different—well, let's see, no, that was relative to the atomic bomb casualties. But in the way of victims of the fallout, a Dr. [Ernest] Sternglass in upper state New York conducted a study. His first study covered the years, I think, 1961 to 1962, and he concluded that one out of three of the infant deaths during that period of time probably were contributed to by the fallout. Now you have to bear in mind that the fallout didn't stay in the West. It went east and exited out over the ocean. Upper-state New York in the Utica, Troy and Albany area were heavily affected by some of the fallout. Another area was St. Louis, Missouri. Another area was Paris, Texas. So there were areas outside of the Intermountain West that were affected. But anyway, what I'm getting at is that he initially indicated that—his estimates were that upwards of forty thousand children were affected by the fallout. Then he did a study that included the entire range of years of testing up through 1969. He estimated that there were four hundred thousand children that were affected. And the government didn't like that one, so they asked Dr. Gofman to look into that and see what he could come up with, and he assigned it to his cohort, Dr. Tamplin. Tamplin came up with four thousand instead of four hundred thousand.

Now yet another aspect of this, let's look at another thing. If you take the National Cancer Institute study of which we received a copy in 1997, a synoptic copy, they estimated that ten to seventy-five thousand children were affected by the fallout. Now you take another statistic. In 1997—no, '98 or '99—1999, there were rumors of a government study that had been done on deaths along the West Coast as a result of the fallout from the South Pacific tests and the Russian

tests. They estimated that ten to fifteen thousand people died as a result of the fallout from those two areas of testing.

All right, let's try to put that in perspective. You've got ten to seventy-five thousand by an agency that's funded by the federal government, so you should be able to rely on that fairly well. You've got an estimate of upwards of four hundred thousand by a private researcher. Then by the government again you've got an estimate of ten to fifteen thousand just along the West Coast. Now bear in mind, here we are with a group of people that are closer to the Nevada testing than what the West Coast is to the South Pacific or Russian testing.

Yes. I see what your point is, yes.

Eugene: And so how many people have really been affected by this? And the numbers, I think, **[00:15:00]** are probably horrendous. And I don't think the government wants to really recognize that because that's going to be a liability. Now another thing, speaking of liability—do you mind if I continue on?

Go ahead.

Eugene: Have you followed through on the cases with the Federal District Court that took place between the sheep men and the government?

Some, yes.

Eugene: And the Allen case and the government? OK.

Tell me what that is. I've been doing a lot of reading, so you have to—

Eugene: OK, let me give you a quick rundown on that. Following the 1953 debacle with the loss of the sheep, the sheep men sued the government. They went into court and Judge [Sherman] Christiansen was sitting on the bench, as I mentioned earlier, the position of the government was that malnutrition had been the cause of the deaths. That was accepted by the

court and as a result the sheep men, they were ruled against. They did not win their case [*Bulloch v. United States*, 1956].

Then you came down to the 1980s and the Allen case [*Irene Allen v. United States*, 1984] was instituted with the Federal District Court, and it was covering the injuries or deaths to humans. Judge [Bruce] Jenkins was the judge that sat in on that. And he ruled in favor of most of the plaintiffs, not all of them, but most of them. That case was taken on appeal to the appellate court and they ruled against Judge Jenkins on the basis of their interpretation, which was a *new* interpretation of the tort law.

OK. Yes, I know what you're talking about.

Eugene: OK. And what that was, in essence, was that the way the tort law of actions against the government had been originally interpreted was that if a leader such as Congress, the presidency, instituted *a* policy and you followed that policy, then you were not liable. But with *this* situation, what happened was that they reinterpreted that law that if the people that were conducting the testing developed policies that were, even if they were harmful, then even though *they* developed the policies and not their superiors, they were not responsible. So in other words they made it impossible. And I don't think the people realized this but I bet if you were to take any kind of a case to the federal government, a liability case, you would never win because of the precedence that has been established by this reinterpretation of the tort law.

So as a result, the Allen case, it was appealed to the appellate court and Judge Jenkins was reversed because of this reinterpretation of the law. OK, now in that case it came out that the testimony of witnesses and legal counsel in the sheep men's case had been fraudulent. And so the sheep men, they hired Harold Knapp who was a major researcher of radiation effect. They said, OK, this stuff has come out. Will you look into this and see if this is really the case? So he **[00:20:00]** did, and he found that

both personally that radiation *was* the cause and effect of the sheep deaths, but he also found that government documents said the same thing. And yet that's not what was brought out. So the sheep men, they took their case to court again and Judge Christiansen sat on that one. But, and this is kind of interesting, this is the first instance of where a federal district judge has ever reversed his rulings, and he reversed his ruling in the first sheep men's case. That then was appealed by the federal government to the appellate court and the appellate court said, `Well, this was really not a fraud against the court. It was a fraud against the individuals. And besides that, it has passed the statute of limitations limit.` And so they ruled against Judge Christiansen.

So in other words, sheep men never came up with anything. People never came up with anything. The only time that anything was ever done was when this congressional act was finally passed in 1990 [U.S. Dept. of Justice *Radiation Exposure Compensation Act,* or RECA.] And we have what I think is a very serious matter that I bet, unless you're an attorney dealing with tort law, you probably are not aware that you can never sue the government. What they were really saying is that they have sovereign immunity. And then you have to ask yourself, well, sovereign immunity developed from kingdoms where people were ruled by kings. Should sovereign immunity be a part of a democratic republic where the government is *by* the people, *for* the people? So there are some real serious questions that *I* think need to be asked and resolved. Because I don't accept what has been done, that it's been good law.

So this is really moving beyond—your concern moved beyond the particular really tragic situation of your own lives and your son's life to being a manifestation of something that's happening between our government and its people that you're concerned about.

Eugene: Right. I think our people need to be informed. This is, frankly, kind of a start for us, but as we have talked with people over the past ten years, most people, *many* people, did not

even know what happened, that there *was* such a thing that happened. Those that are old enough to know that yes, there was this testing, have no idea what it did to the public. And it's not just the Mormon public in the Intermountain West. It's across the entire country. And then you get down to—let me cover one more point and then I'll quiet down.

Sure. Please do.

Eugene: You get down to this situation of relationship, a direct cause and effect concept. One of the things that I think the government could and should do is to try to determine *who has actually been affected* by this. Now you have to use the concept of probability to a great extent but that's not a bad thing to do. It's quite reliable in most instances. But there's another aspect that comes into play in our day and age and that is the development of forensics. For example, if the government were really interested in determining whether our son died from the effects of **[00:25:00]** being exposed to the radionuclides from the 1953 shots, we have his teeth that he lost about a year before, you know, as they lose their temporary teeth and get their permanent teeth.

Zenna: The good fairy puts them away.

The Tooth Fairy kept them.

Eugene: Yes. And we have his hair, a lock of his hair. So what I'm saying is you have iodine-131 which has about an eight-day half-life, which you probably could not determine anything on that one. You have cesium-137 which has about a thirty-plus-year half-life. You have strontium-90 which has about a twenty-plus half-life. You have plutonium. Two of those isotopes of plutonium are in the thousands of years, one twenty-four thousand plus, one six thousand plus. A third isotope is, oh, I forget. Anyway, it's like sixty-seven years or something on that order. Anyway, what I'm getting at is that in today's world I think we could definitely determine the extent of exposure to these radionuclides. If the person has been exposed to those,

then I think you eliminate a lot of this ethereal world that you've got to have that doesn't exist because of the direct cause and effect concept.

This what world? Ethereal?

Eugene: Yes, ethereal.

Yes, so you just don't know what's what and it's all mysterious?. That's a really interesting point. That's a really interesting point. OK. It's three o'clock.

Eugene: I'm concerned for you, not for us.

Don't worry about me, this is my job. This is my job.

Eugene: Your husband will probably come and hunt us down.

No. No. He totally supports it. But I think for now we'll stop—

[00:27:30] End of Track 2, Disk 3.

[End of interview]