

Henderson Libraries

Henderson Oral History Project

Robert Earl Campbell

Oral History of Robert Earl Campbell

conducted by

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm

March 16, 2015

Interviewer: *Today is March 16, 2015. We're at the Paseo Verde Branch of the Henderson District Public Libraries in Henderson, Nevada. My name is Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm and I'm interviewing former Henderson City Manager, Bob Campbell as part of the Henderson Oral History Project of Henderson Libraries. Thank you so much for joining me, Bob.*

Bob Campbell: Very pleased to.

Interviewer: *I'd like to start by asking about your childhood. Tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what your parents did for a living.*

Bob Campbell: I was born in Sedalia, Missouri. That was the nearest hospital to the farm where I grew up, which was in Southern Missouri. We had a four hundred acre cattle small grain farm that kept my father busy, but not busy enough, because he was also high school principal. And my mother was mother and housekeeper but also a teacher, so we had a very active family life and farm life. My grandparent lived in our home. He passed away when I was fourteen at age eighty-two. And it was a wonderful childhood in the Ozarks.

Interviewer: *I bet. What kinds of things did you do for fun?*

Bob Campbell: Well, when you're in the Ozarks, you start driving tractors and trucks on the farm when you're nine, ten years old.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Bob Campbell: So raked hay, bucked hay bales, took care of the cattle and the horses. We also had a grade-A dairy herd, so that was busy. My dad was very proud—the whole family was—of his registered Angus herd, Angus cattle, which is now quite a brand name.

Interviewer: *It is. Yeah.*

Bob Campbell: It was just getting started at that time.

Interviewer: *Oh, how about that. Yeah.*

Bob Campbell: But they all wore chains around their neck with numbers so you could keep specific records on each animal. So it was just a typical farm life, nice farm neighbors, and to some degree we lived in two worlds because the school where my father was principal was about fourteen miles away and there were city kids and country kids and sometimes you could tell the difference and sometimes you couldn't.

Interviewer: *How many people worked on your farm?*

Bob Campbell: We would normally bring in three or four people that would help during the summer putting up the hay. My dad and I—I should have mentioned that I had two older brothers.

Interviewer: *Well, yeah, I wondered how bring your family was, if they helped too.*

Bob Campbell: Yes, they are twins, eight years older than I am. And I had a mixed relationship, I think, as younger brother do with older brothers. I was not happy at one time when they hooked my tricycle up to a hot spark plug wire.

Interviewer: *Oooh.*

Bob Campbell: But they went away to college when I was about nine and I welcomed them home on weekends. They introduced me to this wonderful new thing called pizza, which I had never heard of, and they told me of a wonderful place in the college town where you could get nineteen cent hamburgers from a place called McDonald's. So that was—that was my youth life.

Interviewer: *And so then did you go to college in that town?*

Bob Campbell: I did. I went to the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

Interviewer: *And you studied public administration?*

Bob Campbell: I studied public administration. I had kind of a roundabout way of getting there. My father had a stroke my first year in college, which impacted family finances to some degree. And I had decided by that time that I wanted to go into law enforcement. So after I graduated from high school, that summer I borrowed my father's car and drove to the State Capital and went in to see the State Highway Patrol Superintendent, without realizing I might need an appointment. But he was kind enough to see me, spent about an hour with me, and gave me the name of a person to contact when I got to the university. And I did that. So I ended up—I had some financial help from my family, but I also worked. I ended up doing—being a dispatcher for the Police Department before I turned twenty. And when I was twenty, the Chief went ahead and sent me to the Missouri Highway Patrol Academy so that when I came out, I would be twenty-one and could go on patrol. And so I worked my way through college doing that. Intended to go into law enforcement, but ended up active in the Columbia community with the Safety Council and Kiwanis Club and through Kiwanis I met the Dean of the School of Business and Public Administration. And through him I ended up going into city management.

Interviewer: *That's interesting. And I feel like there are a lot of cases where people who were planning on careers in law enforcement ultimately go into public administration. Did you find that to be the case?*

Bob Campbell: That was it. Actually one of the things that eventually dissuaded me from law enforcement, I had done—the university campuses in the mid-'60s were an interesting place to be because we had quite a few so-called subversive groups that were operating and we had students attempting to run weapons to Cuba for the revolution and those type of things. And so

I had a lot of interplay with the Federal Bureau of Investigation Agent in Charge for that area, and he had encouraged me to join the FBI, which I applied for. Unfortunately those were the days before contact lenses and I failed the eye exam.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's too bad.*

Bob Campbell: So one Saturday morning after my wife Pat and I were married—we had met at the university—the Dean called me at about seven o'clock on a Saturday morning and he said, "Bob, have you ever thought about being a city manager?" And I said, "Well, no, but my degree is in Public Administration so perhaps I should." And he said, "Well, that's good, because I've set you an appointment to be interviewed at ten this morning just up the highway about thirty miles, in a place called Boonville, Missouri, on the Missouri River. And the Mayor and Council are expecting you. So I did that and that's how I came to go into city management.

Interviewer: *That's really great. How long were you there?*

Bob Campbell: I was the City Manager of Boonville for about two-and-a-half years, and it was interesting because I was the first one that they had had—it was a new position and obviously it was my first position, so they didn't know what to expect and I didn't know what to do. So we both just established our roles and worked together and it was a—it was a great training ground, frankly.

Interviewer: *Yeah, sounds like an interesting learning experience.*

Bob Campbell: It was very good—good people in the community, and that—as city managers usually have the opportunity to do, I had the opportunity after two years to move to a larger city up near Kansas City, Missouri, called Excelsior Springs, Missouri. And that was a larger city, and so we moved up there. During the time we were in Boonville, our first child, Robyn, was

born. That was the highlight of our Boonville experience. And then we went on to Excelsior Springs, Missouri, as City Manager.

Interviewer: *How did you end up coming out to Henderson?*

Bob Campbell: Well, that's a bit interesting. The Winter of '76-'77 was a very, very, very cold winter in northern Missouri. In Excelsior Springs it did not get above zero for twenty-two straight days. The water mains were frozen, the fire fighters were very concerned as to how they would react. That kind of temperature does great damage to streets and highways. And all of these were just city manager challenges, but by the middle of winter, I was promising my wife a trip to Las Vegas because that was the time to—Las Vegas was just really beginning to take off in its second generation, I would call it. And I got a—most city managers get—belong to the International City Management Association. And every month you get a newsletter of positions that are open around the country, and I saw one for Henderson, Nevada, which I thought would be much warmer. And since I'd been promising my wife a trip to Las Vegas, I looked at the map, saw it was in the Las Vegas metro area, and I sent an application along with lots of other folks who thought they would go where it was warmer as well. That was in February. And my wife and I came out for an interview in—I believe it was March. And I met with the City Council and toured the town and within a very short time after returning back, called and was offered the job.

Interviewer: *That's great.*

Bob Campbell: And so that was—we liked what we saw of Henderson. And so, again, backtracking a bit, while we were in Excelsior Springs, our second daughter, Jenny, Janelle, was born. So we packed up our car in April of '77 and a moving van picked up our household

belongings, and we drove across the states, which—the first time I'd seen real cactus. I used to see it in the Western movies and TV shows, but I really didn't believe it actually existed.

Interviewer: *[laughter]*

Bob Campbell: And so we drove across. We'd stop at motels that had swimming pools and play with the girls and—it's interesting because on April 17th we topped the hill at Boulder City, stopped at Railroad Pass for a bite to eat, and we were sitting at a table in the dining room, and Robyn, who was six at that time, said, "Daddy, what are all these machines around here?" And I hadn't really thought of an answer to that, but I said, "Well, they're kind of like candy and gum machines."

Interviewer: *Oh, no. [laughter]*

Bob Campbell: And so she accepted that. And as we got up to leave, well, there was an older couple, locals, as we came to be called, that were at the table next to us. And those gentlemen motioned me over as we got ready and said, "Son, you ain't gonna be able to tell her that for very long." So that was our introduction.

Interviewer: *That's funny. So you came with your two daughters and your wife. And then when you moved to Henderson, where did you move?*

Bob Campbell: Well that was a problem because Henderson was undergoing a real boom at that time, and it was a lot of construction and housing being built. The City Manager, of course, is required to live in the city and there was just nothing available.

Interviewer: *Gosh.*

Bob Campbell: And so one of the Councilmen introduced me to Mr. Hank Chisholm. Chisholm Homes is one of the large home builders. And I met with Mr. Chisholm and—my wife and I

did—and he said, “Well, we don’t have any houses that are ready.” He said, “We have three model homes.” He said, “Let me show you those model homes and if you’d like, why, we’ll sell you one of those.”

Interviewer: *How about that.*

Bob Campbell: So we toured the homes. It was on Hidden Valley, and we saw one that we liked and so we bought it, and we gave I believe \$45,000 for it at that time.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: And so we moved in, and since it was an active subdivision, we learned very quickly we needed to keep our doors locked, because otherwise we had people looking at the model homes—we were the middle one—wandering in, saying, “My, this looks lived in.” [laughter] And so we made sure that we locked our doors most of the time. But that’s where we lived.

Interviewer: *That’s neat. Did you have neighbors at that time, since they were model homes?*

Bob Campbell: We did, we did. Right behind us lived the Brimmer family, which are still our good friends. Our daughters grew up with their daughters. Dundee Jones, who is with Parks and Recreation, lived up in that area. Rich Heckendorf, who is with the Planning Department, lived up in that area. So, yeah, it was a new, newly developed area, and it was one that family, you know, young families in large part—good place to set down roots.

Interviewer: *Yeah. That’s something that’s really special, I think, about Henderson, is that people do set down roots here. People stay here. They go to college but they move back or they go to college, they move away, but they keep in touch with all their old friends.*

Bob Campbell: They do. And Henderson—a lot of people think of the Las Vegas area as being very cold and distant and everyone's a tourist, and that's not the way it is as you've found out. It's a very, I felt, we felt, cohesive community. It was easy to get to know people. And people in the West, and I know you've mentioned you came from Texas, we noticed that compared to the Midwest, people in the West have just what I'd call a "can-do" attitude. We can get it done. And that's nice to see in a community. So we thought it was a great place to raise our daughters. They have now turned out to be wonderful young ladies with their own families. And it was great, no regrets.

Interviewer: *It's great having Robyn on our Board.*

Bob Campbell: Robyn—Robyn's—you know, it's funny, but my wife and I joke about this—it used to be that when we were very active and lived here in the community, that people knew Robyn as Bob and Pat's daughter. And now we're known as Robyn's parents.

Interviewer: *[laughter]*

Bob Campbell: So it's changed.

Interviewer: *That's funny. You know, you thought this was a very cohesive place when you came here, but you introduced some things when you first became City Manager that I thought were some very good things for team building and drawing people together in the city management. Could you talk about that a little bit?*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, we—when I was City Manager in Excelsior Springs, there were—Excelsior Springs and four other neighboring cities of comparable size and makeup had received a federal grant which was intended to promote cohesive city management styles and working with the community in which you were located to accomplish the goals of the greater community. And

we had a lot of really specialized training and experience in doing that, and when I came here that seemed like a good thing to do. And, you know, a large part of it is just getting out in the community every opportunity, going to events, service clubs, making presentations, listening to people and their concerns. And then we'd bring it into the department head meetings; we had department head staff meetings each week that I conducted with our department heads. And we had a good group of people. All very dedicated. And one of the things that I have found helpful, whenever someone had screwed up as a department head on some issue, instead of trying to come down on them in an iron fist type thing, we made it into a kind of a joke, which was more effective than anything. I had prepared what I called a "Green Pickle Award" and it was a nice, very impressive looking wooden plaque with a brass plate on it that said "Green Pickle Award". And it had a great big green pickle in a plastic pouch like you can buy at a grocery store, a single large pickle. And it was mounted on the plaque, and it was noted on the pickle package that it was packaged in Waterloo, Iowa. So when some department head had made a mistake, a calculated error or something like that, why, at the staff meeting, we'd make a big point of presenting that person with the "Green Pickle Award", and pointed out that it was made in Waterloo and, you know, no one wants to meet their Waterloo, but you have now met it with this pickle award. And everyone laughed. It had its effect as presented. No one got upset or mad over it, but it served its purpose and it rotated until the next person had an opportunity to win the Green Pickle Award. That was an effective form I think of bringing a group together. We had a good time. Our department heads and—there was—certainly as City Manager, I didn't have the staff that the city now has with the size of the city and the size of the

staff. Didn't have an assistant manager or a public relations person or anything like that. So we were a cohesive unit and it served the city well, I think.

Interviewer: *I think there's two assistant city managers now.*

Bob Campbell: I realize that. [laughter]

Interviewer: *[laughter] That's crazy—a lot of things to take care of. Well, the city has grown a lot since you first came here too.*

Bob Campbell: It has. And if I may say, I have to say that's one of the things that attracted me to Henderson, speaking as a city manager. Excelsior Springs that I came from was the oldest city manager west of the Mississippi River and it was pretty much totally developed. Came to Henderson, it was, I believe, seventy-four square miles in size but only fifteen percent developed. Well, to a city manager, that's like an artist having a blank palette to work on. And so we spent a lot of time, not only with our staff, but with expertise of consultants that we would bring in from time to time, and I like to think that with everyone's help, we created a lot of what you see today. The parks and the recreational facilities and the public facilities, all of those things we did a huge amount of planning for and I think created that palette, which has now come to be in large part. And I can't claim credit for all of it or even most of it. It was a real community effort to do all of that. It took the votes of the public voters when we had issues that needed to be approved. We got that approval almost every—I think every time that we went to the voters. And one of the—speaking of outreach, as you did a while ago—one of the things that I found effective during my three cities of city manager, the—in a kind of a stand-alone cohesive community, as all three cities that I was in were and are, there are two groups of people that everyone in the city usually sees once every month or so. That's the barbers and

the beauticians. So when we were going to the vote of the public, we would personally go to every barber and beautician early on, tell them what we were doing, why we were doing it, what it would cost, what would be the result if we couldn't get it approved, and how much we needed it. And those people felt, number one, very happy to be knowledgeable, because they knew it was going to be discussed in their chairs by their customers. They appreciated being informed enough that they could intelligently discuss it. We didn't try to sell them on it. We just told them what the facts were. They could decide for themselves if they wanted to say to their customer they thought it was a pretty good deal for the city. But we used that—and every time we went to the voters for anything, both here and other communities I was in—and I think it paid off.

Interviewer: *Robyn mentioned that you used to—the first thing you'd do in the morning is drive around and visit people.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, I spent a lot of time. I'd go to all the departments. I'd drive a lot—of course, there weren't as many streets as there are now. But I would cover the area and I'd drive out in this area [Green Valley District] which was volcanic rock at the time. There was really little or nothing—well certainly nothing south of Highway 146 and not much south of Sunset Road. So the community's changed a lot and it's been—I think city managers that stay in a city three or four years and then leave it and go to another city across the country—which we did, in two out of three—miss out on a lot, because here I've been able to see everything that we talked about and planned happen.

Interviewer: *That's amazing, yeah.*

Bob Campbell: I drive back here and I can remember some of the early meetings when we were talking about these things and now they're there. I go back to prior cities, you know, and I don't have that basis of knowledge given what I see now because so much of it happened after I was no longer even knowledgeable of what was happening. So I think our family gained a lot by keeping—staying here many years.

Interviewer: *And you had a tremendous impact on the community here too.*

Bob Campbell: Well, it's—I had an opportunity to be involved in a lot of things. I don't know how much impact it was.

Interviewer: *Well, tell me about some of the issues that you faced as a city manager. I think there were some water and sewer issues.*

Bob Campbell: There were. I won't mention any names on this particular one. The old timers will know who it is. But we had a local developer who absolutely loved to disobey any city code that he could possibly think of. And when Green Valley was first getting ready to develop, there were very few houses here at the time. Why, there was a large water main that had been put in place to serve Green Valley and there was a large water main going to it. Well this particular developer had a piece of land in between those two sections of water main and when we first started needing water out here, we couldn't figure why we couldn't get any pressure. We found that he had put a very small section of pipe between the two large sections. So those were the little things that he did. He and I tangled a lot to the point—I had, of course, told—asked our code enforcement people to be sure and keep a very close eye on this gentleman.

Interviewer: *Yeah, you have to, I guess.*

Bob Campbell: And so he resented that. So he started running full page ads in the local Henderson newspaper calling me the carpetbagger from Missouri. And he would explain how I was ripping off the city expense account and all these different things which, of course, weren't true. Well, Morry Zenoff was the newspaper publisher at the time, and Morry and I had gotten to be good friends. My wife and I had gotten to know him and his lovely wife, Ava. And so I call Morry up one day, I said, "Morry, let's go have lunch. So we went down to Nick's, which was the hangout at the time, down at Water and Lake Mead, and we were having lunch and I said, Morry, I have a question for you. "What is it, Bob?" I said, "Are we good friends?" He said, "Yeah, Bob, we're good friends. Bob, we are really good friends." Well, I said, "Morry, tell me something, then. How come your newspaper is accepting these full page ads from this gentleman calling me a crook and a carpetbagger?" Well, Morry laid down his knife and fork and, you know, he said, "Bob, he's paying cash." So that was my answer.

Interviewer: *[laughter] He was a character, huh?*

Bob Campbell: He was. He was. The other thing we did—the town had grown up as an industrial town, as everyone knows, the World War II effort. And the water system for the city was being operated by the private entity that operated the BMI complex, Basic Management. Well, the 1974 Safe Drinking Water Act passed by the Federal Government had gone into effect, and we got very concerned about whether the private industry was as careful with the water standards as the City was required to assure. So one of the first big decisions that City Council had to make, which I had recommended, was that we take over the water system. And so we did that. That's allowed it to grow with the growth of the community and assure that the water standards are met.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that was a good move. Now I know that you also—you had some influence on, like you say, some of the things that you were talking about planning in the city and have come to fruition. Well, one of the things that you helped establish were the colleges here, the College of Southern Nevada and Nevada State College. And I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about how you helped get them established.*

Bob Campbell: Sure. Well, one of the concerns—and we saw it in our youngest daughter, Janelle, who wanted to pursue a nursing career—and we were finding that the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, while a very nice institution, was having a tough time getting bachelor degree people out within a four-year timeframe. They just—their adjustment of the college, of the class schedules—it was impossible to do in a four-year time period. And we experienced that personally and a lot of other people did too. And so one, I believe, Sunday afternoon, there was three or four of us that met at our home. One was Jim Gibson, who later became mayor. I believe Selma Bartlett was there, our long-time banker friend. Selma was a staunch supporter and she and her husband, Troy, were two very good friends through many, many years and taught us a lot about Southern Nevada. But she was there. Richard Perkins, who was very active in the Legislature as well as being with the police department at the time. At any rate, we met in our living room and discussed that maybe we should try to start a state college here, which would be concentrating primarily on business degrees and nursing degrees and those types of basic four-year bachelor degrees. And so we started working on that through the legislative process. That was a tough battle because we found that the vested interest in higher education as it then existed in the State were very, very entrenched and turf protection was in full battle mode. And we had some huge battles through, I think, two sessions of the Legislature in getting

that done. A lot of people pulling for it. We had some wonderful help from one or two regents that were in rural areas of Northern Nevada who thought it was a good idea. And, of course, we got to Father Caviglia, who was a staunch supporter of anything and everything in Henderson. And Bob Swadell, whose name I'm sure you've also heard.

Interviewer: *I've heard it, yeah.*

Bob Campbell: The three of us kind of became known, I guess, as the Three Musketeers over the years, because we were always going off on battles for the community of one sort or another. But with a lot of help from a lot of good people, why, eventually the support came around. And to drive by and see the State College campus and the Caesar Caviglia building on it is a very heartwarming thing to see.

Interviewer: *Yeah, we've had some of the Henderson Historical Society talks, panel talks, in the Caesar Caviglia Auditorium there.*

Bob Campbell: It took a lot of support to do it and I think it's a great asset to Henderson and to Southern Nevada and the growth of the students. We started off really struggling in whatever open space we could find to have it, and I think they're now, if I'm not mistaken, around four thousand students, something like that. And that's four thousand that would have a really tough time getting a degree in a reasonable time period anywhere else in the state, I think.

Interviewer: *Yeah. That's really great. And so then you also have something to do with getting Nevada State College going.*

Bob Campbell: That's actually what I was talking about, Nevada State College.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's what you were talking about. Oh, okay.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah. But did I say Community in the beginning? I meant Nevada State College.

Interviewer: *Well, College—I was thinking College of Southern Nevada.*

Bob Campbell: That's, that's the—what, is that the Community College?

Interviewer: *I think that's where the Caesar Caviglia Auditorium is, at College of Southern Nevada.*

Bob Campbell: Oh, rather than—you're right—rather than the State College. That is—you are correct. You are correct.

Interviewer: *And they are completely separate entities.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, they are completely separate. Yeah. The facility named after Father C is College of Southern Nevada and the State College, of course, is another facility down south. That's right. I co-mingled the two—both educational. [laughter]

Interviewer: *They're close to each other in proximity too. [laughter]*

Bob Campbell: They are. They are.

Interviewer: *Yeah. Well, and then you had a lot of other influence on the development of Henderson as well, and one of the first things you did was, after you were City Manager, you worked with American-Nevada Corporation to develop Green Valley.*

Bob Campbell: I did, and we had been here—we had had a very good run, I think, as City Manager here and laid a lot of ground work, some of which is still happening. But I—frankly, we had—when I say we, my family and I had fallen in love with Southern Nevada, Henderson in particular. City managers for one reason or another tend to move on, politics change, support base changes, you irritate enough people over time that you had to get out of town. [laughter] The Green Valley area was a large expanse of land which Mr. Greenspun, the Greenspun family, had purchased some years before through the federal government. And they were just getting

ready to start developing and I saw that as really an opportunity, number one, to stay in the area where we loved to be. Number two, to—maybe a good transition to the private sector, so that we could earn a living and stay in the area and not be in city management. Had a lot of similarities, developing a new community and so I had—and as you may or may not have gathered, there’s always been a—what I’ve termed a love-hate relationship between old Henderson and Green Valley. Old Henderson liked Green Valley on some fronts, they resented Green Valley on some fronts. Green Valley, as it developed in the early years, had some of those same feelings going the other direction. And I knew that leaving the post of city management and going to work for Green Valley was going to cause some upheavals among the power structure of Henderson. So I went to my good friend, Father Caviglia, and I said, “Father C, how do I do this? I want as smooth a transition as possible. And I want to be effective in my new role.” He said, “Bob, don’t worry about it.” He said, “I’ll have a big dinner here at the parish. I’ll invite all the shakers and movers in and you can tell them what you’re going to do.”

Interviewer: *That’s really great.*

Bob Campbell: So he had a dinner and Pat and I went and, I don’t know, there were thirty or forty people there, and it went very well. They congratulated me on my pending decision, and so we moved ahead. And Father C and I always laughed thereafter that we had experienced a truly ecumenical event because a Catholic priest had had a dinner so that the Presbyterian could explain to the Mormons why he was going to work for the Jews. And it turned out very good. When I went to work for American-Nevada Corporation as Senior Vice-President and General Manager, there were twenty-two houses in Green Valley. It’s now, I think, something over two hundred thousand. But it was a lot of lava fields, and our first building, office

building—well, the office—the first office building was where our offices were, and then we got ready to build the next office building, which is where St. Rose Dominican was going to open up a clinic and a satellite facility. And I got to work early in the building one morning, and I heard screams coming from down where the St. Rose people were. So I went up to the end of the building to see what was happening and they were all, nurses and all, were standing on chairs. And I said, “Well, what’s the problem?” Well, we looked over and there were little rattlesnakes wrapped around the potted plants.

Interviewer: *Oh, oh, my gosh.*

Bob Campbell: And we had—we were pioneering that area, you see, and it turned out we had disturbed a rattlesnake nest.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: And these little babies had worked their way in. But we had a—I knew a friend on the Fire Department had a dog that could sniff out snakes. And so I called him and he came out found the den about two hundred feet away from the building. And we got the snakes out of the potted plants and everything went on. But those were one of the interesting things of pioneering.

Interviewer: *[laughter] Wow. Yeah, no kidding.*

Bob Campbell: The other thing that happened, we were putting in a large utility line at the Sunset and Green Valley Parkway intersection, and the bulldozer operator managed to hit the seventeen inch high pressure gas main that fed the whole Las Vegas Valley and it blew the bulldozer out of the trench. And the gas was venting. It was like an earthquake. It was shaking

the earth for probably a quarter of a mile. We had to evacuate the few houses that were there. They had to reroute the airline traffic coming into McCarran so they didn't get in the fumes.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: And fortunately, I don't think we ever hit any other gas mains. That was exciting at the time.

Interviewer: *Well, in 1988, when you were President of the Chamber of Commerce, they had the PEPCON explosion.*

Bob Campbell: That was probably the most unfortunate and memorable event. It was concerning on a personal level because our two daughters were at schools fairly close to that site and some of the first radio reports were that some roofs on nearby schools were collapsing.

Interviewer: *Gosh.*

Bob Campbell: Which was very unsettling. I had gone—I was meeting a person for lunch in Las Vegas. I was actually working for Southwest Gas at the time. After I left American-Nevada I went to work doing public affairs for Southwest Gas Corporation, which is a Fortune 500 gas company for here, Arizona, and parts of California. And so I was getting ready to have lunch when you could see the smoke and the radio, and I had just gotten my first cell phone at that point, the big brick that you carried around. And so I headed in that direction, and I got out to 146 and Las Vegas Boulevard South where Metro Police had the intersection blocked and weren't letting anyone go down 146. And I looked over to a group that had been stopped and people were out of their cars and there was a gentleman named Tom War who was Executive Vice-President of the plant that had just blown up. So I went up to the Metro officer and I said, "You know, there's a gentleman over here who I think your Commander on the fire scene

would like to speak with, given the chemicals they're dealing with." I said, "If you will let me, I will put him in my car and take him there." And he said, "Well, you'll be going at your own risk." And I said, "Well, I realize that." So Mr. War got in my car and we drove down 146, and as we got opposite of where that fire was, the heat was terrific. I mean we could feel it through rolled-up windows. There were dump trucks and cars blown over on their side on the highway, and just a huge fire going on. I got up close to where the Fire Department had set up a command center, and it was the County Fire Department because it was in that donut hole, so to speak, that's the County rather than the City of Henderson. And so we were standing outside the trailer where the command post was, and I looked over and there were two other executives of PEPCON behind another yellow tape. So I went and knocked on the door of the command post and the Chief in charge came out and he was—happened to be a good friend of mine by the name of John Papageorge [Clark County Deputy Fire Chief]. And I said, "John, there's two or three guys here I think you need to be talking to." He said, "You mean from the plant?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, get them in here. We need to find out what we're dealing with." So they went in and I waited there, and after they'd been in about thirty to forty minutes, why, the Chief came out and he said, "Bob," he said, "We've gotten all their information. We're very concerned their families may think that they were in the explosion. Would you mind taking them to their homes?" I said, "I'll be happy to." So these three gentlemen got in the back seat of my car, and I was driving them to their homes and they were—their chief scientist was speculating as to the explosion. He came to the conclusion that he thought it was a spark in their batch plant. And when I got them home over in different places in Las Vegas, it was probably the most emotional sight I've ever seen because their

families were out in the street hugging their neighbors, afraid that the news was not going to be good. And when I drove up and their fathers and husbands got out of the car, it was quite unbelievable. And so I made it back through the roadblocks. I stopped at the hospital. I was Chairman of the Board at St. Rose then. And it had blown out all the windows and we had a triage set up in the parking lot and everything was under control, as I expected it to be. And I was in communication with Pat. She had taken both daughters and some of their close friends that we knew their parents were unavailable. I believe they went to Boulder City. And eventually we all got home together that evening and it was one of those days you never forget. It was very traumatic for the Henderson community and I think probably one of those things over the years that drew the community together even more.

Interviewer: *I remember reading an article that you had written in the paper that said—that was working on drawing both the Green Valley and the old Henderson communities together in the wake of this and I think you were pushing for more transparency in the plants.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, the plants—and I think it came from their having been created for the war effort. I don't know whether you've looked at an aerial map of downtown Henderson, old Henderson. Well, you've seen the crazy street pattern.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bob Campbell: And that theoretically had something to do with the Japanese not being able to figure out where to bomb or something. I'm not sure of the total theory behind it. But I found it out very quickly when I came here as City Manager because I had told the police and fire chiefs, anything big happens, I don't care, night, day, three in the morning, you call me because I'm going to be ultimately held responsible anyway and I want to be on the scene. So I got a call one

morning about 2:30 a.m. that there was a house afire and a potential fatality in one of the Townsite houses. Well, I could see the flames. I could not figure out how in the heck to get to the house. I mean, every street I went it took me off in a different direction and eventually I found a way to get there. But their pattern did, I guess, what it was supposed to do. But I was fairly new to the community at that time. So anyway, I think the plants were secretive with good cause in the early days and that still tended to hang on. So, yeah, we did a lot of trying to open up lines of communication and the plants had some environmental issues that they needed to deal with and they hadn't dealt with properly in some cases. We had the chlorine haze over the city in the early days that finally got corrected. But there were days when you'd go out in the morning, your eyes would burn because of the chlorine.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: So one of the reasons Green Valley didn't want to necessarily advertise they were in Henderson is because most of the larger market thought of Henderson as having some of those issues even though it was a wonderful community. So, fortunately, as those issues got corrected, and Green Valley developed and realized that they had attributes and old Henderson had attributes, and then, frankly, when Lake Las Vegas came along and it kind of bound the whole area together, why, I think most of those probably no longer exist, those biases.

Interviewer: *You had some role in developing Lake Las Vegas, too, didn't you?*

Bob Campbell: Yeah. I was working with Southwest Gas at the time and as you may—and I won't go into a lot of detail with—what's now Lake Las Vegas had been proposed as Lake Adair back in the mid-'60s.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I remember that.*

Bob Campbell: And I had a fine old gentleman by the name of Carlton Adair that had—he was a wonderful man, had tremendous vision. A lot of what’s built out there now, he put on paper in 1964. I know others have since claimed credit for having the vision but what’s out there was what he came up with in ’64 in large part. And he tried to develop it without the financial expertise that he needed. He did manage to get the water allocation from the federal government, which was a huge issue at the time. But he got that and—but when he attempted to develop it in the ’60s, he didn’t have the capital so he gave away or sold pieces of equity in the project. Well, I think at some point he realized he had sold more than a hundred percent of the equity.

Interviewer: *Oh, no.*

Bob Campbell: And so as a result, the project fell apart.

Interviewer: *Yikes.*

Bob Campbell: And it sat there for many years, over thirty, almost thirty.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: And when I was City Manager I kept having developers come in from California, usually, saying, “Well, we’re here to do Lake Adair.” And we’d pat them on the back and say, “Good luck, yeah, you’ve got twenty-two different owners of the property now, so you have to try to put it all back together.” Well, they could never do that. There’s one gentleman that came in the late ’80s and he did manage to get options on all the property, and those options were due to expire in December of ’88. And he could not—he didn’t have the money to exercise options. So the Bass family—they’re a very wealthy oil family from Fort Worth—it was petty cash to them, so they stepped in and exercised the options. And then they got ready to

develop it and they had retained—you've probably heard the term, juice, in Las Vegas, for political juice—they came to town and retained what they thought was the best political juice in town. And they probably were. What they, I think, failed to realize was that the Las Vegas Strip did not want that project. This was before gaming had expanded off the Strip. Now it's in Macau and Atlantic City—this was before all of that. It hadn't even really gotten started in Laughlin yet. It was just the Strip.

Interviewer: *Oh, wow. So they didn't want any competition.*

Bob Campbell: They did not want any competition. And I think the people representing the Bass Family didn't realize that the experts they hired, they knew that the Strip was going to be here in five years, they weren't sure Lake Las Vegas would be, so their true loyalty was to the Strip, even though they'd been retained to assist. So they went to one of the meetings to get their approval and lost the vote. So, I was—as you know, that I was President of the Chamber of Commerce at the time, and I was doing the politics for Southwest Gas. So I chaired a Chamber of Commerce meeting on January 19th of [1989] and I remember the date because it was also my birthday. And after—I noticed there were two or three people in the audience I didn't recognize. And after the meeting, why, Father Caviglia and Bob Swadell came up and said, “Bob, we've got a little meeting planned in the back room.” We were in the Convention Center. “And why don't you join us. We want to talk about something.” So I said, “Sure.” So I go back to the meeting and it was three representatives of the Bass Brothers, and they were bemoaning the fact that they had lost the vote. Well, I didn't—I hadn't really paid that much attention at that point. I knew it was going down because I kept involved in what was going on politically behind the scenes in the Valley. Well, Father Caviglia and Bob Swadell had decided that that vote was a

slap at Henderson more than at Lake Las Vegas and that Henderson needed to get behind this project and make it happen. And so, long story short, I went to the—the representatives of Bass Brothers asked if we would help. And we explained to them what they had done wrong and we all agreed that we would assist them if they would absolutely freeze out anyone else they had involved in trying to get it approved, so they did not even know what our strategy was going to be, then we would help them. Well, they were happy to agree to that because they now owned the land. They had already spent the money to exercise the options and they had no value at that point. So I, then, went to Kenny Guinn, who was future governor and was a friend of mine and he was Chairman of Southwest Gas at the time. And I said, Kenny, here's the deal. We've—you and I both spent a lot of time here trying to attract non-gaming money and good investment in Southern Nevada. The Bass Brothers from everything I can find out are fine people, clean money. They're trying to do this project; you've read about it in the paper. I'd like to see if I could help them with it. And I said, "By the way, they are in our gas franchise area." He said, "Well," he said, "do you think you can help them?" And I said, "I think I can help them. I think we can put together a team of local people that can bring some credibility to what they're wanting to do. And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, Bob, if you want to help them, you can go help them. You can disappear from the office here. Number one, you will stay on my payroll. Number two, when it's over, they will owe you nothing and you will owe them nothing." I said, "Understood." So I disappeared from Southwest Gas for about seven weeks and we had a little cadre of people, Selma Bartlett, Bob Swadell, Bobby Caviglia, Phil Speight, who was City Manager, Shauna Hughes, who was City Attorney, the Bass representatives, including their chief engineer, Steve Ainsworth, a brilliant engineer. And we would meet at St. Peters seven

o'clock every Wednesday morning and develop the strategy for that week. We would define when we would ask Senator Reid to talk to certain people in Washington and what we would like him to say, and when we would do some things up in Carson City—the Legislature was in session—in order to bring pressure on Clark County and the City of Las Vegas—they had legislation they wanted enacted. And we met with the representative—the biggest hurdle the regional flood control district. That was the final vote we needed, and it was made up of reps from all the different entities. And so we strategized it right down to the minute on who was going to do what when and how we'd do it. We wanted to be sure at one point that we continued to have the support of the representative from Mesquite. So we flew up there and landed in the middle of town in a helicopter one day, which I think was the biggest thing that had happened in Mesquite in quite a while. And we had the pilot tell all the neighborhood kids—show them the helicopter and let them climb in and out of it while we met with the councilmen and visited.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that's great.*

Bob Campbell: So, anyway, it took seven weeks. We went back for the vote for the same group on March the 14th of ['89] and we got a 7-1 vote for approval.

Interviewer: *Wow.*

Bob Campbell: The one vote was my good friend, Commissioner Paul Christianson, who just passed away this week. I was very sorry to hear that. Paul was a wonderful guy. I just—we couldn't bring him around on this one, and I understood that. He had a—he did what he thought he should do. But, anyway, we got the vote and started construction fourteen days later before anyone could get an injunction to stop it. And it, at that time, was the largest civil

non-government project in the country. We had like ninety pieces of heavy construction equipment running twenty-four hours a day out there building. And it's, again, it's had its struggles as it—it was such a big project, it's hard to know, chicken and egg, what you have to—do you do residential first, you do the hotel first? And so it got mixed up in all of those things. Eventually with Kenny Guinn, Chairman of Southwest Gas's blessing, I ended up going to work for Lake Las Vegas for a few years. But I'm proud to see what's out there.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that's really great.*

Bob Campbell: Probably more than you wanted to know.

Interviewer: *No, no, yeah, I didn't know the history behind that. That's very interesting and it just—you all worked very hard to bring that.*

Bob Campbell: We had to—politics is not only knowing which buttons to push, but the order in which to push them, because if you push one in the wrong order, you can lose the next two or three that you may need.

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bob Campbell: So it's a very tricky process.

Interviewer: *Sounds like it. You also had some involvement with Ascaya, which is just starting to go again and Robyn was telling me that you got to visit with Michael Jackson at [Neverland] because of that project.*

Bob Campbell: We did. That was a—that's an interesting project, and Michael was an interesting story too. Yes, the land out there was bought for something less than \$300 an acre from Jack Binion by this very, very wealthy gentleman in Hong Kong. And he bought it in, I believe—well, I'm not sure when he bought it, some years ago, '94. No, he came to—they came

to—by this time, my wife and I had our own public affairs company. We had spun off from Lake Las Vegas and were doing politics for different entities at federal, state and local levels. And this gentleman sent a representative in '94 to see me—wasn't sure what he wanted to do with that acreage up there. So we spent about ten years studying different possibilities for types of development and in '04 we moved ahead with starting construction on a project, or trying to get the approvals, and we got those. A very fine Chinese gentleman. I had some reservations about doing business with someone that far away with a culture I was not familiar with. I've got to say, yeah, he's been one of the best clients we've ever had. He and his—he was in his mid-fifties. He'd come over with his eighty-seven year old father every year and we'd have Dim Sum together and go up on the project and he is just a delight to work with, and his whole family is. But once we were getting into the design stage and deciding how we were going to do it, one of the things I found out in doing that—I was the primary contact on the project—and I found out in the process that the very wealthy of the world apparently have their own communication network. And I don't, and will never know, how you ever break into that. But I know that I started getting calls from all over the world from some names you would recognize instantly wanting to be involved in that project. Well, one of my friends, who worked with me on a lot of projects—he's still a very good friend of twenty-plus years—was a big Hawaiian fellow by the name of Jimmy Gomes, and he moved here from Hawaii. He was heavily involved in the political process in Hawaii. And Jimmy has a lot of contacts and through he and the—one of the other businesses that the Chinese gentleman owned was a movie studio in Century City, and I was advised that through a friend of Jimmy's and through the head of the movie studio that Michael Jackson wanted to be a part of this project. So Jimmy and I flew down to L.A. and met the head

of the movie studio, and took a limo up to Neverland to meet with Michael Jackson. Well, we went through two security gates, probably tougher than getting into a military installation.

Took our pictures, had to sign documents, all of this type stuff.

Interviewer: *It's easier to get into the White House. [laughter]*

Bob Campbell: Yes, yeah, right now for sure, apparently! [laughter] And we went, once we'd gotten through the second security gate, why, we were in a different world. There was music coming out of the trees. There were Peter Pan statues everywhere and we drove for about a mile. We went by a recreated Disneyland-type area with the train and the carousel and all kinds of things. There were live elephants and giraffes wandering around, and so we drove up to this huge Tudor-type English mansion, and as we got out of the limo, why, the entire house wait staff came out to meet us, and they lined up on the sidewalk going up, and they were all in black and white, men in tuxes, the maids in black with white aprons and white hat, very classy looking. As we walked up the steps, each one said, "Welcome to Neverland, welcome to Neverland." So we got to the door and one of Michael's associates, a lady, met us and she said, "Well, welcome to Neverland. Michael is out with the children right now, but he'll be back shortly, and he invites you to go into his library and make yourself at home." So we went into his library, which was a lot of, I'm sure, very rare leather-bound books and photos of Elizabeth Taylor and gold chess sets and just—it was a room like I'd never been in before, to put it that way. And after about fifteen minutes, why, Michael came in with his children, and he was very delightful person. He introduced—at that time, he had the little boy and the little girl, were the two. This was '02, I believe. And the little boy, I believe his name's Prince, I forget the name of the little girl. But they were—Michael introduced them and they were just very polite and I

asked—it was Super Bowl season, not that long after Christmas. So I said to the little boy, I said, “Well what did you get for Christmas?” And he said, “Well, Aunt Janet got me a computer. I wanted a computer all my life.” And I said, “Well, that’s great,” you know. So we visited with them. So in a little bit the nanny came and Michael said, “Well, come on in, let’s go in the library.” And so we went in. Michael was not what you saw when he was performing. He was dressed in flannel shirt, jeans, shirttail out. Absolutely no makeup on. I was—it was not what I was expecting because he spoke with a normal voice. He had a firm handshake and we were there to discuss a business deal. He did not have a CPA or an attorney. It was Michael and he held his own in a business discussion.

Interviewer: *Wow. How about that.*

Bob Campbell: We spent the first fifteen or twenty minutes laughing, telling stories about people we mutually knew here in Las Vegas, Steve Wynn, some of the people that we’d done business with. So finally we got down to business and Michael took a—he had two glass portraits, one of his little boy and little girl on this little coffee table that was in front of us. Well, Michael laid those on the floor so we could lay a parcel map out of this project, and we laid it out and we discussed it. We were there probably two, two-and-a-half hours, discussed the project and finances and all those things. Very typical business discussion, and he was fully involved, knew what he was talking about, and as we wrapped our discussion up and stood up, why, my Hawaiian friend, Jimmy, took a step over to shake hands and there was a loud crack and I thought, oh my gosh, someone shoot at us? Jimmy had stepped on the glass portrait of the little girl.

Interviewer: *Ah, oh no!*

Bob Campbell: Well, that's not a good end to this conversation, probably.

Interviewer: *Yikes.*

Bob Campbell: And Michael froze for a little bit. And Jimmy is very quick on his feet. He said, "Michael, I am so sorry. The next time we come I'll bring my portrait and you can stomp on it." And Michael thought that was hilarious and he laughed and that broke the ice and we shook hands and parted and left. So it was, it was—

Interviewer: *[laughter] What a story.*

Bob Campbell: You know, having grown up hearing of Michael Jackson and my daughter's more interested in him than I was, and then I ended up meeting with him, it was quite interesting.

Interviewer: *Must have been, yeah.*

Bob Campbell: Once in a lifetime.

Interviewer: *I bet. Yeah. Are you still involved with Ascaya?*

Bob Campbell: I am still. In fact, the gentleman in New York that's overseeing it now for the owner in China has asked me to go up and visit it Wednesday morning, I think it is.

Interviewer: *That's great.*

Bob Campbell: So Pat and I'll go up and see. We took a lot of people on tours up there from all over the world when we were working on it. Those were four-wheel drive days and we had to wait until they weren't doing any blast where we were going. But yeah, we're so really looking forward to seeing how it's—yeah, hopefully it will—the economic recession hit just as we got ready to open sales about '08, '09, so hopefully things will start to come back and some of those names from around the world will reappear.

Interviewer: *And I saw they had a little promotional thing with Tesla the other week.*

Bob Campbell: I saw that. They did one with, what's that new top of the line car that Mercedes came out with? Can't recall it. They also had a big ad in the *Wall Street Journal* Mansion section last weekend, so they're doing some good marketing, I think.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that's good, that's good. Well, we've talked a lot about the way that Henderson has developed. Are there any other changes in Henderson that you've observed over the years that we haven't talked about?*

Bob Campbell: Well, I think Henderson has certainly grown far beyond what anyone would—well, I can tell you that in the early days, even when we were doing all this planning, we didn't project the density that has now happened. And they've improved how they do density now from the way it was done in the old days. But we did—one thing that we did, which I didn't mention—it was really [important]—two things I should have mentioned during my days as City Manager: we had excellent City Councils in those days. They were good people, they were down to earth, they listened to the community, just—it was great to work with. One of the things that we did in trying to promote cohesiveness—I think the second year I was City Manager, we had a lot of things—as I've said, the city was really booming at that time. We set up what we called a "Happening in Henderson Tour."

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

Bob Campbell: The first one was a disaster. It had a school bus, which—the roads were mostly gravel, so we asphyxiated ourselves on dust. We got to—practically the only ones that signed up were the nuns from the hospital. They were bored, I think. We got to Green Valley where the Greenspuns had very kindly set a beautiful tent with lobster and shrimp. A whirlwind caught it just as we were pulling up, ruined it. By the next year or two we were using Gray Line Buses.

People paid a nominal amount to go. I think our best year, we had like seven busloads of people. And a lot of real estate people signed up to take it, a lot of local residents, just to see what was going on, and I think that brought the community together very positively. People could really say, you know, that they knew what was going on.

Interviewer: *So that was an annual event.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, it was the big social event of the year, and we'd end up somewhere and have lunch and it was—they saw the very early stages of every major project and that was continued, I think, for a few years after I left city management. I don't think they do it anymore. The town may have gotten too big for that. But Henderson, I think Henderson has been on a great roll. I think it will continue to be on a great roll. It's been a wonderful experience and it was great to be a part of it.

Interviewer: *And what do you enjoy most about having lived in Henderson?*

Bob Campbell: I think the friendships and the people and—when we announced to our friends and relatives in the Bible belt that we were moving to the area of Sin City, we got lots of raised eyebrows. “You're going there with the two little girls?” But Henderson is a very down to earth homey community. The only problem we experienced was when friends from back in the Bible belt would come to Vegas, call us at two in the morning, thinking no one went to bed.

Interviewer: *[laughter]*

Bob Campbell: So we made the right move.

Interviewer: *That's funny.*

Bob Campbell: It's been fun. We've met a lot of great people. We've had the opportunity to be active across the state in a lot of different areas.

Interviewer: *And you live in California now.*

Bob Campbell: We do now. When we moved from Henderson a few years ago, we bought—well, we bought a property in Southern California in Imperial Beach and then we bought a little twelve-acre horse ranch up this side of Lake Tahoe. I guess I had to get back a little bit to my rural roots, and that was great. We sold it about a year ago. And now we have a home in Coronado there, on the bay, and that's hard to beat.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that must be nice.*

Bob Campbell: But I think if you live in a place like Nevada for this many years and do this many things, Nevada's always home, I think they say.

Interviewer: *Yeah, you keep coming back.*

Bob Campbell: Yeah, we keep coming back. Nice to have family still here. And nice to come back and see the things that we dreamed about and planned and hoped would happen here when we lived here.

Interviewer: *Yeah. Well, it's been really great talking with you today, Bob.*

Bob Campbell: Well, thank you.

Interviewer: *Thanks for coming in.*

Bob Campbell: It's been nice to—nice of you to do this and there's a lot of people that have done a lot more than I have or we did for Henderson in making it what it is, and I know you're talking to a lot of them too.

Interviewer: *Yeah, we're trying to talk to everybody we can.*

Bob Campbell: Great.