

INTERVIEW WITH: Bill Tornbom
INTERVIEWER: Jay Haymond
INTERVIEW NUMBER: One of One
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 22, 1999
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Day's Inn Motel in Page, Arizona
SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW: His Experience Living in Big Water, Utah
and the General Area of Kane County Utah and
Coconino County Arizona
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Suzi Montgomery is also here to run the camcorder and maybe if she has some questions she'll chip in also.

JH: Bill, tell me a little bit about yourself first, the family into which you were born—your father and mother and brothers and sisters and that sort of thing.

BT: They're ranchers and farmers up in North Dakota.

JH: Oh yeah.

BT: And I spent some time in the Navy. Then I spent some time when my hat was on my roof was shingled. And then I ended up out here.

JH: What brought you out here?

BT: I was the Mining Superintendent for the White Mesa Mining Company.

JH: I see. That was over in San Juan County?

BT: No, that was in back of you here about twelve miles.

JH: I see.

BT: So if you turned around, you'd be looking at it. (Laughter) But you couldn't see it.

JH: I see. What kind of mining were you doing?

BT: Well, I'd been running a gravel mine for an outfit out of Fargo, North Dakota, and they told me, "Come on out here, you're doing the same thing out there as you're doing out here, you're busting rocks."

That's all I was doing. We were blowing them out, hauling them up to the crusher and crushing them up and running them into the copper, the barrels, we were using a five percent sulfuric acid solution and that's how I got out here.

JH: I see. Now when you say you're using sulfuric acid, were you using that in the ore processing?

BT: Yeah. We had two great big one hundred ton tubs of water and we'd run it into one tub and then into another tub and then it went into the, I can't think of the name of the thing, 'lordy' that makes me mad when I can't think of the name of something. Run it into the screws and then we'd run it. I can't think of the words we used for it.

JH: Are you talking about the reduction process?

BT: Yeah, but we'd run into the spoil bank and then we had the copper solution in these screws, it was supposed to take the sand out of the copper solution and we'd run that into the solution pit where we let it settle and then we'd pump out the solution, we'd pump that into drying ponds, and when the ponds dried up, why, we loaded them into trucks. You'd better have a good truck; because there was sure a lot of acid left in them things.

JH: Yeah, did they line those beds or anything?

BT: Yeah, with timnabob once every two months. And it was just cheaper to line them like that than it was to try to put half way decent beds in there. That copper solution, CU₂, that's what I was trying to think of, the solution. They were, you'd only load about maybe ten to sixteen inches into a bed and I don't care how high the sides were, that's what you could load without load restrictions. And then he'd go down to Bluebird with it and he'd bring copper, tin, he'd bring tin back with him so we'd have something to run the solution over. You'd pump the solution out of the plant and you run it over the tin, and the copper stuck to the tin and when all the tin had disappeared, then you knew you had a copper solution.

JH: The leaching process.

BT: Yeah, that's it. A leaching process.

JH: Yeah. Well the living arrangements over where you were, was that like a company town, or would

you...

BT: Just, the Navajos had their hogans and we had a couple, three trailers out at the Copper Mine Trading Post. It didn't take many of us. There were one, two, three, four, there was four of us belligana, and we had about thirty Indian laborers. And the Indians were better off than we were when it comes to housing. (Laughter)

JH: Yeah. (Laughter)

BT: That word, Belligana, I can't spell it, but that's anything that isn't Navajo. It's not Navajo. A lot of people think it means White Man, but it doesn't. It means "not Navajo". I don't care if you're pink or black or green or brown, or white, you're Belligana.

JH: I think it's phonetic too, don't you? A phonetic word? In other words, it's spelled the way it sounds?

BT: Oh man, I wouldn't tackle that one. (Laughter) No sir. My English isn't good enough. I don't know what all those dots and squiggles are over the English language, so I wouldn't tackle that. (Laughter)

JH: Okay. Let's talk then, how come you left this mining operation? What was the deal and the day when you...I see, they closed it down?

BT: It went to the wall. That's as far as I know about it. I know we ran for a couple of years and we lost a couple million dollars and the boss said, "That's it."

JH: What year was that?

BT: '68.

JH: Okay, 1968 and Page was here as part of a government reservation for the dam construction, right?

BT: Uh huh.

JH: And you said you helped build the town.

BT: Well, I shouldn't have said that in that context. I helped build a lot of it, I mean. After the dam was

built and everything else 'Kochun' Construction Company was a small family organized construction company, and we put in sidewalks, we put in slabs for house and curbing and this and that and the other thing.

JH: Uh huh, but I think that's a good way to put it because that is town construction.

BT: Well, yeah. And just before they started building the plant, we put in, oh lord, I don't even know the name of it, it's just part of Page, but we put in a big trailer court.

JH: Well, the way the town serves the people, I mean, these are people who are on the move about all the time aren't they?

BT: Here, no, there are quite a few permanent residents.

JH: Would you say that that would be true of the people that live in that trailer court?

BT: Mostly, yes. I would.

JH: Do they just prefer a trailer court to a home?

BT: No, it's a point of, the houses are gradually coming, but you move into a trailer and then you come into a town. You rent a trailer. You've got a wife and a couple of kids. You rent a trailer. It's okay. You like it. You just keep living there until you figure you can afford a house.

JH: Sure.

BT: And some of those trailers are pretty fine trailers.

JH: Oh yeah, they are.

BT: I don't think there's a real junker left. Oh, I suppose there are, but I haven't seen one lately and a town like Page and Big Water are both the same way, they are eliminating the junkers. And there are certain parts of town you can have things in and certain parts you can't.

JH: May I assume that you had a family when you came out to this country?

BT: Yeah, more or less. They weren't with me, but I came out here.

JH: Did they come with you?

BT: I went and got them. About two months after I came out here I went and got them.

JH: Sure. And that consisted of a wife and how many kids?

BT: Four kids.

JH: And where did they go to school?

BT: Page. They went to school in Page.

JH: I see. The living arrangements when you were working for that small construction company, were you living in Page then?

BT: Yeah. I was renting an apartment from the boss.

JH: I see. So you were a resident of Arizona?

BT: More or less, I guess, yeah. Not for very long. My wife kicked me out.

JH: What took you to Glen Canyon City/Big Water then? Why did you decide to go over there from here?

BT: Because she had a house there.

JH: Oh.

BT: Does that make sense?

JH: (Laughter) Yeah.

BT: She had a house there and I didn't.

JH: Yeah. The community is a little bit different in the sense that it's isolated and it was built originally as I understand, for construction workers who wanted to live on that side of the river to build the dam. The dam construction was gone, over with. What was going on then?

BT: Nothing. Kind of water and toothpicks. It was tough. You couldn't even get a job dish washing in this town and then for a couple of years here it was, well, for a couple of years we roamed down in Texas. I went back to the oil fields and then we came back here and then Kochun needed help so I went to work for him. I just happened to luck out. I went to work for him because I knew something about CATs. And then...

JH: Are we talking about a D8 Caterpillar?

BT: Yeah. Caterpillar tractors, and I knew something about heavy machinery, and then the power plant started and from then on it's been uphill all the way. Getting better and better and sometimes worsen. How do you like that word?

JH: We might be able to spell that. (Laughter)

BT: (Laughter) That's your problem, not mine. (Laughter)

JH: Okay, we'll work with it. So you helped build the power plant.

BT: No. I did not. I think I'm one of the few guys that never worked on the power plant. Mr. Kochun kept me pretty busy. Yeah. He's just a small contractor with a lot of kids and just a hell of a good guy. And I liked working for him. I could of made a hell of a lot more money working for other people, but then the other people wouldn't say, "Come on, put your shovel down, let's go have some coffee." So that's why I stuck to Paul. He's a pretty good guy. He had one, two, three, he had four sons. And they're all good hard workers.

JH: Did the, in other words, you were living in Big Water and working in Glen Canyon City, you drove over here to work?

BT: Yeah, oh, in 1972, he got a permit from the BLM and set up a gravel plant out there and I had experience in gravel plants and that's where I was. I worked out there, oh, about three blocks from

home for twenty-five years. So, that made it good.

JH: What kind of plant did he have?

BT: Just a crushing plant. Crushing and separating. We'd crush big rocks into little rocks and then we'd take the little rocks and sort them smaller.

JH: Was it a jaw crusher or gyro cone?

BT: It's a jaw and a cone both.

JH: I see. And then a screening operation?

BT: Yeah. Well, it all went together.

JH: Did I hear you say he was bill aggregate or were you building road gravel?

BT: Aggregate; for, we built a lot of road gravel, but we built mostly aggregate. We had to meet specs with a lot of it.

JH: Did you wash it?

BT: In town they did, yeah. But washing it was not part of my operation. Of course once it left my plant I didn't care if they stewed it and ate it. I'd made it. They told me what they wanted and we made it.

JH: Are we talking about an independent, well, I'm sure we're talking about an independent plant where you had your own power generation?

BT: No, we, got, we started out back at the airport, we had our own power generation and we were making it there because the BLM had rights to make it there, see. And we had our own plant and our own power generation and everything, but when we got out to Glen Canyon City, the REA put in a line for us. And that it made it a lot nicer than trying to fight with that power plant. And I don't think that power plant we had would've handled that plant.

JH: Big motors?

BT: Yeah. One, two, three, four, five, six, well there's about nine 5 horse motors there. There were a couple of ten horse motors there. I didn't like monkeying with that stuff. That stuff would kill you too fast.

JH: Before you could pull your hands away.

BT: Hell, you didn't even have to touch some of it. It'd blow you to pieces. But then again, I liked it better than 220 because at least it would blow you away. 220 would hang on to you. And Jerry, his oldest son and our electrician, him and I both got burned a couple of times. I guess a couple of times it was our fault, and then again it wasn't.

SM: Would you elaborate on that?

BT: What?

SM: What happened then?

BT: What?

SM: When you got burned? Like, what happened?

BT: Stupidity. Sticking your finger in the wrong place. That happens not only in electricity, but that happens.

JH: Might even be human nature.

BT: Yeah, but not on purpose. If you've ever been hit once, you try not to get hit the second time, believe me. It, it kind of upsets your apple cart. You walk around like this for three days.

SM: Really?

BT: Well, what hurt with me, as a young man I was hit by lightning. Well, I wasn't hit, we were on a potato planter and I guess the lightning hit the ground, oh, about from me to that bank over there and it knocked both Engh Sherva and I out. And in fact I don't even, all I remember is...I'm on the potato

planter and he's on the tractor, and all of a sudden, bammm, and I woke up about four feet from the potato planter. And it tipped the tractor over. So lightning is nothing to monkey with. Oh, there've been cowboys out here that have been killed deader than hell because of lightning. You get out in the prairie out here and you're the tallest thing for a hundred miles around and it wants something to hit. It'll hit the tallest thing. So that's what my uncle always told us, out in the prairie. If you're on the prairie, get off your horse and lay down if nothing else. And he'd always say tie your horse to a bush and walk a hundred feet away and lay down.

JH: That's good advice.

BT: Well, I thought so. But we got hit awful hard that time.

JH: Let's go back to Big Water and have you talk about what you found when you moved over there. Now you moved in with this woman, so she was part of the community already?

BT: Yeah.

JH: You had a house.

BT: Yeah. Well, Big Water, Glen Canyon City at one time, was a going concern and then when the dam was done, they way just swoooosh, just like Page, everything disappeared, except she had a place to live and she had a job.

JH: Was she working here in Page?

BT: Yeah. She worked in Page. She worked at the Steakhouse, no, wait a minute, she worked at the Empire House. Because the Steakhouse opened up, well everything closed down, just about, except the Empire House and Ted Shalnah's place, the bowling alley. That's the only thing that was open. And she worked there and I know this, no, wait a minute, wait a minute, Empire House, lord, I'm forgetting. Anyway she worked as a waitress and we got into a fight. She always told the kids after that, "don't ever get in a fight with a customer, you'll up end up marrying them." (Laughter)

JH: Fate worse than death, huh?

BT: No, she was a good woman. She was a very good woman. But she died, so that took care of that.

I've been alone now for eleven years and I still haven't gotten used to it. You don't get used to it.

JH: That's right.

BT: You just don't get used to it.

JH: Tell me what you found over there besides the abandoned buildings, what was left of the community?

BT: There was a store there. No, there was a cafe there and a motel. It was run by a couple of sisters, when they felt like running it; otherwise it was closed. And lord be, I don't even remember their names anymore. And that was all, just that cafe there. That was all. Then we had a post office. There were a few buildings that there that was slowly torn apart and torn down as time went on.

JH: Who owned the property?

BT: A fellow by the name of Gordon Holt.

JH: And he was located where?

BT: In Salt Lake.

JH: I see.

BT: Cosby Canyon Investments. He bought the whole town at a Sheriff's sale. I think he said he paid fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) for the whole town.

JH: What he was really buying was the water system probably?

BT: Yeah, mostly that was it. That wasn't much of anything. Oh they bragged about it, but I was Water Master too long to have them fool me about that.

JH: What happened, [how long] did you just have that existence for...?

BT: ...Well, we just went on and on and on there and the town kind of came back when they started building the power plant here and then when the power plant quit, the town went back to not quite it's

original size, but it was a little bigger and then people just kind of gradually started moving in and it's like it is today. It's growing. I had a friend of mine that came back here, he hadn't been here fourteen or twelve years, and he came back here and he couldn't believe this was the same town, that these two towns were the same town.

SM: When people started moving in after the power plant, was it mostly families or was it single people or?

BT: A lot of the people that worked on the power plant stayed here and worked for the power plant.

JH: So they became part of the operating crew?

BT: Yeah. They became part of the operating crew and then there were a couple of other construction companies that started up and there was carpentering and the town was growing and they needed this and that and a lot of them stayed. A few of them left. And then there were some that left and a couple of years later they come back because they liked it here. I stayed here because I liked it. I could have worked most anywhere. I stayed here because I liked it.

JH: One of your neighbors, which moved in with his family, was Alex Joseph. Do you want to talk about that?

BT: (Laughter) Oh, Alex was all right. People didn't understand him. Alex and I were good friends. A lot of people in Page would say, "Well, how come you dare live out there; they all carry guns?" I said, "Mind your own business." I didn't bother him and he didn't bother me. And if I had something to say to him or I got mad at him, then I went and told him. And I found out later that that's what he wanted. If you wanted to pick a fight with him, fine. Do it in front of him, not behind his back. Oh, some things happened to some property out there. I wouldn't say that it was Mr. Joseph's fault, or any other people's fault, but they couldn't keep their mouths off him. Just because a man wants to live with four or five or six or seven women, that's his business. Christ, one is too much most of the time, let alone two or three. I suppose women feel the same way, but. (Laughter) But why the hell a man would want that many wives...of course Alex had a little more than a front room IQ. I think his IQ ran about 170. He wasn't stupid; believe me. He out figured the State's attorney three or four times. They lived out there in Cottonwood Canyon out there for a while and they were good people, I liked them. I liked them all. I never had any trouble with them. In fact, like I say, I was a good friend to Alex. They called me at 1:30 in the morning the morning he died. They called me and said that Alex had passed

away. And I think I should have gone up there, but then I figured, no, that's a time for the family, not me. And then a couple of girls were mad at me because I didn't come up there. I said, "That's your privilege. If you want to get pissed off fine, fine. I was a private in the army and I had generals mad at me, so I ain't going to worry about you."

JH: (Laughter) In a way, did Alex Joseph and his family constitute a special interest group in that town?

BT: Themselves. Just themselves. And there were a couple of outsiders like me. But their special interest was just themselves; "leave us alone and we'll leave you alone." And I guess you can't ask any more than that.

JH: Do you think they were faithful to that idea?

BT: Yes, pretty much so. Pretty much so. They looked out for each other. You get into a fight with one of them, you were fighting all of them. I found that out. Not the hard way, but a couple of guys I knew found that out the hard way. Yeah, he was a polygamist and he wanted to live the polygamist life and we had a couple of, oh I don't want to call them what I'd like to call them, but they just couldn't leave them alone. They had to pick at him and some of the Catholics out there really thought that was bad. (Laughter) Yeah, and what I thought of some of those Catholics was about the same thing. So it made everything about even.

End of Tape One, Side One

Begin Tape One, Side Two

JH: Let's say that consistent with what we've already talked about with Alex Joseph and his family, that they were more or less a special group, were there other groups out there that had cohesion like they did?

BT: No. Unh huh. Most of them are just ordinary citizens. There's a couple of them out there that you can't do anything right, if Jesus Christ walked down the street, he'd probably leave tracks too deep in the street, or he'd blow his nose the wrong way or something. There are a couple of them out there; they've got to bitch about everything. I don't care what it is. Can't do it right.

JH: Maybe they're happy feeling low?

BT: Well, I've heard that stupid people get along better with each other than ordinary.

JH: That sort of raises the issue of how does the community get a long and make the community work?

BT: Oh, pretty much all right. Big Water or Page, we've each got our own opinion about how some of our town fathers do and I'm not any different than anybody else. I've got a couple of them. I don't think they could pour piss out of a boot, without having a bunch of instructions in their hand. And then there are other guys that other people think are doing a lousy job and I think they're doing a good job. So actually, what you say cohesion in the town, there is no bigger, oh, how am I going to put that, anyway, there's no man smarter than a man that agrees with you. Do you know what I say? We've got that. Page has got that. Only I think Page is a little dumber once in a while. They're bigger. Page, you know, Page hasn't got money to stripe the streets, but they've got money to put in these islands in town. They've got money to build the useless golf courses, of course that'll get me into trouble quick.

JH: Yeah, well have to be careful about that one. (Laughter) You might want to strike that one.

BT: Yeah, strike that last sentence. But you see what I'm saying?

JH: I do.

BT: They haven't got money to stripe the streets, but they sure got money to monkey around. And then you talk to a dozen people in Page and you'll get at least four opinions. Oh, I guess it's all right for the guys that like to play golf. That's fine. I don't argue with them. And I can't say a lot about it because I'm not paying for that golf course. But that's what I keep kidding our town fathers [about]. We'll never be a town until we've got a golf course to fight over.

JH: (Laughter) Well, there's something to that.

BT: Yes, yes there is.

JH: So what is it that you fight about in Big Water?

BT: In Big Water? This, that, and the other thing. It doesn't really have to be anything special. They're fighting now about, something about the building inspector having some kind of authority and some of

them want it and some of them don't and the town board and a few others are fighting about that. Me, I don't care one way or the other.

JH: Who is the building inspector and who establishes the code there?

BT: We're an incorporated municipality.

JH: Okay, I see, you've got some state regs that you follow?

BT: Yeah. I was fire chief out there for twenty-five years. Yeah, we started with nothing. And I mean nothing. We bought a fire truck from the federal government for four or five hundred bucks and the first hundred feet of hose we had in the fire truck, Hindley Bright and I stole. Well, you dare say something like that? Well, hell, twenty-five years ago, what are they going to do?

SM: It's history now.

BT: Yeah. And then a guy got in trouble out on the highway and I helped him out and he said, "What do I owe you?" And I said, "Oh, nothing." Of course I had wreckers, I was making a living that way and it wasn't much. I forget what it was, it was nothing worth bothering with, and he said, "I'm fire chief from Vegas, and if I can do you any help." Ohhhh, you don't know what you just said. (Laughter) So I went in there, he invited the wife and I in there and we went in there and oh, man, we got hose and we got uniforms and we got, oh man, he was really good to us. And that's what really got us started and then we incorporated. Alex was elected Mayor. Of course, he had the votes, so he got the Mayor. It just went on from there. Alex couldn't do anything right it seemed, by a couple of people. They were always trying to get him thrown out of office and he always had the votes. I voted for him.

SM: Because of your affiliation with Alex, do you think you got more involved?

BT: I would say yes, because my wife was Justice of the Peace. They called her the "hanging judge". (Laughter)

SM: Really? (Laughter)

BT: Yeah, her first case, drunken driving and the town lawyers said, "Well, your honor, we do it this way and this way and this way, and demand the minimum sentences." And the wife looked up and says,

"Hold it counselor; I don't care about the minimum sentence, what's the maximum sentence? The guy's eyes opened up like shutters on a camera. (Laughter)

JH: Uh huh. Got his attention.

BT: Oh, lordy, did it ever.

JH: Do you think that with the votes, Alex governed the town justly?

BT: I think so, yes. But there are a hell of a lot of them that don't agree with me. I don't know what it is. Well, you've lived in towns for Christ's sake, both of you. You know what it's like. Some guys have got a good idea, three people agree with him and three people don't and bam, there goes the ball game.

JH: Now that Alex is gone, who is the leader over there?

BT: Nobody.

JH: Is that good?

BT: They seem to be doing all right. I know I'm good friends with a couple of the girls, and the reason I'm good friends with them is I'm old enough not to be dangerous, if you follow what I'm saying. (Laughter)

JH: (Laughter) I do. I've heard of that.

BT: What?

JH: I've heard of that.

BT: You know, like the old story goes about the old boy walking down the street and this green frog looked up at him and says, "Pick me up and kiss me and I'll be a beautiful woman for you." And so the old boy picks up the frog and puts it in his pocket. He's walking down the street and the frog says, "Didn't you hear me? Kiss me, and I'll be a beautiful woman for you." And the old boy takes the frog out of his pocket and he looks at the frog and he says, "At my age I'd rather have a talking frog." (Laughter)

JH: Not to mention a "bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." (Laughter)

BT: Ain't that the truth. Yep. Yeah. Oh the three of us could sit here for the next, oh, I guess three or four days, discussing Glen Canyon City and Page and not get everything covered. Page is, we're an isolated area out here. Our closest town of any size is 135 to 140 miles. St. George, or Flagstaff. Of course we've got Kanab over there and we've got... Kanab that's about as much as I can say. It's the county seat. And we've had a lot of trouble with Kanab, the governmental aspect of it. They're good people, but if it don't happen in Kanab, it don't happen in the county. And if it does happen anywhere else in the county, Kanab tries to knock it down. Or if they not knock it down, take credit for it, or worm their way in there somewhere.

JH: Is there an economic angle there someplace that they want to be able to control that?

BT: Well, there were the movies. See, they used to headquarter out of Page here, or out of Kanab, and then when Page got here, it was a little more modern city, so they come out to Page and then some of us showed up in Big Water and we made just as good extras as anybody. There are economic things in there. There's one old boy, he kind of controls things there and if you were a good Mormon and paid your tithing, you always got work. If you didn't pay your tithing, you didn't get work. So, and I don't believe in anybody telling me that I gotta give ten percent of my wages to anybody for anything. If I want to give it, that's fine. But they ain't going to take it from me. Course Uncle Sam's got more clout than the rest of them, as you probably know.

JH: I've heard. (Laughter) Well, the matter of county government and the regulation of certain aspects of land use...

BT: ...that's why we incorporated. We incorporated in 1983.

JH: Gave you a little distance between the county...

BT: ...yeah, uh huh. It kind of told the county to back off and listen. You're not running everything. And I think it's for the better. We had one egghead out there. He wanted to disincorporate, telling us how good the county would be if we disincorporated and the idiot hadn't been there before. He got there after we had incorporated and he didn't know what it was like living there under unincorporated municipality. We had a fire out there in '74, '75. Burned the cafe to the ground and we organized the

fire department. The town got together and we organized the fire department and there were two of us that had any fire department experience and Phil didn't want it. That left me to be the Chief. And by hook or crook, chicanery and everything else, we organized the fire department, but now we've got a pretty damn decent fire department. We started out with that old '43 GMC. Didn't go very fast, but we didn't have far to go either. (Laughter) We covered, oh, about eight miles to the highway. They'd call us and we'd go. We went as high as twenty miles because there was a car on fire or something; otherwise we didn't go.

SM: Did the fact that a disincorporated city doesn't have the same status with the State, is that why...

BT: No, a disincorporated city meets the standard of the State and the County. An incorporated city doesn't have to meet the County Standards.

SM: I see.

BT: And as a rule, the State standards are higher than the County Standards, so by disincorporation, you move from your own standards to State standards, whether you like it or not. And disincorporation means you got no taxes, town taxes. We got town taxes. We wouldn't have if we didn't have incorporation, but in order to govern ourselves, we had to have some taxes and we didn't have any taxes in town for a couple of years until that stupid Wagoner tried to get disincorporation, then we had to hire a lawyer, so we had to have taxes. And then he hollers about how we wouldn't have taxes. I told the guy in the open meeting, I said, and that's just the words I used, I said, "You goddamn fool", I said, "If you hadn't opened your big scrawny mouth about disincorporating, we' wouldn't have needed taxes." He got mad at me and wanted to throw a punch at me, but that was all right, I mean. In those days I didn't walk with a cane and nobody had operated on my back yet and so he could have taken a fist at me, I didn't care.

JH: It's helpful to think about it as home rules, when you incorporate.

BT: Yeah. We, whenever we wanted a piece of land to do anything, outside of the, see, you, the BLM owns everything and if you note, do you own any property?

SM: Unh huh. I rent.

BT: You own property.

JH: Uh huh.

BT: All right, you trace that property back, you do not own it. You are the caretaker. And if they want it, they take it, whether they take it by writ of replevin, or just federal step-in, you can lose it. And that's out there. Out here you have...when the government took over, they had school sections. They called them school sections. Every other section of every third section, I don't remember, which, was to be sold and the money used for the school.

JH: Trust land.

BT: Yeah, you're right, trust land. The BLM had a few sections of land down where people could get at them, like Holt and another outfit, bought the land from State, like Big Water is a school section.

JH: Six hundred forty acres.

BT: Yeah. Something like that. And if you wanted to do anything outside that section, you had to get the BLM's permission. And boy, oh boy, oh boy, you talk about pulling teeth. We wanted some land for a cemetery before we were incorporated. Those guys cried real tears when they thought they'd have to give it to us. Geeez, so that's one of the reasons we incorporated. We had a little more clout. And it helped. But I don't know. I'm glad it did in a way. I don't know. At my age I don't care any more. I don't monkey with the town meetings, I don't. I go there to the town meetings now because I can sit back and heckle. I know I can harass them. I don't have to be worried about my rank or anything like that or in the city. That's the general consensus.

JH: Do the people generally get along together, except maybe with..?

BT: ...oh, yeah. Outside of government issues and that, why yeah, people get along all right. There's no blood in the streets or anything like Wagoner used to say. "Oh, if they win that election, there'll be blood in the streets tonight." Geez, talk about an idiot. But anyway.

JH: One of the things that indicate a sense of community is where they help each other. Does that go on over there?

BT: Yeah, oh yeah. Heck, yes. If somebody has lost everything in a fire, why most of the people in the

community will kick in, even if it's a pair of socks. But, yeah, there's a community continuity there in that way. We may not get a long all the time in, I know this, if Jerry Olsen's house burned down, I'd help him, otherwise he can go to hell. I mean, it's that kind of a feeling in the community. You may be the guy that needs the next round of help.

JH: That's exactly right. Another way of measuring a community's spirit is if there are those who are willing to mourn with those who are called up to mourn. Is there that kind of community and cohesion over there?

BT: I don't quite follow what you mean. Do you mean if some guy kicks the bucket, then they feel sorry for him, the rest of the community does?

JH: Or they help the family?

BT: Oh yes. Oh yeah, they'll help the family to a certain extent. It's like, people from all over the world have interviewed Alex. And this Englishman came and asked me, he says, "What is it about you people out here?" And I said, "What do you mean, 'about you people out here'?" Well, he said, "you got laws and if you don't like the law, you tell the Sheriff to go to hell, and you just ignore the law if you don't like it." And he said, "I've been all over the world", he named a whole bunch of places. Of course I've been a couple of the places he mentioned. I get a kick out of it now. They're having this war in Timor. Hell, I'm well acquainted with that area. But anyway, I told the guy, I said, "Out here most of us are here because we like to kill our own snakes." And I guess that still pretty much covers it. Not as much as it did. But people say, "How do you live out here, how can you live out here?" It's what we prefer I guess. I don't know. I like it. I've lived on the Canadian border and the Gulf of Mexico and both Coasts. I prefer it right here. I like it here. It isn't too cold in the wintertime and it gets, oh, we get about six weeks of a hundred, a hundred and five, something like that. But you go down in the valley; it's hotter than hell in the summertime. And you get over on the Wasatch Front, it's cold and there's no balance in there. Here, as a rule, cold weather in the winter is twenty above at night forty in the day. That's cold weather here. It isn't like where I was in North Dakota when I was a kid in 1936. We had six weeks when it never got above 20 below and that was rough. And snow banks. Oh lordy, I remember the snow banks and trying to run cattle in weather like that.

JH: I've heard them talk about the Yukon Express.

BT: Uh huh. Yeah, that comes down from Canada and North Dakota, down until it gets into Oklahoma

and in through there and it freezes everything, including the water.

JH: Well, the BLM has now been given the responsibility to manage the land to the north of you there and they're going to call it a Monument. How is that going to influence your community?

BT: We think it's great.

JH: Do you? Great.

BT: Oh, yeah. Some of us do. Some of them don't. Like I was telling her, I don't like the underhanded way they did it. But it's going to mean jobs and stuff for people in the town because Big Water is going to be an entrance community. And that's the one time I think, course you'll get people that will violently disagree with me, but there's one time I think the BLM did something on the smart side and you know, "Shit for brains".

SM: (Inaudible)

BT: Our President.

JH: Clinton?

BT: Yeah. Oh, what he did, I did this and I did that, and I did the other thing. He didn't do a damn thing that they didn't let him do. And you know, they pulled this surprise on us. Quote unquote surprise. Hell, somebody had been working at that for months. You don't declare something like that in a ten-minute conversation with Babbitt and a couple of others. You don't declare something like that. But it's there and I think it knocked out Ambulex* for sure from the coal mining up there. Of course all we need is one good war with China and if they need the coal, that won't mean a thing. And you and I both know it.

JH: That's right. Well I'm really running out of questions. I think we've asked the ones that we've had in mind. What have we failed to ask you? What would you like to say that I haven't asked about?

BT: I don't really know. I'll probably sit at home tonight and think of a hundred questions.

JH: Let us know. We'll come back.

BT: How long are you going to be here?

JH: We're going to be here until Friday. Leave about noon, but there are other times.

BT: Well, I know where you're at if I think of something. I can give you a call.

JH: All right, good deal.

BT: No, I can't think of a damn thing.

SM: I have my sheet of paper here and it's full.

BT: Do you want to ask some questions?

SM: No, not right now. I've been thinking about going to the store tomorrow and see who's hanging out there. Is that a good way to do it?

BT: Up in Big Water?

SM: Yeah.

BT: Oh, you'll find me there and you'll probably find Steve there and Bob. We go over there for a coffee break.

SM: I was thinking of coming over there with my tape recorder tomorrow and just ask some questions, see if people would talk a minute.

BT: Sure, go ahead. Don't get too involved with Joyce Comstock, the storeowner. She's got an opinion on everything and her opinion is the only one that counts. She's a good person. She tries to be a good person, but like I say, we've all got our opinions, good, bad and indifferent. But as far as, I can't think of anything you haven't really covered because you'll never cover it all with one guy anyway.

JH: That's true. And you can't cover everything in just an hour.

BT: No, unh huh.

SM: I figure what I'll do is just think about what we've talked about and come up with some more questions tomorrow and if you're going to be there that would be great.

BT: Just don't mention me.

JH: (Laughter) Okay. That puts a slant on it, doesn't it?

BT: See, I'm an old grouch and I'm negative and I do that on purpose because it pisses Joyce off.

JH: (Laughter) Well, a guy's got to have a little fun.

BT: And Martha and a couple of the others that know me, why they get a kick out it. But I'm known as the old grouch.

End of Tape One, Side Two

End of Interview