

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

Interview with
Gay Kauffman

October 11, 2006
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project

Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor

Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators

Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology

Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

The material in the *Nevada Test Site Oral History Project* archive is based upon work supported by the U.S. Dept. of Energy under award number DEFG52-03NV99203 and the U.S. Dept. of Education under award number P116Z040093.

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

Mary Palevsky: *Gay Kauffman, thank you so much for meeting with us today. I was so thrilled to meet you a few months ago. It was really hot that day, as I recall.*

Gay Kauffman: It was hot.

It was really bad when we went through a lot of your documents. So now, to start off, if you could just tell me your full name, place and date of birth, and a little bit about your family background, to get us started.

Well, I was born in Denver, Colorado on November 2, 1914. And we moved to Chicago. This was at the wartime [World War I]. We weren't yet involved but it was—we moved to Chicago and I went to school there; my first job was there. Bad Depression. But I had a good childhood. My brother died—we were very close—in a Fourth of July accident when he was twelve and he'd already completed two years of high school. He was really a brilliant boy. And that was hard. But I got a small scholarship to University of Chicago to some literature classes. And when that ran out, why, I went over to the Billings Hospital, that's the medical school, and took laboratory courses there in bacteriology and clinical medicine and so forth. I became a laboratory technician, which was interesting but it got very boring. And then I worked at the American Medical Association Journal [AMA] as an editorial assistant—I always wanted to write. Then the war [World War II] came along and I married and came to Las Vegas.

Well, I'm going to stop you right here for a moment, because I want to pick up a couple of details about your childhood. You told me your first name yesterday on the phone was actually—

My first name was Gertrude Anne Yoder, the initials spelled G-A-Y, and that's what I was called all my life. And it didn't have the present connotation then. It's sort of amusing now, when I go to an airline office for instance and am asked, Are you Gay? And I have to say, well, yes and no. That's how the Gay came about.

Now tell me your parents' names. Your father's name?

My father was Perry Morton Yoder. He came from a Pennsylvania Dutch background. It was several generations before Amish. And my mother was from Tunbridge Wells in England, and had come to America and took nurse's training at Asbury Park in New Jersey and became a pediatrician nurse. And she traveled all around the country and they met at Glenwood Springs in Colorado. There's a town outside of Colorado Springs named Yoder. My grandmother and grandfather came there [00:05:00] in a covered wagon and established the first post office. The town, all that's left is a building with a big sign with Yoder High School. It wasn't very prosperous; they went to Oregon. But my father stayed and he became a school teacher; he had two schools near Colorado Springs where he taught.

Now what was your mom's name, your mother's name?

My mother's name was Helen Atwell and my father was—Perry Morton came from a governor of Indiana whom my grandparents had admired very much. It's just like my brother's name was Theodore Roosevelt Yoder and that's because my father had met Theodore Roosevelt. He was a great admirer of his.

Now what took your family to Chicago in that era? Your father was a teacher.

It was war. He tried to [enlist]. He felt very—I mean passions were really raised against the Kaiser [Wilhelm II] at that time. People were inspired to enlist. But he was rejected. He'd had rheumatic fever when he was young and did not have a good heart. But anyway, we got into

Chicago, and I had a very good childhood with good parents. I can't remember being struck. [It was] part of his background, nonviolence. That's why this present war makes me so anxious. But I waited till I was ninety years old to be struck. A man broke in the door here and threw me and injured me. I mean that's really the first time that I was ever struck in my life and I was hospitalized.

Sounds awful.

The Chicago years were difficult in many ways. I had good friends there. Our car was struck in a hit-and-run, injuring father's hand.

Now your brother who was killed, that was Theodore Roosevelt Yoder?

Yes.

Was he your only sibling?

Yes. And then I—well, the time in Chicago, it was good. Many museums and go to the opera, go to good plays, and it was good. You wouldn't do this now, I don't think. I rode all over and I mean you weren't afraid.

So I imagine what you said, the impact of losing your brother, do you mind telling me the circumstances of that?

He had a blank cartridge gun and it exploded in the palm of his hand here. My mother sent him to the doctor, and the doctor put healing powder on it or something or other. She [00:10:00] kept looking and said it doesn't look good, you know, in a couple of days, this is not good, and sent him to another doctor who didn't exactly tend the wound but he gave him a shot of tetanus, a big shot of tetanus. And Teddy came home and within half an hour he was in anaphylactic shock. The tetanus serum had activated everything, and they rushed him to the

hospital, of course, but he died. And at the hospital they operated on the hand and the wad from the gun was still in there. None of these doctors had tended it. And it was a very shocking thing.

Yes. Yes. Well, I'm sorry.

Yes. And then when I was at the Journal of the American Medical Association, I traveled quite a little. I went to various conventions in New York, in Atlantic City [New Jersey], and so forth.

And it was interesting and I certainly met some very fine doctors, which makes me a little bit hard to get along with, with some of this present HMO [Health Maintenance Organization] business where all they want to do is get you out of the room.

Now remind me of what year this was, then, you're doing this work.

I'm bad on dates.

Approximately.

I was married in 1943 and this was, like I went to the AMA, I think it was probably '41 and '43 and '43.

So the war is on.

But I had worked in hospitals doing routine lab work, blood counts and typings and so forth.

So when did you meet your husband, and what was his name?

Oh, my husband was from northern Indiana. This Kauffman is a Pennsylvania Dutch name. And we met when we were very young. And my father and Milton, Lew's father, were very good boyhood friends, and I used to go to the farm where they lived, and Lew and I were really very good friends.

And then, of course, he was drafted. He was one of the first draftees out of Indiana. He was in college then. And he began writing me. And I had a pretty good retinue of beaux in Chicago. Lew wrote beautiful letters, and I went down to his graduation as a pilot in Marfa,

Texas. He was first in artillery, and then he got into the Air Corps and took all the flight training, and he was graduated at Marfa, Texas. And he wrote and wanted me to come. I didn't know at the time he was engaged. I knew nothing about that. But anyway, he just begged me to come to Marfa, so I went down and saw all the graduation and it was really [pretty] in spring. Marfa is a lovely little Texas town, first time I was ever in a place like that, and I felt so good. It was about 5000 feet above sea level. I mean it was up. And I really, I just felt wonderful there.

Anyway, we saw the graduation and came home, and he went to B-17 training at [00:15:00] Roswell, New Mexico. And at Roswell, he wrote again and begged me to come, and I went down to Roswell. Roswell was a very nice little western town. And we got married there in the Episcopal church. I continued my job at the AMA. And then he was stationed in Las Vegas, where he was a B-17 pilot training gunners, and all the 17s were up at Indian Springs Air Base. Indian Springs Air Base was an offshoot of the Las Vegas Army Air Base. It was named Nellis after the war.

I came out for Christmas and stayed. There isn't a Nevada Biltmore Hotel anymore, but then it was on the corner of Bonanza and Las Vegas Boulevard. The Biltmore Hotel had a pool. Lana Turner stayed there getting her divorce from Stephen Crane. We had a room and went and bought an electric plate and used to cook Kraft dinner, which only cost eleven cents then.

Now this is still the wartime? Is this still wartime?

Oh yes, I came in the Christmas of 1943. He got paid during the time I was here and I was amazed. I thought everybody in the Army got \$21.00 a month. I mean that was the thing. And I'd been sending him cigarettes and everything and saw the paycheck for four hundred dollars or something; I wrote back to the AMA and I quit. I stayed here. That was a good time. You were in with a whole bunch of people all in the same circumstances and it was certainly a very

different town than it is now. You knew the characters. It was great at that time. The first year that we were here, it began to get hot. Oh, I never felt such heat. It started early, like in May.

Then Lew got a leave, and we went back to Chicago and it was late June, I think, and we went to Indiana and Chicago. We stayed at the Palmer House in Chicago and we'd taken a whole bunch of silver dollars, and people there, they didn't have silver dollars, and we were spreading these silver dollars around. We really had a good time. We were on a train returning to Las Vegas when the news came about President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt's death.

But we got back to Las Vegas and Lew was transferred to Roswell, back again, to take B-29 training. Now this was before the B-29 had dropped the [atomic] bomb. And so we had to pack up and go to Roswell. We were driving. This was in, I think, early July of '45, and we were driving [00:20:00] at night across the New Mexico desert into Albuquerque when we saw the whole sky lit up. It was like day, and it was amazing. Everything lighted up, and it lasted for it seemed like quite a long time. We got into Albuquerque and we got into a motel to rest a little bit for the rest of the trip down to Roswell. And boy, I couldn't wait to get to a newspaper. What happened? What happened? Nothing. Nothing. That was the first bomb, the Los Alamos test down at White Sands [Trinity tes July 16, 1945]. We saw it.

Right. That's amazing that you saw it.

Yes, we were going across the desert and that was quite an experience.

So nothing was in the newspaper, you say?

Nothing. Oh yes, nothing. Oh no, when I was in Santa Fe, most of the people working on the paper there had been there through the war and Los Alamos was up there; people from Los Alamos would get transported down to Santa Fe once in a while and watched very carefully and

so forth, and everybody knew something was going on at Los Alamos, but the security was immensely tight and there was nothing about this.

I'm just curious, that's so amazing that you saw it and then nothing was there, did you ask other people? Had other people seen it as well?

No, you kept quiet a little. You just didn't—no, you didn't talk about—it wasn't a topic that you brought up much about what was happening.

I see. Because of the war.

Yes.

So in your mind, are you connecting it maybe with the war or you just are mystified?

No. I don't remember that it was—and when Lew got through the B-29 training and got a crew, he was a captain, what do they call them, an airplane commander. He had his crew, and most of them were Mormon boys from Utah, and a really good crew, he said. And he and his crew had to go to Lincoln, Nebraska where they would deploy out of the country to more in the vicinity of Japan. And we were up there. We'd been up visiting my uncle up at Fairplay, Colorado. After Lew's training, we were on our way to Lincoln and we were coming down the mountain road into Denver and V-J Day happened. And oh, what a time it was in Denver.

Well, let's talk a little bit about that. You heard it on the radio, am I understanding you correctly?

Oh yes, we had the radio on in the car and oh, gee, we got down into town. We had reservations at the Adams Hotel and we couldn't get anywhere. And we had these friends who were also pilots in Las Vegas here, the Johnsons, and we called them up and Jeff said, well, I'll come down and get you and lead you here. So we went and stayed with them. And much celebration, of course. The next day, we got down to the hotel and that night, people just kept

coming to our room. These pilots that we had known here and at Roswell, they kept coming up to the room, and a detective would come up and say, You have to quiet down. But I mean it was such a remarkable time.

[00:25:00] And we got to Lincoln, and believe me, it took a day or so for the participants, the pilots, the Army people, to turn from heroes into kind of not very much. Really in Lincoln they didn't help us get a place to live. They were just very uninterested, and mostly interested in keeping their young women away from these Army service men. And our time at Lincoln was not very enjoyable.

That's interesting. I want to talk about that, but first I want to back you up a little bit to Denver because a lot of the images we see, postwar babies, baby boomers like me, see the streets of New York, Times Square. Was Denver like that?

Oh, Denver was clogged! I mean it was clogged! I mean not necessarily cars or anything, just people! Everybody came downtown, it seemed, and it was a remarkable time. And I certainly believe the pictures in New York, the sailor kissing the nurse, and it was very true.

Now you had seen the Trinity test, the Alamogordo test, and you know that these bombs have been dropped on Japan. Did you make the connection then or did the papers report it?

No, it wasn't until we came back here [Las Vegas] for the tests that we began thinking about this. I mean kind of my background, I guess, from the nonviolence and so forth, it just was not a topic that we—and Lew's—was not a topic that we pursued much. It was not—and when we got back here and there was all this bomb stuff and so forth, why, that's when [we] made the tie-in that that's what we saw.

Amazing. So he still had to report to Lincoln.

Oh yes, and we had to stay there. It was late fall. And all we wanted to go—he didn't take any of the benefits. I mean there were a lot. He should've gone back to school and got his degree and so forth. We just wanted to get out of the Army. Just wanted to get out of the Army. And he didn't want to pursue anything. He was a very good pilot, multi-engine pilot. And he certainly could've gone to airlines and so forth, but I mean we just didn't want to do that. And we went back to Chicago for a little and we went to—

Oh, while we were in Las Vegas here [during WW II], we had a house down here on Vegas Drive—well, it wasn't really on Vegas Drive. It was up on a hill sort of right down here. And it's still there. We'd rented it and should've bought it. A beautiful little house. And we had all kinds of opportunities, believe me. And the man that lived down the hill used to come up and he'd beg us to buy property. He owned all this stuff here, see. And the golf course was here.

This golf course across the street [Las Vegas Golf Club].

Yes, it was there at the time. And it was desirable. This was very kind of elegant along here. And in fact, when we moved into this house, all that land down here that is now—gee, it was a horse ranch—

Where Rancho is there?

[00:30:00] No, Stonehaven. The Collins brothers came in and they started building that, oh, a couple of months after we moved into this house. And they began tearing down things and so forth. But that was a horse ranch down there. We lived farther down. We lived at the Nevada Biltmore. We've always just sort of been in this area here.

I see. So that house that you rented was during the war.

Yes, during the war, and it was a very nice little house.

So I'm understanding that your husband left the Army as soon as he could?

Oh yes. And we didn't want to stay in the Middle West. We wanted to come here. We had liked the West very much. And we went to Colorado because I had relatives there, and we kind of scoured the state. We had a couple hundred dollars and we were going to establish a dude ranch. And we drove around the state and met all kinds of people, and finally wound up down in Durango. And we drove up [to] this place and here was this beautiful lake, and it was an earthen dam, big, on the Pine River. And the people that we met there told us to go down and talk to Bruce Sullivan. He was a sheriff of the county there. And Bruce had owned the ranch along the Pine River that had been appropriated for this dam and there was a big lake there now. But he had land on both sides, you know, that were up, just bordering it. And his wife, I think they were getting separated or something, she had all the land on that side of the lake and had a dude ranch there, visitors and so forth, very nice, very big. But he had some land on this side. And so we went and looked up Bruce Sullivan. See, the lake was down here and then there was some land that belonged to the [Bureau of] Reclamation, and then there was a road that was going around it, and up here there was about ten acres of land. It had a spring on it and so forth. And so we talked with him about [it] and he says, well—he almost gave it to us. It was \$4,500 for ten acres. But it didn't have a road into it, it didn't have anything, it was just a lot of pine trees, lot of aspen. And so we made a deal with him. We gave him a couple hundred dollars and had to pay him every month a little money. And here we were, we were property owners. And we worked. Lew kind of did work around at the dam there, and we worked. And we got a squad tent. He built a platform and we lived in this squad[tent]—that's big, you know, and we had a stove. We'd go and buy things. And a bed. And we got very well acquainted with a whole lot of the people that were there. And when they were building the dam, the Reclamation had built these houses [00:35:00] and cabins for workers and that had been turned into a resort. And you know there

was work around, a lot of cabins and so forth. And we built a road. Many of the people who were in these cabins, these little houses, they were nice little houses, were in these houses, were people from Midland, Texas. This is where George Bush is from. And we got a lot acquainted with people from Midland, Texas, all oil people and all with a lot of money. And it was very interesting. But anyway, it was not a living. We did operate the resort one year and that's when we really got to know them. And I had Ute Indian girls [who] were maids and boy, that was interesting. These Ute girls, I'd be crossing the road with them, we'd be going somewhere, and they'd say, Ssh. They could hear the mailman way down by the bridge. He was coming. And I mean these girls were—very, very good experience with the Indians there.

But anyway, as I say, it was not a living, and we went back. My mother and father had moved to California and they were living in Alameda. And we went to Alameda, and I got a job at the City of Paris in San Francisco. It was getting on to Christmastime and—no, I didn't, I went to the Emporium first. It was getting on to Christmastime and I got into the toy department and worked for a company that made a number of games and a number of things. And I was on sort of a commission but I was also paid by the store, and I had this counter, and I sold more games than anybody. I mean they were always going over to the City of Paris and getting some of their stock and bringing it over. I really sold a lot of stuff and I got offered a very good job for them, but then that wasn't anything that was in our plans. And Lew, then the airlift business—the Russian sector and so forth that had cut off supplies to parts of Berlin and we were airlifting stuff over—

Yes, the Berlin Airlift, yes.

And they were doing all the servicing of the planes out of Oakland there. And Lew got a job on these planes. I don't know just what he did, but he worked there. We were making our payments to Bruce. Oh, and then Lew got a job managing a nursery out at Niles.

Where is Niles? I don't know where Niles is.

You know what happened in Walnut Creek?

Yes.

Well, Walnut Creek's up there and you come down a pass and there's this little town of Niles. And it had a big nursery, a very large nursery. And Lew was there, and he wasn't getting along [00:40:00] particularly well with this guy that owned it. And canning time came along and Lew got this job managing all the supplies, the cans were coming in or something or other. He had a crew, all non-English-speaking mostly. And so we got a house there at Niles, a little cabin, and I said, well, I'm going over to the cannery. I can do something there, too. And so I went and I saw this guy and he said, Oh, you do bacteriology? And I said Yes, so anyway he says, well, you know, now come back in this sort of time and we got a lab here. We need you. And so I went back and went to the employment department, and this man—he was a nice man but he drank quite a little, and he was not cognizant at the moment or something or other. Anyway, they told me to come and I was to get on the peach line. They made me a cannery worker. And so I went. And the peaches were terrible. Fuzz. And then the tomatoes started. And that's when I was supposed to be in this lab, testing tomatoes. Nothing happened. I was the only blonde in the place. It was Portugee [Portuguese] people. I got on the line, and the tomatoes would come out of this thing, boiling hot. If you were down at this end of the line, well, you could get these hot tomatoes and just kind of squeeze the—I mean just a couple of—well, you had a knife and get the skin off. But if you were back at this end of the line, the tomatoes got colder and they weren't as easy, and you changed every day, you kept going like this. And at

first I would pick up a tomato and look at it, you know, and so forth. And I worked next to this Olie and she was the chief tomato peeler. She was wonderful. She could do this stuff. And so I kind of observed Olie and I got to be a good tomato peeler. And Olie was the best tomato peeler, but I was second. And they came around in two weeks and anybody that wasn't—you were putting them in these cans and they'd take the cans away. But if you weren't meeting production or something, you were gone. I wasn't gone. And I was standing there. And I was tomato juice from head to toes! And you know, it was fun. And I got very well acquainted with Olie and got to know her whole history and so forth. And I was kind of sorry when tomato season was over.

We went to Albuquerque then. We had some money. We made money at that place. We went to Albuquerque. And at the University of Chicago's Billings Hospital, the head of the bacteriology lab was Lois Segó, and Lois was then working for the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. And she got us a house and everything. And I started to tell Lois about working in this cannery and she said, Gay, never mention that. She said, That is not a thing to talk about. And you know, it was an adventure.

Yes. And what was her point there?

She said it's not proper, nice people don't go to work in canneries. She said, You're a nice person. That's not good.

And what did you think?

[00:45:00] Well, you don't say anything. You know, this was Lois. And she was certainly a very good friend and loved both of us. And Lew started a little landscaping business there and was doing pretty well. He met this guy, he had a nursery in Santa Fe, the big nursery there, and he offered Lew a job to come up there. It was a pretty good job, and so Lew went up to Santa Fe. And I was proofreading for the Review Journal down in Albuquerque. And I got pregnant and had some problems and I had to quit and go to bed and so forth. And then I miscarried and it was

sad. But anyway, Lew was up there in Santa Fe, and one of the people that he met was Pat Matthews. They had this house—and you don't call it Ma-DRID, you call it MA-drid—it was this big house on Madrid and it was a beautiful place. And her husband Glenn Matthews had a couple of bank magazines. And they were both out of Missouri. And anyway, Lew got very well acquainted. And Glenn was off on a business trip to New York, and Pat was doing a lot of landscape problems and she was dealing with Lew. Lew was telling her about his wife in Albuquerque and wanted to move her to Santa Fe and so forth. And Pat says she was going to New York to be with Glenn for the winter, and she said, You have your wife come up. And I got on a bus and I went up and we sat there in this gorgeous house on this down couch and everything. And Pat, you know, we talked and everything and were sitting there talking and all of a sudden she said, well, I'll show you where the good silver is. And she says, Now, I'll be leaving next Monday. Here's the keys. I mean she just went and left her house to us. And Glenn got very ill in New York and it was extended. We were in that house almost a year.

And when he came back, I had a job at the *New Mexican* and I was proofreading. One day I was going to work and went past the Capitol and they were ripping up all the trees. What are you doing? Now the Capitol, it was trees from all these countries that had sent them. They were all special trees and so forth. Here they were. And I got to the office and I was really screaming about they were ripping up all the trees, and the editor said, Gay, go out and get a story on it. And so I did, and I told about ripping up the trees, and it was on the front page, and I got a by-line. And believe me, I wasn't proofreading anymore. I was assistant woman's editor. And I worked with Calla Hay.

I never had any training to do this stuff. When I worked at the JAMA I dealt with the publications of the council. I worked for the Council on Physical Therapy. And believe me, when I had stuff, I loved to get down in the printing plant, the first two, three floors of the building there at 535 North Dearborn. It's the American Medical Association and it still is. [00:50:00] And I'd get down into those bowels of that printing thing and I just loved the printers and being down there. And here I was on this paper and the printers were out there. Now this was all hot type. There wasn't any of this business of—I mean they were sitting out there making the type. And it was great. It was great. And the people on the line-o-type machines.

And Lew didn't last with the nursery. I mean that turned out to not be too good. And he got with the Santa Fe Hay and Grain. And he was dealing with the Pueblos. And you had to be good dealing with the Pueblo Indians. You had to do a lot of standing. It was a lot of silence. And he was good at showing the Indians respect. And he got acquainted with this guy with the logs building, milling the logs. They were doing it up on forest reservation land up near New Mexico, and they were running out of logs and they were looking at Colorado. Up near Gunnison there was a pretty big stand of lodge pole pine up there, and they were looking at that. And this guy that was doing it—anyway, Mr. [Louis J.] Reynolds from the Reynolds [Electrical and Engineering] Company [REECO], was involved with this thing about the logs. He had a ranch and he had built a log house up there. Anyway, Bosley made Lew a proposition to go up to Gunnison and run the logging operation and run the company up there. And so anyway, that's how we became acquainted with Mr. Reynolds. But in Gunnison, you don't work much in the winter. And it was getting to be winter and we went down to Mr. Reynolds's office and he said, well, [this is 1951] we're just starting the operation at the Nevada Test Site. You go to Las Vegas.

For the [Nevada] Test Site?

And you go to the test site. And I don't think I was involved in that business. So Lew came home and says, We're going to Las Vegas.

Well, there's a Las Vegas, New Mexico and Lew thought we were going there. I said, Oh, no, I think the testing is in Las Vegas, Nevada.

And so anyway, we lived on Plaza Balentine. Did you know that? It's a sweet little street there in Santa Fe. We had a house there. It was very cute. I kind of hated to leave. But anyway, we finally established that it was in Las Vegas, Nevada. We had a Packard station wagon, and this Packard station wagon had been owned by Mrs. McCormick who lived up in Taos. And we had a Jeep station wagon. I don't know if you—anyway, they had Jeep station wagons back then. And we traded our Jeep station wagon while we were there and we got Mrs. McCormick's Packard station wagon. Oh, all leather seats and everything, and real wood on the [00:55:00] outside. And we packed it up with stuff. And while we were packing, this Indian appeared at the door and he said that he knew we were leaving—did I have things for the Indians? And I said, Well, yes, I've got things that I can [give]. I was giving them shoes and clothes I didn't need, and cooking utensils and everything. And he gave me this, I got it in there, he gave me this necklace made out of—they used to take the 78 phonograph records and they would put the turquoise into—and make jewelry from—and anyway, he gave me some of that.

I'm going to stop you right here because we're going to run out of videotape. So I want you to hold that thought so she can change the tape, or we're not going to get it. And maybe actually we could get that [necklace] and you could actually put it on, because that would be a nice thing to photograph, that gift that the man gave you.

I tried to restring it and I don't know if it's— yes, I'll get it.

OK, just wait a second and then. Gay, this is so wonderful. Thank you so much.

Oh, I hope I'm not going on too much.

You're going on, but in a very good and logical way. You're doing great. So you've gotten us to Nevada, which is where I wanted to get in the first hour.

Well, you know, that was our advent—

[00:56:45] End Track 2, Disc 1.

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

OK, Gay Kauffman, we're back recording again. And during the break, you put on that necklace that this Pueblo gentleman gave to you as you were packing up your Packard.

Yes, this was just a gift because I gave him things. And he wished us good luck. And so we drove. It was a very hasty pack, too. And we drove to Las Vegas, and we pulled up at the old Last Frontier Hotel, which was, for that time, it was quite an elegant hotel and a very beautiful hotel. And we opened the door and the oranges rolled out. But anyway, we stayed at the Last Frontier Hotel.

Yes.

Well, anyway, this is where we became acquainted with Frank Rogers and other of the people that were at the test site. And we stayed at the hotel and it began worrying me because we weren't getting any money and hotels were, you know [expensive]. And so we found a motel place where we moved then, and I think maybe that we stayed there for the rest of the primary season.

Now, they put me in an office on Fremont Street. It was up above this restaurant. I think it was Fremont and Third, or something. Fremont Street was very different at that time. And this was the office for the REECo thing. Evelyn Quick was the secretary, and I don't know what they called me but I was just kind of there.

Let me ask you a question about this. So Mr. Reynolds of REECo gets acquainted with your husband Lew in Gunnison [Santa Fe], and then you come down—?

No, no—see, we hadn't even been up to Gunnison yet.

Oh, you hadn't gone to Gunnison yet, then. OK.

No, no, we went right from Santa Fe to the Last Frontier Hotel.

Now what was Mr. Reynolds's first name?

Lou.

It was Louis also.

Louis. Louis J. Reynolds.

Right. And so you came down to work for REECo.

Yes.

For your husband to work for REECo, basically.

Well, both of us were going to get employed there.

Both of you.

And Lew, he was chasing down materials for—he'd go and buy buckets, he'd go and buy—really it was pretty primary. And there wasn't any Mercury [Nevada] particularly, you know. Of course they had housing for people up there. And one of the things that I did a couple times—they had a carpenter, a very good carpenter up there, but he would come to town on the weekend and have a very good time—two times I went and bailed him out on Monday morning so he could go, they needed him.

Up at Mercury.

Yes. And this was, as I say, pretty primary.

When was the first time you actually went out to the test site?

I didn't get out there that year. It was—all during the fifties, we would come back in the [00:05:00] winters and then they had moved—let me see, I just went one year at that restaurant thing. I think that Evelyn left then, and we were out on Las Vegas Boulevard and—you know where the—Opportunity Village had some stuff out there. It was kind of in that area. The AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] offices were on one side and we were on the other. And this was farther along in the fifties. And I got out there one time, I think, for a test. It was a test that was an airdrop and it was over some hills over there and it was—I didn't talk for a couple of days. I mean it just burned everything. It just lit up everything. It was kind of like the thing we saw out in New Mexico. And those atom tests were—I think that further tests, they began dropping them from towers.

Well, they did a variety. So you saw an airdrop test from a plane?

Yes, I saw an airdrop test, and there were all kind—I can't remember the names. They're very important journalists there, and we were all sitting on benches, and they had their phones, and they went and they dropped this thing, and they got on the phones and they were writing and everything. It was quite a show of journal—and boy, I wasn't interested in doing anything but getting home. I mean it amazes you.

But as I say, I didn't get out to the test site. I was downtown there most of the time. And then after, I became kind of head of the employment stuff down there. Did you interview Goldsberry?

No. Say that again.

Goldsberry. He was personnel director. And I did his PSQ [Personnel Security Questionnaire] when he came from—I think he'd been in the Philippines. Did you hear of Joe Neal? Oh, the senator, the state senator.

Joe Neal.

Joe Neal. I interviewed him for his job here.

Interesting.

Yes, that was interesting, working in that personnel office, the people that you—

OK, I'm going to back you up one little bit because I want you to tell me a little bit more about the test. But you said something earlier that confused me, so I want to make sure I'm clear on this. Are you now living full time in Las Vegas?

No, no, no, never. We didn't until I began this stuff [indicating NTS News collection].

OK, so you're going back to—

Yes, this is the fifties.

Right. So you're here and you're in Santa Fe still?

No, no, we're here and in Gunnison.

In Gunnison. Thank you.

We had a house in Gunnison. We had a log house on the Gunnison River.

OK. So your summers in Gunnison and winters in Las Vegas.

Yes.

I got it. And this is when REECo is really developing the test site.

Well, when it was developing the test site, yes, and as I say, we were here at the very beginning, when it was—Harold Cunningham was here then and it was pretty **[00:10:00]** raw, in a way. I mean this is the first test site.

So just because it's historically so significant, I'd like a little more detail, if you can recall, when you do see this first test, do you leave from Las Vegas in the morning? Do you remember any of those kinds of details of getting up there and how long it took?

Oh, well, on a bus system. Oh yes, this was a big deal. They had places where—there was places out here along Rancho, that was kind of raw land then, where there'd be an area. There'd be cars parked. People driving up there to get on the bus to go up to Mercury. And yes, the bus thing was big. And a lot of people got their sleep. That's how they got—because Las Vegas is a twenty-four-hour town.

Right. So when you witness that test, you go out to one of those places where the benches are.

Yes.

Is it still nighttime or is it—

Oh yes, oh yes, nighttime, sure. Sure. Now I think that—have you run into the name Trudy Schror?

I've heard that name.

Well, she was the chief honcho secretary, executive secretary downtown. I worked with Trudy a couple of years in the personnel office down here, before we had a big-time Goldsberry operation. The guys that just come in and a lot of them were from Louisiana, and mostly black people, and very nice, very polite, and they would tell you anything that they thought you wanted to hear. I mean it was hard to get facts. And they were from parishes. And I'd never had any experience with parishes or anything like that. And there were Spanish-speaking people come from New Mexico here, too, and they would always get me to do it. I don't speak Spanish but I kind of understand them. I have a Spanish lady who does the house, and we talk, she in Spanish and I in English.

So this is when they're actually building the infrastructure of the test site.

Oh yes, the thing is being built up and it didn't become the bureaucracy that was evident in the sixties. Oh no, this was kind of free-wheeling somewhat.

And Frank Rogers is managing—what's his position at this point?

I don't know. He was not general manager of the test site. The first one was Joe Lopez that we knew, and Joe Lopez was a very fine engineer, very good. He went back to Albuquerque and started a company, and particularly interested in developing the solar energy, equipping buildings, which should be done more. But anyway, Joe Lopez was here, and then following him came Davey [James] Crockett. Davey Crockett was an immensely popular person, very fair, very nonpolitical sort of person. His son is the Crockett you hear sometimes on the TV ads, who is a lawyer here now.

[00:15:00] *So how many years did you divide your time between Gunnison and Las Vegas?*

Through the fifties. The logging thing kind of played out up in Gunnison. We sure met a lot of very, very nice people [who] build log houses, interested not in white stucco and contemporary stuff. But anyway, we built in Aspen, we built in Vail. And there was up out of Crested Butte near Gunnison, this was a coal-mining town, and we had people, they blew the coal mine shut while we were there, and this of course threw a lot of people out of work and a couple of the people came down and worked in our mill; they were interesting, Scotch people who could just recite me [Robert] Burns for hours. I mean it was fun.

And Gunnison, it was cowboy country. It was real cowboy country. You go into the Oasis Café there and we'd buy spaghetti. And it was a bar, and they had a thing on the wall where you put in your coins to play the jukebox, and boy, that jukebox used to play. And you know they had a place in there where you could put in your nickel and buy five minutes of silence. And we used to do that occasionally, and the people didn't like it. But anyway, that was a great experience.

We got very well acquainted with the Corrigan family. Now the Corrigans are from Midland, Texas, and Mr. Corrigan was a very influential—I mean these people from Midland, Texas, they're like no other breed, really. And anyway, the Corrigans, you go up to Tin Cup, Colorado was where they were. And they used to come down and stay with us and we'd go and stay with them. So we got mixed up with Midland people from being down in Durango and from being in Gunnison.

And when I came—now this was in the fifties, too—when I had this office down there, and I was making reservations all the time.

Here. Now we're back at the test site.

Yes, for people. I mean for senators, for all kinds of people, and I got very well acquainted with [Las Vegas] Strip manager of the people there. And believe me, it was nothing like it is now. When they opened the New Frontier Hotel, Mario Lanza was supposed to be the opening act. Well, Mario got here and got the Las Vegas throat and he wouldn't sing. Opening night for the hotel. This was their first thing. And this guy, now I can't remember his name, well, we had become very friendly on the telephone, and we were leaving the next day for Gunnison, and I'd called him up to say goodbye, and he says, Oh, you've got to come down.

I said, Oh, I can't come down. We've been packing and everything.

[00:20:00] And he says, No, you've got to come down. I'm in all this trouble!

And so anyway, we got down there and we met him, and he put us in the dining room, one of the feature places. And anyway, Mario had gone back to California. The hotel manager was so mad at him. And top acts from every other hotel on the Strip came and did a turn on the stage there to open that hotel, and it was better than if Mario had been there.

But anyway, it was nice and we had good times at those hotels. One time—oh, this was when we came back to stay in, I think, it was in December of '60. And we had gone into that, oh, little hotel on [the Algiers]—anyway, we had landed in there about five o'clock and we unpacked and so forth. And we say, let's go out and eat, and let's go and have a—and so we were riding up the Strip and we passed the Sands, and the Sands said they had Joey Bishop. And so I said, Oh, I like Joey Bishop. Let's go. Let's just splurge a little. Let's go in and hear Joey Bishop. So we went in. We were going in and they had us wait for a minute at the door, and they escorted us to this table up near the stage. I mean we were kind of right—and anyway, it was Joey Bishop's opening night, and the whole Rat Pack was there. And there were diamonds, there were furs, and here we were sitting there. And anyway, he gets into his act and he says, Oh, my goodness, there's a lady in a cloth coat! And they put the spotlight on me. They had put us up there just because I was the only one in there without a fur.

That's a great story.

And we had a good time. And one time we were at one of the—I guess it was the old Sahara Hotel. Quite a lot of the show people would go there. And we went in and they gave us a good table, and we were sitting there, and then [they were] going to start the show and everything gets black, and I thought I saw some movement. Now Lew had lost his hair. And anyway, the lights come on and here's, what was her name, some little opera star, she was sitting on his lap with his bald head, see, and she was kissing him. And anyway, this was her opening act. I mean we would get into things just for—it was great.

OK, well, I think—I love these stories, I could listen to these Las Vegas stories forever.

Well, there's a lot of them, I mean about hearing Harry Belafonte and what happened to us there. But anyway, we had lots of kind of adventures.

Yes. But we have to make a choice here because of time.

Yes, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

No, don't apologize. I would've interrupted sooner but these are such great stories. But we do need to fast-forward because this work you did when you got back to the test site was so important. So why don't you talk about some of what you told me about before, which is when you returned and you began working on the NTS News.

Well, when we came back, we gave up the mill, and moved away from Gunnison and were going to come here. And so anyway, we came and this was our opening for when we came here permanently, that Joey Bishop thing. But we got an apartment and then it's—they [00:25:00] were just building the Landmark Hotel, which is not there anymore, and we got an apartment in there, and the people upstairs were the McGuire Sisters. This was before Phyllis McGuire attained all her—but anyway, we lived in the Landmark Apartments. Yes, we went into the Landmark Apartments.

And we both drove up to the test site. We drove every day up to the test site. And they put me in kind of busy work, and they had this thing, a sheet that you were supposed to put out every week. It had the movies in it, what was playing at the movies, it had a little classified-ad column, and mostly the thing was a big picture of a security business of "Loose lips sink ships," or something of this sort. It was a big picture, and then you put all this other stuff in. And it was just one page. And then one week it was security, and the next week it was safety. Don't drop your hammer on your toe, or something. And this was it.

And I could've just sat there and done that for years. And I don't know just how it happened, but I got interested in what was going on up there, I mean the people, and the testing, particularly all these scientists making studies, and this was very interesting. And so I began looking, and they let me use photographers at the printing plant who hadn't had a chance to take the kind of pictures they wanted to take either, and we went out, and the first place that they took me to was Cane Springs. Oh boy, Cane Springs, beautiful little stream going by, and this tree, and this cabin, and it's lovely. And I did a story on it, and put the picture on the thing. And that week we needed two pages for the *Bulletin*. And you know we just began doing it and going out to more places, to White Rock, and getting many, many stories. And eventually I said it would be nice if we'd just have a little publication. And we got it. And I got some people to work with me, I got a typist, and it just kind of grew like that. But that is the truth. Nobody was paying any attention to the corrals that had been used, the history of the place, and it had a big history before the test site began there. And things like they had a dedication of the post office. The dedication of the post office turned Mercury from a construction camp into a town. And this was important. The postmaster general wasn't here but he wrote a letter, and this was important to change the status of this town. And all the things that began happening and particularly this work that they were doing and the [00:30:00] people that were there from universities. And believe me, nobody had paid attention to it. I was amazed sort of because during the fifties I got up there that one time at night and got scared to death. But they had dormitories, they had cafeterias, they had swimming pool, they had a really good baseball diamond, and they had good—it was a theater. And it had grown into a town. And everything wasn't good. The road from—the road outside into Mercury this one spring had all this beautiful mallow, the orange flowers growing there, and the next day it was gone. The oil trucks had been out there killing that nasty stuff. And I think

that publishing things kind of grew a little awareness of the—but you heard it from people, you heard it from—this terrible place, everything's the same, and there's no—this is so boring. And it isn't boring. Almost every inch of it you can find some—it's very interesting. It was a very great outdoor laboratory.

I have to ask you a couple of questions here to clarify, and then I would like for you to talk maybe specifically, in addition to Cane Springs, some other places you went. The photographers that worked with you, from last time we spoke, am I understanding correctly, these were laboratory photographers who were there to photograph the tests, is that right?

No, they were there to photograph construction things, mostly construction things. Their names, Dick Borden, he left to go with LRL, the Lawrence [Radiation] Laboratory and Doc [Richard] Colyer, and Doc Colyer, he left also before, and that's why I was using an artist so much, you know. But I think Doc stayed as long as I, because there when the president came, when President [John F.] Kennedy came, why, Dick Borden was the one who worked with me on that. There were no other newspaper photographers, no press at all.

I didn't know that. So those famous pictures that we see—

Yes, they're the only ones. Pierre Salinger was there, who was kind of—and—

Kind of what?

Well, he had his eye on what was happening and so forth. He was a good press man. And boy, Kennedy knew how to be photographed.

Did he.

Well, in this picture that I gave him, here's all these people standing around and here's Kennedy looking up—he knew. But no, the photographers were my very great help, and they were both very good fellows.

So how would it work? You would decide weekly that that there was something—how—you tell me.

Well, I don't know, we'd just talk about it, and they would come to me with the stuff, and Fred Worman knew where he wanted to go. Now Fred, I don't think Fred got a hand up about doing archaeology at the test site till I started this stuff. And then he became very interested.

Let's talk about that.

[00:35:00] Now I have no background, educationally on any of this and they did play tricks on me and so forth.

Like what?

Well, the first thing that happened was I got involved with this crew from the University of Utah, and they were doing research on lizards and possible effects that the radiation was having on lizards and so they were working with these lizards. And oh, this guy, he was very interesting and very helpful, and he was telling me about this one that they'd found a rare species. You know, lizards don't make noises, and this one was, he was really making an obvious noise. And this was very interesting. It was a breakthrough. It was marvelous. And I printed it, on this thing. And of course they all laughed and so did I. They really had me. I believed everything they told me. And it was a good start. I was glad they did that, because it was a good start because I wasn't getting mad or anything, and they were good fellows. And so that was kind of the start of some of the animal research. I mean they really did very—and wrote wonderful papers. And I've given them all away. I gave the Nature Conservancy quite a lot of them.

Well, if they were published, we can probably find them.

Well, this fellow, what's his name, [Donald] Tuohy, who did the work out at Tule Springs.

Oh, OK, he's the Tule Springs man.

Well anyway, he wrote a pretty good thesis on—what did he call it? He was up there a number of times and he called it Stone Age Missiles in the Age of, you know, Atomic things [see Tuohy, D. “Stone Age Missiles in A Modern Test Site”. Masterkey 39: 44-59. 1965], and that was a good thing. And I didn’t think I gave—I really wanted it because I didn’t get a chance to really read it well, and I wanted to, and I think that got taken.

And what was his name again, Gay, this guy? Well, we might be able to find a copy of this.

Well anyway, he wrote a couple things on the test site.

Now, on a day—talk about when you’re going out to some of these sites. It must’ve been a hike, a fairly large distance.

Oh, well, we had a car, of course.

Right. What would you do? I didn’t mean a physical hike but I meant a—was it an all-day trip?

Oh yes, you’d go out. And this was at a time when you dressed for the office. Slacks weren’t as prevalent and I would have to get into clothes where you could climb around. And yes, I worked very hard, I really did, I worked very hard. I don’t know of anybody that—I had to put the thing together, I had to lay it out, and I got very little cooperation from the printing plant. Some of this stuff when I read it I think, oh my God.

What?

Well, it’s just not as readable as it could be. I mean the printing, particularly of the graphics, the words, it’s not real professional.

[00:40:00] *But there’s so much interesting information in this. Just let me get a detail. This is a REECo printing plant, is that right?*

Yes, it was the REECo printing plant. And then they were doing a lot of work, well, anything that needed printing. And the head of it was Helen LaPlante, was called Smoky LaPlante. And I

saw Smoky one time at a Nevada Wilderness meeting, and she was not very helpful to me and had to fight for everything that happened. But I did get those fellows. I got Doc and I got Dick and they were great. But that is the truth. I mean a lot of interest in some of this stuff really started with getting this thing out.

Yes, you've made that very clear.

And I think it did. And believe me, some of the people in the REECo office were not pleased. I mean they want a publication with two men shaking hands, that So-and-so had this big plan that he's getting commendations for, for saving rubber bands. I mean, you know? And this is what a company paper is, is two men shaking hands. And I had plenty of it. Boy, any time that they had a construction thing or anything, I think I did all right. I covered Sedan well. LRL was a big help there.

Let's talk about that a little.

Well, LRL I think was part of the Plowshare program, I think.

Right. It was.

And I really had hopes that the Plowshare program was going to develop because atomic energy must be—I mean this is an energy source we need. We do not need to store the residue up in Yucca Mountain, though. France is taking care of its residue in a way; they have learned to recycle it. Why don't we spend some time in—just to bury it, I don't know. I do not have enough background in this science to speak, but it just seems reasonable.

Let me ask you about something you just said that I was curious about, so I might as well ask you now, Plowshare and the peaceful uses, and I wondered because you mentioned your nonviolent background of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Are you thinking about any of those kinds of things when you're working at the test site?

Oh sure. You know. When this stuff in Baghdad started, I sat over in that chair looking at the television. I didn't know what to do. I mean they were dropping bombs on Baghdad and it was—

But at the test site, are you making those kinds of connections?

Well, yes, I was very pleased to work with something that had a significance of using this energy in a way that would be helpful and not just—this is what Iran said they were going to do, was to use it for their industrial purposes. And I think that France—I do [00:45:00] not know enough about this to talk about it, I guess—but I think that they've put it to good use in places, and I don't think they've had problems. Of course Russia had this big thing [Chernobyl] but no, it's very dangerous stuff.

We only have about maybe a little bit more than ten minutes left on this tape, so maybe you could talk about one or two of your sort of favorite stories. A couple come to my mind. You produced this famous picture of this cowboy with the AEC brand, and then you've got a picture here of petroglyphs. Let me see if I can find that one. But talk a little bit about this one that you did with this guy.

Oh, that's Ken Case and I got a good picture of myself with Ken Case. And Ken was the AEC cowboy. And he really did. He had a herd and we had bulls, we had cows. It was very picturesque. And then they fired Ken.

Oh, did they?

Yes. I don't know why. Maybe they ran out of projects or something or other. But at this time, Ken was working with the herd and they were making observations.

I think it's a really extraordinary set of documents you created here that now have historical significance.

Now this one, this thing, this is when they dedicated the post office. Now that was sort of a historic thing.

Yes. You've got one on Black Buttes here.

Black Buttes was interesting. You know the Forty-Niners came down this canyon and we found things.

Did you?

Yes, wagon wheels and so forth. I really tried not to identify locations, but they all disappeared. And any petroglyphs that could be lifted were—just stupid people.

So you made a conscious effort not to reveal where some of these things were?

Well, I tried not to be too specific because in some cases—now there's one here about when the workers, some of the labs and RADSAFE [Radiological Safety] workers dug up Indian graves.

Oh, did they?

Yes, Security found them and they brought the skulls and the bones and things into my office. And I had them there until Fred [Worman] took them.

Fred Worman?

Yes.

I'm looking for that one, there was that fellow up in—

Oh, one of the sheriff's deputies—see, that's Nye County. Tonopah's in Nye County. And anyway, up in Tonopah, the hospital there has a wing where they had these aged pioneers—I don't imagine any of them are left anymore—but old prospectors and people, from the teen years, from the early 1900s. And it wasn't like any nursing home down here. I mean it was [00:50:00] friendly. And those people were taking care of them. And one of the chief people

there was Louis [Schmidt]—I've got it here somewhere? Where is it [the issue of the NTS News]?

We've got it here. I'll look at it. I'll find it. You keep talking. I'm going to find it for you.

Well anyway, Louis, he was from Alsace Lorraine and worked his way across country here till he landed in the Tonopah area. And he said originally, you know, he had a restaurant. I've heard he also had some girls [prostitutes]. But anyway, Louis was a popular citizen around. And Louis got old and wound up in the hospital there. And when we went up there, most of the people were in robes, in bed or something. Louis, he got up every day and he got on a shirt and put on a tie, and the tie wasn't tied very good or anything, but he was proper. And anyway, here Louis was like a hundred and something then. And they told me that one of Louis's big fears was that his clothes were all kind of gone and he didn't have a proper suit to get buried in. And I went down to Penney's and I told them this story and I said, Do you have a suit that, you know, hasn't been sold or is maybe out of style even or something or other that you could let me have cheap?

And the guy went and looked and found this suit, nice kind of formal blue serge suit, and he said, I'll let you have it for twenty dollars.

And so I said, Oh, good. And I said, Give me some ties and a shirt.

I paid for it out of my own money. And so anyway, we sent this suit up. It made him so happy. And the nurses have written, there's a letter there, the nurses have written that Louis is so happy in his suit, that he loves to wear his suit and he's so happy that he's got a proper suit to get buried in. He lived to 106.

Wow! I think that one may be in the other room because I don't see it here, but I'll take a look at it. Now was he a prospector himself?

No, no, he was always a supplier of amusement, of food, of something for prospectors.

But some of those prospectors sure had some stories. When we went up to Pillar Spring, at the entrance there was this bedstead. I got a picture of that and a story on it. There was this bedstead sitting there, nice bed, brass bed, and it's pointed directly at the north. And anyway, this prospector, he'd come from Maine, and he was proper. He had to sleep in a bed and it had to be pointed north. Now this was a pretty good superstition amongst many of them. You get special wavelengths coming from the north. You should only sleep with your head pointed north. And anyway, here's this bedstead and there was stuff around a campfire. I've got a thing here of, we found mining sites around the—and they always had a Log Cabin syrup can. I was going to write to the Log Cabin syrup people and tell them I want to do a story on that. Because I did, I found them, well, in Round Mountain and kind of throughout the state. But **[00:55:00]** anyway, Log Cabin syrup was a good mining accessory for some of these prospectors. Some of the pioneer people and the people from Rhyolite; I met this old miner up at Rhyolite that some of his stones are back there. And it was very interesting, and I loved it, I just loved it. I liked all the people that you met and the places and so forth.

[00:59:16] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[End of interview and beginning of informal review of materials not transcribed]