



National Park Service Paleontology Program

Oral History Interview – Helen Mortenson

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/012



ON THE COVER

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1849 “C” Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

December 2020

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Natural Resource Stewardship and Science
Fort Collins, Colorado

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Please cite this publication as:

V. L. Santucci. 2020. National Park Service Paleontology Program: Oral History Interview – Senator Harry Reid. Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/005. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Background

[This oral history phone interview with Helen Mortenson (HM) at her home in North Las Vegas, Nevada, was conducted December 14, 2020. Helen is a member of the Protectors of Tule Spring and was a member of the Tule Springs Coalition. She is interviewed by Vincent Santucci (VS), Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program, from his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. They are joined on the call by Erin Eichenberg (EE), Integrated Resources Management Specialist at Tule Springs Fossils Beds National Monument, Jill DeStefano (JD), President of Protectors of Tule Springs, and Jon Burpee (JB), current Superintendent at Lewis and Clark National Historic Park and a previous Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument.]

The interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder and a mp3 file was created. A written transcription of the interview was produced by volunteer R. Sky McClain from the digital audio recording and this document contains the discussion during the interview. Helen Mortenson signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. If present, PII has been omitted.

Transcript

1:34:51 (length of interview)

[START OF INTERVIEW]

VS: Today is Monday, December 14, 2020. My name is Vincent Santucci. I'm the Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. Today we are conducting an interview with Helen Mortenson, conservationist, who was instrumental in the conservation of important Ice Age fossil localities in Nevada. We are joined by Erin Eichenberg, Integrated Resources Management Specialist at Tule Springs Fossils Beds National Monument, Jill DeStefano, President for Protectors of Tule Springs, and Jon Burpee, the current Superintendent at Lewis and Clark National Historic Park. But more importantly he is a previous Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. The interview is being conducted by telephone from Helen's home in [North] Las Vegas. So Helen, thank you so much. We really look forward to this interview.

HM: Thank you. I look forward to it too. Absolutely, I'm very honored.

VS: If you are willing to do so, our first traditional question is asking when and where were you born?

HM: I was born in Georgia.

VS: When did you wind up coming to Nevada?

HM: 1962.

VS: Good year.

HM: It was indeed. My husband was a nuclear physicist and he came out to Las Vegas and of course we followed him, to work on the nuclear rocket mandate to Mars.

VS: Excellent. So the first question is, at what point did you become involved with the concept of preserving Tule Springs Fossil Beds as a National Monument? Can you share some recollections about those early discussions?

HM: Certainly can. When we arrived in Las Vegas it was a completely different element from the East Coast. I grew up in the swamps and Spanish moss and all that type of stuff in Augusta, Georgia. And we actually came from Richford, Virginia which had the same thing. Came out to the desert. I was thrilled to death that my husband Harry was in the nuclear business and future problem of taking man to Mars, developing the rocket. We were so excited about it. Immediately he went to work and I started finding out about the Las Vegas area. During 1962 I came across the newspaper reports of a Big Dig in our valley here. It was called the 'Alley Oop'. A lot of people were participating. About September of 1962 I became very interested in Dr. Sheila Brooks and Richard Brooks and became involved with observing. I have no academic accreditation so was just an observer. But, I joined the University who had an Anthropology Department and from there that's how I became interested in the Big Dig plus State Parks and so forth further on down the road. I became very active in a lot of different organizations because

there was a lot of free time to do that. So, I was PTA President. I was Women's League Voters. I was just a number of organizations. But, the Red Rock Interpretive Association and pre-cursor to that, working with KC DenDooven, who established the Fee Collection and Interpretation support to the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] for Red Rock area, became very involved with that, Thalia Dondero, and so forth. So, I was really just submerged in what was happening around Las Vegas. I also became the Secretary of the Town Board of the Spring Valley Town Board and very interested in the land. That was later down the road though. But, the interest grew year by year on what was happening around the valley.

VS: Excellent. Thank you. Specifically in terms of preserving the Tule Springs Fossil Beds. They could have been preserved at the local level, the state level, or the federal level. When did you hear first about the possibility of the area being preserved as a National Monument?

HM: Well, just before that the area was designated by BLM as a disposal area in response to the Sloan [Canyon] petroglyph site that they wanted to make a Visitor Center at the Sloan petroglyph site. But, they had to trade land somewhere else for people to develop. That's when I first became aware of it. I was also very much involved with the Gilcrease paleontological dig which Larry Agenbroad came down and helped supervise so am very familiar with the fossils there as well as the Tule Springs area. That was more or less the initiation of that. Working with Dr. Steve Rowland. Working with Larry Agenbroad, with [Valey Greenhurse?]. Out at Gilcrease we were a group of volunteers that worked under supervision at the Gilcrease paleontological dig and we uncovered 21 mammoths there. So, that sparked my interest. The second thing that happened when the disposal area came in, I got a call from a BLM employee. She said, "Helen, do you know 315 acres of state land is being offered to the Mayor of North Las Vegas. It was the Mayor before Sherry Buck and that's who I was trying to get a hold of – that specific name. Because everything east of Decatur [Blvd] is North Las Vegas. So he was trying to get that area in a disposal area thinking that it was BLM land. When I found out that it was State Park's land I called Wayne Perock of the State Park Director, the Nevada State Park head person and had him come down here and meet with Bill Wood, who was a real estate developer/agent/manager for UNLV. They met directly across the table, eyeball to eyeball, and Wayne said, "Yes, that is State land. I didn't realize it." They didn't even know it was State land. Bill showed him it was and that was the beginning of my real involvement with the State land.

VS: Excellent. You have a very good—

HM: I have documentation on that also where he, Bill Wood, had a map of the whole area. The withdrawal of the district land from BLM and it showed it was a truism and Wayne Perock said, "I had no idea." Didn't even know it was State land. Evidently looked at the record. But, anyway that's the number one reigning thing.

VS: Very good.

HM: It was the disposal land, going to have an environmental review, they found the studies from Utah, discovered the unique geological feature of the area was very unique. So, this shouldn't have been a disposal land. Then Jill [DeStefano] was evidently notified and I was notified about a meeting up at Aliante to discuss the disposal land to see if we wanted to put it to use or not. I brought to that meeting a mammoth tooth and dressed in my Safari outfit and everything. I said, "This needs to be preserved." As a result, and correct me if I'm wrong Jill, but

as a result of that meeting, when I talked to your group, we decided we needed to form a group called the Ice Age Fossil State Foundation. Correct me Jill. Is that when we started working together?

JD: Yes, that's the first time I met you. It was in January of 2007.

HM: Oh, thank you. That's what I was looking for.

JD: You came to the first Protectors of Tule Springs meeting, the first one we ever had. We were just forming then. It took a while. You and I started working together and did our flyer and all that kind of thing. But, I think it took a while before you did the Ice Age Fossil Park Foundation.

HM: Yes, in fact I was a member of the Red Rock Interpretive Association and they were very good about forming groups and helping form them formally. And you and I we took our project to the Red Rock Interpretive Association. I'm trying to find the name of the guy who was the director who helped us formulate our organizations parallel to each other. After we got that done we started petitioning with the DMV about saving this land and we got quite a few petition. I've still got some of them and you probably still have some of them too. But, there were over a thousand petition responses. We set up a petition table in the Galleria [Mall]. We set up – we stood on the corner of the DMV's. Any place they'd let us promote our cause and have people sign the petitions. It was extremely important to get some leverage about moving this stuff along. Then, I think, you decided to break away and be on your own. I still stayed with the - because the Red Rock Interpretive Association encouraged us to go on our own. We were just the managers or a part of a group that was helping Red Rock. And Red Rock was helping us to establish ourselves. So that's when we parted. You took off independently and just wonderful what you have done with that organization [POTS]. That's one of the biggest things that has helped us out in my opinion.

12:20

VS: Thank you Helen. And so in the same vein it sounds like the biggest concern that you had, the motivation that you had to stand up and speak on behalf of protecting Tule Springs had to do with the development. Were there any other factors that were concerns to you that you viewed as threats to the Tule Springs Fossil Beds?

HM: I think the biggest thing was the ignorance of our elected officials. That's why we made up brochures. We went and talked to the different organizations to educate [about] what was out there. Really when Jill and I and Harry, my husband, visited [Senator] Harry Reid I had talked to Harry Reid's staff three times before I set up our appointment. Harry Reid's office explained we had 10 minutes with him. We all three went in and pitched our dog and pony show to Harry Reid. Harry Reid kept us there for 45 minutes. Harry Reid wrote back to me personally in a note, "Helen, I had no idea of the significance of this project. Let's work together to protect it." And that was in his own handwriting as a P.S. to the regular thank you note that goes out to everybody about the presentation. That gave us wings. The other thing that gave us wings was informing Nellis Air Force Base. We had Colonel Belote of the Nellis Air Force 99th Wing. We took him out to the site. And fortunately the [Las Vegas] Review Journal did a photo shoot of Jill and I with Colonel Belote and I have a picture. It was November 8 – no 17 November of '08. Anyway, we are standing out in the field. I'm in my safari outfit holding a mammoth tooth and

Colonel Belote is laughing. We're both laughing. He said in the newspaper article, 'Not only is this a fantastic paleontological site for Ice Age animals but it's also a security corridor from Nellis Air Force to Creech and we don't want any development. We don't want any schools. We don't want any kind of development.' That was a huge boost to us because Sandy Croteau, she was a real estate agency and part of our team. When she went and sold houses in and around that area and people said, "Well, the planes are screaming." She said, "That's the sound of freedom people." So, it was this kind of education process. We also had [Senator] Dean Heller come out and watch some helicopters fly right through the 300 foot height limit of the canyon there. The Nellis Air Force Base said that was an ordnance area. They could drop something accidentally. They did not want to hit schools, or people, anything. That was a huge, huge, plus that that was a security order through there.

HM: I've been in touch with Nellis Air Force Base ever since then because Harry, my husband, being a State legislator, we were invited to the 'Citizens and Military luncheon' every other month. Mayor's from the different places and we educated them of what was out there. We went to Oscar Goodman's office and he had no idea there were camels out there. He said, "You've got to be kidding, camels?" It was just a matter of going around and informing everybody. It was amazing how unknowledgeable our legislative and everything was about this beautiful area. So, we fought like heck. And Harry put in bills. We also later on worked with the State Parks. Harry was part of the State Parks Cooperative Association and I said, "You know what? We need to protect the State Parks land. So, it really came down to working together in the long run – bills and everything. Thank goodness for Jill DeStefano and her group because she was really the power behind getting things done. I was kind of on the periphery getting some things. Honestly Jill's organizational ability has done – her group POTS has done a fantastic – and continues to do a fantastic job of educating the public. Am really proud to be part of her team.

17:40

VS: Thanks Helen. So, the letter you received. The thank you letter from Harry Reid's office where he wrote on the bottom in his handwriting. Do you still have that letter, I assume?

HM: I definitely do. I definitely do.

VS: It would be great if we could get a [copy]. Could we get a scan or a copy of that?

HM: I'll make sure you do. No problem at all.

VS: I mean that's historic.

HM: Very important letter.

VS: It is very historic because

HM: He was the one that started – gave us wings to keep going.

VS: Yes, that's great. I was unaware of that. And that's very historic to the story.

HM: Yes, I have a date on it and everything for you. I will definitely scan it for you. Who should I scan it to?

VS: To Erin is fine.

HM: OK, will do. Will take care of that today.

VS: Thank you so much.

HM: Oh, you know what? To me that was extremely important. The fact that he had no idea that this was done. You would think your State people would really realize that.

18:50

HM: Also, the fact that in 1962, when the Big Dig was here, they did such a well job of, under the State Museum and the Southwest Museum, working together out there as a team of about 20 scientists. Doctor Claude Warren was one of them. Sheila Brooks and Richard Brooks. They all worked together and we had the different hotels – I think it was the Flamingo did all the kind of communications work. The people that did the laundry. People that did their food and everything. The whole of Las Vegas turned out to really help them. And that was about September of 1962 to about January, February of 1963. What happened as a result of that meeting was the *Pleistocene Studies of Southern Nevada* was published in 1967. That showed the original Fernley Hunter collecting the modified piece of obsidian out of a bunch of burnt camel bone and sent it to Gaylord Simpson in New York – the American Museum [officiary] in New York. Now one of the things we've been working on is that obsidian flake, which is in the Museum. I might not have the title of the Museum right. But, anyway, Sharon – one person from DRI – only work with professionals. One person from DRI and I thought, "I wonder if that obsidian is still existing?" And she called the head of the Museum and found out – [his name was] David Hearst Thomas who had done work in Nevada. Anyway, he's the one that answered the phone and said, "Sheryl, I don't have time now but I'll call you if I find it." Two weeks later he said he found it. We have some far western down here. A gentlemen that can take—not destroy the thing at all—but has an instrument that he can actually port up to New York and take back and give us a date on that piece of Indian material, obsidian and tell what quarry it came from. So, that's the kind of stuff that keeps going on and on and on and on.

21:40

HM: The thrill of this Monument still is going where we are really in the schools educating students and their parents and their teachers with tangible displays like topo maps and replica of the Saber Tooth Tiger skull. It's just amazing. We get the kids that – I go into a school like Alexander Dawson or any of the other schools. Go in and I talk to the science teachers. I said, "In two weeks I'd like to have a talk with the kids. Can we schedule me in?" But, what I said was, "What I want after the talk – I want the kids to get up and talk and visit with each other. See and hold the displays. But what I want is what they thought of this new National Monument. What are their ideas? What do they want to see?" I said, "I would like those letters back from the kids." We got a hundred and fifty letters from five classrooms and Jill DeStefano and Sandy Croteau and among her members, picked out three of them and sent them to Congress to educate Congress about what the kids wanted. What they were excited about. That kind of movement between Jill and I and Sandy Croteau and her whole team. And I have a team now called the Ice Age Park Foundation. We're doing the same thing. That's the type of education and it still needs to be done so people don't lay on it and depend—and the thing has kind of died—in good hands.

The thing about the State Parks and the getting together with the State Parks and the National Fossil Monument – that was tremendously important to me. Number one the high school right across the street from the State Parks unit – 315 acres.

HM: So, I went to the Red Rock Interpretive Association. It's called the Southern Nevada Conservancy now. They have a meeting with the APPL – Association for Partners of Public Lands. That institution meets once a year on the East Coast and then on the following year on the West Coast. And I got to that fairly regularly. At any rate, the one time they came up was in Albuquerque. I need to find a date on that. I went to that because I saw what workshop they were going to have with public lands and non-profit associations. We have workshops where we work on questions and for the questions that are up we try to get some answers. What might work in one state might not work in another state. Like the Site Stewardship program. But the one thing I was interested in when I went to Albuquerque in New Mexico. Holy Cow, they have a workshop on State Parks and National Parks work together. I went to that workshop and I said, "I need your MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] to take back to Nevada." And with that MOU came the beginning of working with the State Parks and the National Foundation – I mean the National Parks Foundation. And through my husband, took that to the [Nevada] legislature and support through everything. That's what started the ball really rolling of the State Parks getting together with the National Park Service. And it's very unique. The only MOU I got was from Redwood, California, where the State Parks and the National Park work together. So we need to bring examples of what's successful in other states here and try to make sure our legislators see how that is an advantage for our economy.

26:21

HM: When we look at our economy right now in the dumpster and what do we have to offer? Outdoor use. And that came to another thing. In 2007, the National Geographic issue, adventure issue, the Fall issue of 2007 had in it 'Las Vegas is the number one adventure city in the United States' I have a copy and I will send it to you. Because within a circumference of 200 miles to go to Zion, to go to Bryce, to Death Valley, to everywhere. Plus our own Valley of Fire. And our own parks here. We have a multitude of outdoor activities where casinos like Red Rock Casino with the bicyclists. We're just an outdoor community – with our bouldering up at Red Rock with the trails and everything. People come excited about that type of adventure. And by saying we were the number one city, by National Geographic, in the United States and explaining why. Because we have a central airport, it's not miles from the city. You can come in and spend a night at a hotel with lots of facilities for hotels, city. And then you can go out and explore, come back, and go to a show in the evening. We have the potential with our new National Monument of doing a whole different type of outdoor activity that would bring lots of money to Las Vegas and to the state of Nevada. Because we've got beautiful parks everywhere and we've got the Lake Mead which is fantastic. I mean there's 2,000 acres. I talked to [Cheri] Garrity, who's now in charge of UNLV in real estate and the 2,000 acres that lie south of the Nellis Air Force Base near the entrance hospital there, right west of the [Las Vegas] Speedway, has a possibility of having us host the international Olympics there. We could do that. We have the facilities. Most of these have to rebuild their cities to accommodate the people. We don't. We already have it there. I see the future Nellis Air Force Base moving to Creech because it's so pressured by building and everything around. It would be much more—I've been to Creech because I was with the Clark County Comprehensive Government Planning and we went to Creech. Went out

and touched a Predator and everything. Saw these big hangars out there and I thought, “Wow, you know, this is all good stuff.” With Nellis Air Force Base complaining a little bit about – we’re impacted, we have to worry about the height of our structures. I can see in the next ten years they’re gonna move to Creech. And that whole area will be opened up for another airport for the Las Vegas area.

29:57

HM: Also, the Frenchman–Sunrise Mountain area. Dr. Steve Rowland, who is the President of Citizens for Active Management of [Sunrise and Frenchman Mountain]. We’ve been a non-profit board since 1990 and we’re still there. We’re looking at getting that developed as a Red Rock center on the west side of the valley to match something on the east side of the valley. BLM has short staff. Has no money to develop anything and the gateway to the Lake Mead on Route 147, we have an Adopt a Highway program there. Had a tremendous impact with REI employees had a day off last Thanksgiving, Friday. And they came from Colorado, Arizona, California, and even here and 100 people showed up to help clean up that site. The Great Unconformity is a very unique geological formation and had a monument built in 1995. Bruce Babbitt came out to dedicate it. But, BLM didn’t take any care of it. They just let it all go to pot and said, “Oh, well, doesn’t matter.” We have a stone granite emblem there, a sign that got crushed and BLM did nothing about it. They didn’t think it was important.

HM: And then Gypsum Cave is right up the road. So, Steve Rowland and I are working with National Park Service hoping that they maybe will take over that area. And with the Gypsum Cave – that’s the other thing about the Native Americans. Gypsum Cave found the Ice Age sloth, the Ice Age camel, and the Ice Age horse plus atlatl darts. With the same paint, with the same design as the atlatl darts on Pintwater Cave on Nellis Air Force Base land. The Native American’s would like to have that area because Dr. Kevin Rafferty had Lynn Hatzenbuehler go and do an inventory of that area around Gypsum Cave. I’ve got the books from Southwest Museum on Gypsum Cave and the reports of another cave a half a mile west of that area. Lynn Hatzenbuehler’s report with Kevin Rafferty has over 26 sites on it, with artifacts and so forth in front of them. Caves and rock shelters and all kinds of things right smack up against Nellis Air Force Base. Nellis Air Force Base under Kish La Pierre has a Native American soiree every year and they do a lot of preservation of the Native American stuff on their own land plus they have this whole big thing where the Native Americans are primarily the resource on that. I think Erin you attended the last one. You may have attended more than that. But, I attend it every year and that whole area when the Salt Songs came out as a poster from Charlene Cruz, a person that dealt a lot with the Indians. When that came out she said, “Oh yeah, you can get this poster from California.” I ordered two of them and it was called the ‘Salt Songs’ [and] showed the trails of the Native American people. And Gypsum Cave was one of the songs sources. A big map there. So, I gave one to the Native Americans down at the main street station – the Southern Nevada Paiute group, Kenny Anderson, and his whole group. I gave a poster to them. I said, “See how important this is with BLM letting the power lines come through that whole area near your cave. What do you want to do to protect it? What would you like to see happen?” He said, “We would like to have a Visitor Center there. We’d like to maybe have a Museum there.” They’d like to make sure that we take care of the land because gosh knows BLM has not. So, Archeo-Nevada had decided to go into the cave, with BLM’s permission of course, and played music, played flutes, Indian flutes, because three Native American flutes were found in the cave under [Mark]

Harrington's exploration in 1930. So we went in there. Do you know BLM couldn't go in with us?

They said, "We are restricted from going in. We can observe from outside."

[Helen said], "But, you let people go in and trash up the cave and you don't even record that?"

[BLM said] "Oh, you guys can record it."

That cave is so significant and that's what really started me off on the Fossil Bed Monument and everything because I knew more about Gypsum Cave and Harrington's work. And Harrington was part of that Big Dig and all his cohorts from Southwest Museum. So, with Gypsum Cave, Anne DuBarton and I went down to Southwest Museum to look at all of the material that Harrington photographed. Anne DuBarton was with DRI [Desert Research Institute]. I have no academic credibility to do such a thing. So I work under other people. Colleen Beck, who was head of the Anthropology Department at DRI gave me permission to pay for Anne DuBarton to go down there. And she and I worked in the library with Kim Walters, the librarian down there. And she brought back material and we had some recordings we gave to groups called – read this thing [about] Gypsum Cave. Because we were concerned about the power lines going back and forth. And so what happened with Heidi Roberts of Far Western [Anthropological Research Group], but it was actually her associate from Davis University. I'm trying to find/think of her name. She was going to be the person to mitigate Gypsum Cave so another power line could come through. Anne DuBarton and I handed her all the information about Gypsum Cave and she went down to the Southwest Museum. Would you believe she talked them into giving Amy – no that wasn't right, I'm trying to think of her name. Anyway she was given permission to take the artifacts from Southwest Museum on Gypsum Cave up to Davis University and then turn them over to Gene Hattori at the State Museum in Carson City. Now we have our Gypsum Cave artifacts from there. There's some strange things because when Anne DuBarton and I went down there. In the cases were these selenite pendants, these little slabs of selenite gypsum on a thong. I've never seen them anywhere and any other place. So I'm doing some research on the acoustic ability of those things. What did they use them in a song? Some vibration? I mean the stuff just keeps going on and on. It's just a fascinating world and my plate is so full it just spills over. That gives you a sense of what's going on.

38:23

VS: Excellent Helen. So I just want to jump in here for a second. This is really good information and I don't even need to ask you questions. You're covering all the questions we were intending to ask you. I just want to back up for just a minute for a little bit more clarification. I think we have gotten through most of the questions. At least some of the basic information that you have already provided. Do you recall at some point, because both the BLM and the National Park Service manage National Monuments, were you involved in any discussions or have any thoughts about whether or not Tule Springs should become a National Monument administered by the BLM or the National Park Service?

HM: Lord, I hope it is administered by the National Park Service. We've had very little cooperation with the BLM. It was always more about—first of all they were unknowledgeable

about the Fossil Bed thing until we informed them. It was just amazing how they just ignored it, ignored it, ignored it. I think it should absolutely, definitely should be under the National Monument. I do think the partnership with the State is extremely important to keep the legislative process going and to build a good foundation for the State. It won't be an isolated thing. This is a brand new thing and is one of the wonderful partnerships in the whole nation. In fact I'm not sure how many other partnerships are like that, between the State Parks and the National. But, it's a way to educate the public. That's what Jill and I—and don't let me speak for you Jill, pitch in any time. I think the most important thing is educating the public. Even new people coming to Las Vegas have no idea about what's out there. These are people that will wind up being our Senators, our legislators, national representatives. We've got to make sure they've got to know what an asset this is to not only our state but to our nation. Because this is land that's not being used but it's surrounded by an urban thing so it's easy to get to, to do things. And the biggest thing I think about State working with the National Park Service is the educational opportunities for kids. To come out and find out what it is like to be a paleontologist. Would you be interested in going to the Gobi Desert because you have accreditation to that. You've got a whole world open to you and kids are very, very excited. We found dinosaur stuff up in Valley of Fire. Magnolia, fossil magnolia blossoms at Valley of Fire. We've got such a learning potential here. I think it's just unbelievable. Definitely under the National Monument. The BLM, they're good but they're kind of restricted in doing—their maps at times have been wrong. I buy their maps sometimes when I go to the BLM office. "Why do you have this? This is not right." And it's already published and everything. There's just a lot of things. I don't think that they're focus is on the opportunities that lie in Las Vegas. I think they're more about selling land back and forth and I don't know.

HM: But, the main thing about Gypsum Cave was that recently I participated in a thing. It was 244, Bill 244 I think it was about a pipeline coming next to Gypsum Cave along the power lines you know. Power lines and poles can fall down and burn. But, a pipeline 20 years from now might have gas in it or whatever. That could implode. That could explode the Gypsum Cave, collapse and you've got the Gypsum Pabco thing [plant] on the other side. I don't think they thought that through. But, they allowed for that pipeline to come through. Also, I have a map of the earthquakes around the valley here, the USGS earthquakes. Do you know Frenchman's Mountain has the most seismic activity in the whole area? It's just waiting for a bomb to be blown. And it's those kind of things the public doesn't seem to know about and the legislators don't seem to know about. But National Monument, because of your guys magnitude and power and everything, combined with the State, I think we've got a win-win situation here. And BLM, they can deal with the other lands. We still have the Southern Nevada Conservancy and BLM land out there. And the stuff has never been evolved out at Sloan [Canyon]. There's only a trailer out there and people are allowed to go up and down that petroglyphs area. There's petroglyphs so intense it looks like comic book strip on either side of the trails going in through there. And you have people do anything they want. They are not supervised. The Native Americans should take them through a tour there and supervise. Stan Roth, when we were at the dedication of the Sloan Petroglyph area – he was standing on top of a petroglyph with his girlfriend. I thought, "Holy cow. That's not a good example." I really don't have that much trust. We work with them as best we can but I have far more personal trust with the National Monument working with the State Parks because both of them are out there for the right reasons. So I just think it's really important for both of those groups to work together. That's my opinion. Maybe Jill deflects from that. Everyone else has a right to their own opinion. But, I feel like during this interview it's very

important that we definitely get the support we need. And continue the thing for the right thing. For not only our economy but also for preservation of something that is extremely valuable.

45:25

HM: How many Indian artifacts have we found out there? When I went out with Eric Johnson. He's a paleontologist. Anyway, we were out there for—

HM: What's that?

JD: Eric Scott.

HM: Oh yes. Eric Scott I mean. Well we as a group of volunteers for site stewardship in the area. We're invited out to do a dig with Eric Scott. Well I was trained under an archaeologist to do a dig. You go by a three foot by four foot square and you go down ten centimeters – four inches at the time and you record everything in that layer before you go to the next layer. Eric Scott said, "What are you doing that for?" I said, "Well, if there's any Indian artifacts around here or anything else I want to make sure I record them." [Eric responded] "Oh, you don't need to do that." He just jerked the horses [unclear] out of the thing and showed us how you plastered it and everything. Well, that was a good education. I thought, "You know, they don't have the right idea about that's why we don't find any archaeology out there because nobody is really looking for archaeology." So, that's my thing. Enough of me.

46:50

VS: Helen this is all very, very good. What I want to do – I just have two more questions for you. I want to be able to give time to Erin and to Jill and to Jon to ask you questions. So, I'm just going to finish up here with my questions so we can let others have some time. Very good answers. Thank you.

HM: Thank you so much Vincent for this opportunity. Take good care. Yes, I'm ready.

VS: OK. So, can you tell us about the Tule Springs Reunion Event? When and where was it planned? Who planned it and who was involved?

HM: OK, I gave Jill the whole booklet. It was a big booklet and I think Erin was going to copy and then they returned it back to me about the reunion. But, the reason the reunion came about was National Geographic in its December issue of 2000 reviewed 'Peopling of the Americas' and a big map. And on that map was Tule Springs. That's when we decided to do a reunion of the Tule Springs thing. National Geographic was also very involved with the Big Dig back in 1962. They took over 3,000 photographs. They have all the records of that. It's just unbelievable what National Geographic has supported. I think do again from National Geographic especially about the National Monument to revisit it again if possible. But, the 2002 [2000] issue, December issue was when we decided to do the reunion and 2002 I think it was. And Terry Robinson was very involved in it. Trying to think of the other people. There was a whole bunch of people very involved in that. We had a reunion where the scientist Charles Rossier came out. And C. Vance Haynes came out. These were the original diggers. Sheila and Richard Brooks and Margaret Lyneis. They all came out to the reunion. Charles Rossier came back also for a high school, Shadow Ridge High School reunion, called the 50 year reunion. It was just a marvelous,

marvelous plan and the whole thing is encapsulated in that book that I gave you Jill. I think you took it to the Agency. Do you remember that?

JD: Yes and then Erin copied it into the archives and then we returned it to you.

HM: Good, that shows you who participated. The photographs and everything about that's probably the most complete story of the reunion. But, the reason it was started was because National Geographic published that issue that December issue of 2000 'Peopling of the Americas' and in that was a big map folded up and on that map was Tule Springs. So, that's why we had the reunion.

50:20

VS: Great, Helen. So, what I'm going to do now is turn over the questions to Jill and let Jill ask you any questions she has.

HM: Please. Thank you very much.

JD: Well Helen, when you came to our meeting that time that was just the beginning of the Protectors of Tule Springs. Do you remember the flyer that you and I made up off from one of your visions that you had given to the BLM with the mammoth walking across the iceberg? Do you remember that flyer? I have it. Do you have any thoughts on creating that and how your vision, the things on that flyer, and what it encompassed?

HM: Yes, well what it encompassed was the reason we needed to preserve this land. In fact I have a copy with me so—I can't reach it right now. I'm still recovering from this fractured femur right now. So, it takes me a little time to get up and at them. I was going to have that ready but I'm sure I have it. It was the one, Sandy Croteau was very involved in making one of our preliminary images too. I have several different – it was the Ice Age Park Foundation – I think it was. I should have it right in front of me but it's across the room.

52:05

JD: What do you think; we went into a lot of offices together. Do you remember anybody who was negative to us? Who gave us a bad time about our ideas?

HM: You know, I hate to say bad things about people. I did find that the BLM was just really – they had other priorities. They didn't know about the site. I was absolutely flabbergasted that they didn't know about the site at all. They didn't even have a copy of the Pleistocene studies, which I got several copies, and gave to them. Their mind was into the disposal area and making money. I found that it was just – well it was just something you just had to go around and see if you could see it another way, more positive.

53:08

JD: Do you remember the day we took then Congresswoman Shelly Berkley out?

HM: Oh yes. And she wore tennis shoes instead of high heels (Laughter) which was really great. That was wonderful Jill. I think you arranged all of that. I do remember having my Hummer out there with the Ice Age poster on the side of it. And she's right up there against it holding a fossil

tooth. Yes that was a good day. Very good. I put down some other names that were good. [Senator] Dean Heller of course. Trying to think. Oh, Bruce Babbitt also came out to the Great Unconformity. He was the Secretary of Interior. He came out there. That was in 1995. But, that's before we got started. I thought I wrote some names down here.

JD: So many people, Senator John Ensign—

HM: John Ensign definitely. I should have all these names down. Oh boy—trying to think of the legislators we took out there to inform them. I don't have that in front of me, darn it.

JD: We can always talk about—

54:40

HM: Oh, you know what? The other thing that really got us started Jill was the vertebrate paleontology group that met in 2011 here at the casino. And Josh Bonde was a Master of Ceremonies. His wife put all that together. And in every packet, 1,500 people—Santucci, you attended that, that's where I first met you—anyway, 1,500 brochures I put in everyone's packet that they had to take home. That was very, very important meeting because that really opened up about the importance of paleontology. That was at the Paris Hotel I believe. And that was just fantastic. That's where I met a lot of the figures of National Parks. It was just wonderful. I had that whole brochure - was going to bring that up also. That was one of the best things to inform Las Vegas about what to do with this Upper Las Vegas Wash. And we had a whole bunch of people at the Upper Las Vegas Wash. There's a group called the Desert Wetlands Conservancy I belong to. And they were John Hyatt and a lot of the Clark County people. All very important about the desert wildlife conservancy - wetlands pardon me. That was a really important group - the Upper Las Vegas Wash group formed before the National Monument or any thought about the State Parks or anything. [They were] concerned about the waters going down from the area down towards Lake Mead and through the wetlands area. We found out a lot of stuff about that. They were very supportive of it. And trails being built around the valley. We were working with Outside Las Vegas. Thalia Dondero and I were members of that group and we were talking about trails surrounding, connecting around the whole valley. It was called Outside Las Vegas. I think the gal that headed that up - I'm trying to think of her name. She just went to the Nature Conservancy chair or manager. What was her name? [Mauricia Baca]. She was very helpful. The other person who was extremely helpful was Alan O'Neal. He was a park supervisor at Lake Mead. He was a huge help in opening doors to legislative people. He's definitely part of our team. What was the other question?

JD: Thank you Helen. I am done.

57:59

VS: Ok, Jon, do you want to go ahead? We'll save Erin for last so she can cover anything that we haven't covered.

JB: Absolutely. So, Helen, you actually answered the questions I had quite fully. I just want to get on the record: thank you so much for the graciousness that you showed me and family on welcoming us to Nevada. I have to admit that was one of the—

HM: Oh, you know having that [post shout?] outside of my house and having that whole group of people from DRI, the anthropology department, and everywhere to greet you and your wife and I believe your son also, right?

JB: Yep. That was nice—

HM: To me that was outstanding. Thank you for remembering that because my house is a library. I've got three full rooms of books alone that deals with all of this stuff. I'm just sorting through it right now. Making sure it's all catalogued. It's just a pleasure to have DRI people in it and the University and everything. Harry and I, we came to Las Vegas. In 1969 I believe it was John Moyer at UNLV had a convocation to dedicate the new UNLV. Before it was the Southern Nevada campus it was Colorado or whatever. Harry was invited to that convocation as a representative of Duke University. That's the kind of status that Harry had and kept on when he became an Assemblyman. And even before that because I was very interested in all this stuff and he was helping. But he was very much a part of this whole thing and it's just amazing what progress we have done and what things we've accomplished. But, looking at the future we've got a bright brand-new future with a lot of challenges in it. Thank you. To me that was really great. Jon, you did such a wonderful job. Really appreciate all your work cause it was a pleasure to work with you. Absolutely.

1:00:35

JB: Thank you very much Helen and I've got a quick question. As part of that event as everything wound down you took us out to an outbuilding there on your property.

HM: Oh yes, the hermitage.

JB: Yes, the hermitage. You showed us some of the incredible things you were essentially curating yourself. I was just wondering and I think came from the digs there within the wash kind of south of where the National Monument is – I was just wondering what is happening to those materials and is there anything that the National Park Service could possibly help with there?

HM: Oh, that sounds wonderful. Actually I have no artifacts from the Gilcrease Big Dig that they got the 21 mammoths out of. I did have them for a while and they were under my possession. I was worried about a fire or something. You know you always worry about a fire or something happening to your building when it's not properly done for conserving those things. Steve Rowland and I went to Bill Gilcrease and we got permission to take those artifacts to the Las Vegas Natural History Museum and they're archived there right now. And that's where some of those went.

1:02:15

HM: The other thing that probably would be good, I have original publication of Harrington's Gypsum Cave with the color front piece that shows the color and pattern of the atlatl stake. And also Fred Forman's report on the Test Site. His publication, not many people have that. So that's what I do is collect old publications. I have the [viewerbeth?] ethnography from 1889 up to 1912. I'm missing three issues I'm still trying to collect. Those types of things. I've National Geographic from 2014 all the way up to today date. And I have a Pleistocene study. I usually try

to keep ten copies. I give them away to people who I think are going to help us and I say, “Thank you for your interest.” I give a date and the name of the person I gave it to inside. Actually one of them I gave to an auction that we had for the—it was some auction we had with the, it was the—trying to think of the name of it. Southern Nevada Archaeology? No. Anyway, it was a Convention we had of a group together. At any rate I had Claude Warren endorse it on the page that he was recognized in that. And on it I put it to him concerning thank you for your interest and everything. That sold off for \$50, auctioned off for \$50. The importance of these people that worked on these things and Claude Warren is still with us I think. It’s very, very important that we recognize them for what they did. That’s one of the things that I have. I am going through lots of maps, lots of maps. I worked with Russ Avery. I’d fly in his little executive Mooney plane and lean out the window and take pictures of the ground, like Mesa House. He and I went up and surveyed Mesa House and he put it on his – he’s an engineer and surveyor. He’s so far gone but I have his whole collection from George Avery cause Russ died last year, 2019. So, that’s going to either the Special Collections at UNLV or it will be at the State Museum or wherever I find it will be the most productive.

HM: Gypsum Cave and all the mining parcels around Gypsum Cave with the Pabco Mining Company. I have the whole reports from the Pabco Mining Company because when I was up in Carson City with Harry while he was a State Legislator I went to the library. And I went to the Mining Association and I copied everything I could to bring it back so we have a core of information here. What I hope is when this epidemic [Covid-19] that I invite you guys all over to my library. You can browse, do whatever you want. I want to make sure this all gets in the right place so it can all be used. My vision is to have a research center at the State Park and National Monument – the fossil state park there. I’ve already put the bid in. I’m planning to talk to Bigelow about underground features. I’ve got a whole bunch of ideas about that plus a library like the Huntington Library in Los Angeles. That’s a beautiful research library. When you go in with no pins or anything. You sign in and you sign out. There’s no—and they have the Dead Sea Scrolls. Something like that would be a fantastic boost to research and scientific endeavor in our state. And I think we have a huge opportunity, especially with this beautiful Monument. Who knows what else we’ll find out there. It’s not totally explored. So, I would like scientists to come here instead of taking the specimens back to Berkley or whatever. That was one of the main reasons I fought so hard to keep these specimens here. Because once they’re in Berkley or somewhere else it’s awfully hard to get them back here. We were very lucky with the gal who went to Southwest Museum and got our Gypsum Cave stuff. It’s just an on-going feature.

JB: Great, thanks Helen. And it’s been a real pleasure talking with you. And I’m done. Thanks, Vince.

1:07:47

VS: Thanks John.

HM: Thank you so much. And you have my address and phone numbers so any time you have any questions about anything and want to follow up with anything please call me. OK?

JB: Very good. Thanks.

VS: Erin, go ahead.

EE: Hi Helen. So, I have another question about the Autry Museum and the work you did there to go inventory the specimens and artifacts that you selected. So, can you tell us a little bit about the work you did when you went there to inventory those collections?

HM: I went three times to the Southwest Museum. The first time was with Anne [DuBarton] finding out about Harrington and all the work that was done back in 1962 – finding out about what Harrington did all over the world. He was in Cuba. And the George Hays Museum up in New York City. I visited that to get the George Hays papers and so forth from different scientists. And also with DRI I had Sheryl Martin go down with me and visit with, get a whole report also from the Southwest Museum. I have those reports. And Sheryl and I are the ones that were investigating a possibility of finding out what quarry the original obsidian flake that Fernley Hunter found – what quarry it came from. Because there's no close obsidian sources around here. So we thought that might give us a clue further down the hill. So there were little investigative possibilities like that. Sheryl Martin is the one who is with DRI also with the credentials to collect that type of material and make sure that it's properly done. It is not something I go down and do. But Kim Walters was extremely helpful on all of those occasions. And trying to think of the curator of the Southwest Museum. Anyway, got a picture of Sheryl Martin sitting at a desk and all the boxes labeled Tule Springs in the laboratory upstairs—what was his name, the guy, the curator—anyways we did a lot of good stuff there. Lot of good stuff. Isabelle Kelly's stuff, collected from the 30's, of the Native Americans. So, I've got a lot of stuff on Native Americans too. Anything else?

EE: Were you able to find any of the archives that were at the Autry Museum or did you guys not have a chance to look at that stuff?

HM: Can you repeat what you said?

EE: Were you able to look at any of the archives related to Tule Springs that were at Autry Museum? Such as photographs or historical records?

HM: Yes, we did. We did. And of course they published the books. Book #4 is about paleontological studies in Southern Nevada. This is a Southwest Museum publication. So anything about Southern Nevada book published – I mean purchased. I've got four and five books of everything. I'm low on Gypsum Cave book. I went in to—other than paper stuff, published stuff, pictures and so forth—because Kim allowed us to take copies of pictures and notes and everything. So, that I have. That's probably very good research material. Going through those to find different things. I remember one of the things was a picture of Fernley Hunter over the site of what he claimed was the obsidian thing that he found. And then about 15 years later he had another picture taken of him at the same site of where he found the Fernley thing. I think I turned that over to you guys. You were trying to find out where that was located on the maps. And I presumed they had to get permission from the State of Nevada to work on these locations and give reports back to the State of Nevada. I'm trying to find out where those archives are. Cause I don't really have any proof of they applied for areas. You know, it's just implied in the reports. Because they couldn't do Gypsum Cave – they could not explore Gypsum Cave until they got a mining certificate to mine it. Harrington and [Hidon's?] son were the ones that explored that under a mining permit. It was not just open land. Anyway, a lot of little questions need to be answered and maybe developed into a different answer when we find out more information. I can't wait for you guys to come over and just see what I have. It's going to

make a research library out of this stuff I would definitely love to do. In my opinion it's hazardous to keep it in a home. The whole thing to burn down and all that that information lost. You don't want it like the library of Alexander (Laughs). So, it really needs to be either copied and preserved and so on and so forth. The one reason I keep at it is because I seem to be the string from the beginning all the way up, and I'm 82 years old and I want to make sure that this goes on. That it's just not forgotten because people aren't interested in it anymore. I think that the National Monument coming on – the National Park would even be better. But, under the National Park Service that type of history could be preserved. And I think a special underground lab where it's secure to test materials. To have the high school students participate or just watch being made – paleontological stuff. To actually get their hands on a learning process. They could develop into a lot more research that would help all National Monuments and State Parks and everything. So, I think we have a rare opportunity.

1:15:21

EE: I think getting the public involved is definitely important and teaching them about paleontology and the fossils that are found at Tule Springs. Can you tell us about your involvement with the BLM Site Steward program at Tule Springs where San Bernardino County Museum paleontologists taught participants how to excavate, wrap fossils, in addition to survey fossils and how did this program?

HM: I tell you what I worry about it. I tell you what I worry a bit about it. These people going out on trails and having pointed the camel tooth site or – What's going to prevent them from going out later on in the dark – it's not gated. It's not secure. People can go out and pick these things up afterwards. And also when I went on some of the trail hikes led by Josh Bonde and he had 100 people in front of me. And baby carriages were there and everything. I thought, "Wait a minute. Somebody has got to talk – give some kind of instructions to these people." You can't wander off in the desert and pick up things. You can't find things and say, "Look what I found." Yeah, that's fine but now you know where it is. When Jill and I led things out to the paleontological site where it had the tusk and everything we only took 10 people out at a time. And they could not take pictures of the horizon to show where this was. They didn't have GPS at that time I don't think. Anyway, we made sure that the people that went out there signed a pledge that they would not take anything out there. And they didn't know exactly where they were because we went up and down and through ravines. You couldn't even see the skyline of Las Vegas. So, we were very, very careful about taking out groups that we felt confident—Archaeo-Nevada members all sign an oath. They cannot pick up any fossils; any this, that or the other. That's just a big no-no. Well, people have picked that area to death. I think it really needs some restrictions on people going out there and being pointed out the site. "Oh, this came out of that. Oh, my." Well, you can go back in the dark and pick it up again. You can go back out there any time. You can walk right through those gates. Walk right through to the site where you were just at. And I think that's very, very precarious. I don't know what the rest of the National Monuments have but I know you can't even pick a plant from the National Monument. To me it's very, very loosey goosey and I'm not too fond of taking treks out there on trails. I want the scientists out there. I don't want the other people out there picking the place over. Because we won't have anything left after a while. Everybody wants to take home a tooth. Everybody wants to take home this. I think it's very, very vulnerable the way we've got it. And I blame the State as much as the National Monument. It's just got to be, it's just got to be better than what it's got.

Either take a class like Steve Rowland. He took a Shadow Ridge class over there. Pointed out the snails. Had them do observations on them. Find out about the history of them and everything. But, that was a controlled group because they showed promise to develop more into a thing. He didn't take the football team out there or anything like that. I think we have to be very careful or it will be picked over and clean any day. And gosh knows what valuable Indian stuff may be gone also.

1:19:50

EE: So, I have one last question for you. I was curious, what was Nevada State Museum's involvement with Tule Springs besides the Tule Springs Expedition? I know they helped run the Expedition but the specimens and artifacts at the Museum. Do they have—

HM: Back in '62. Are there artifacts of the Tule Springs Dig at the Museum? I think they're up in Carson City. They're not at the Museum.

EE: No, there's actually a few at the Las Vegas Museum. But, I was just curious as far as the Nevada State Museum goes. What is their involvement with Nevada State Parks and the Tule Springs area or do they have any interest in doing any current research or interpretation for the area?

HM: Are you talking about the State Parks thing?

EE: Yes, so what's the relationship between Nevada State Museum and Nevada State Parks?

HM: I think the Nevada State Parks has just a little bit. They are building the Visitor Center there and a parking lot and hopefully a laboratory, but that's down the road. But, right now they're concerned with doing tours out there. And also, I'm not seeing any infrastructure working with the school. I talked to Jonathan Burgess, who is head of the Southern Nevada State Parks District. He hadn't even met with the principal last year when we were forming this whole thing and having the parks dedication and everything. He seemed very reluctant to work with the students or come in and have a demonstration about what's out there or anything. I don't know what the deal was. But, maybe it's changed. Maybe he's changed. Garrett Frehner has done a fantastic job of getting that building started and getting a presence on the land. But, he's also doing another trails initiative grant again. I think really it just needs to be more structured with the school and the education of our legislators and everything. Maybe I am just being premature. Maybe it's not the right time to do it. Right now he's concentrating on getting the building finished. But, one of the things is the gift shop—I don't know about the original plans—the gift shop is about 10 foot by 10 foot. Here's where you make some money by having a gift shop. I said, "Why don't you have the gift shop out where the parking area is so people can buy as they come in or go back and put the stuff in their car." Or whatever they want and not be burdened with you know. And it'd be a separate building out there. Plus, you've got to make sure it's secure. It's not something the people can break into. A lot of security reasons.

1:23:15

HM: I know the other thing we were trying to develop out there, I think it was Jill and I and other people, was about our drone program. At the Shadow Ridge High School there is a military thing. ROTC, is that right?

General: yes

HM: Right. Now, when I went to one of the meetings with the Native Americans and Nellis Air Force Base and Kish LaPierre I sat right next to a girl who was in charge of drones at Nellis. He was the head man of drones. I said, "Oh, my golly. We have a military thing, consultation thing with Nellis Air Force Base at Shadow Ridge High School." He said, "Yeah, my daughter goes there." I said, "Why, do you think we could train the kids to do drones?" Not only for security but also they could identify some sites and not have to climb up to them and identify them. There is also GPS." So, he thought about it but State Parks is not a National Monument. State Parks could make opportunity. Well, I put that to Burgess, Jonathan Burgess, and he said, "No, we aren't going to get into that." And then I found out a little bit later. Probably early last summer that they do have a drone program out at Spring Mountain Ranch that they're teaching kids how to use drones. Well, maybe the doors are opening a little bit so that's another possibility. One of the things you have out there is security. I think it's Sandy Croteau and Dev [Basudev] who really monitor those borders, Crazy how people are breaking through fences. So the security problem out there is a real, real problem. But, I worry about the security of the artifacts. And evidently there has been digging at the end of Durango that faces the park. That's something that I think Christine reported. But, it's kind of a loosey goosey thing. I worry about it. I guess that always comes with the nature of the creature. You're going to always worry about it. I just want to make sure it is protected a little bit better. But, that's my opinion. That's my opinion.

1:26:15

EE: Well, I thank you so much Helen. I think that concludes the questions that I had. I'm going to pass it back to Vince to see if he has anything additional to ask or whether this will conclude the interview.

HM: Erin, thank you so much for helping set this up too. It is a joy working with you and please lift the phone any time. Hopefully when this epidemic [Covid-19] is over I can have a big party. A big barbeque out in my backyard. I am so ready for a party right now. (Laughter)

1:26:50

VS: So Helen, I think a really important discussion for us is your husband Harry Mortenson. And I think we were going to put that off for another day. You wanted to do a little bit of research.

HM: I really do. I want to get my ducks in a row. I don't want to be misquoting something. Jill did an awful lot with getting that Bill through for the Monument. But Harry did a lot of good letter and introductions and getting things through too. He was very effective about, not just the National Monument, but also about State Parks - all over the state. When there was a problem about the fencing for the National - the State land he actually put a Bill in where he got some land from BLM that wanted to have it safe. They wanted to have it in the Spring Mountain area. He got some land traded off and some extra money for the State Parks to put that fence up. And that's when he was working with Dave Morrow. I just have to find out the details on that a little bit better.

VS: Ok, thank you. So, unless there are any other questions from Jill or Jon I just have a couple of last fun questions.

HM: Good.

VS: So, Helen on July 18, 2015 we had an event at the Nevada State Museum. Do you recall being there?

HM: I do indeed. In fact Jon Burgess [Burpee] gave my grandson – granddaughter, Sara, a Junior Ranger badge because she identified the State fossil, Ichthyosaur, and answered all his questions. I have a picture of her receiving a Junior Ranger badge from Jon Burpee there.

VS: So, I wanted to ask two specific questions about that event. That was the first time you met Jon Burpee and wanted to hear your impressions about the ability to meet Jon. And second about the return of the fossil collections from the San Bernardino County Museum. So, if you could respond with both of those topics.

HM: The fossil collection from San Bernardino Museum or are you talking about the Southwest Museum?

VS: The San Bernardino County Museum. We brought back about 10,000 specimens and we had a public event to announce that.

HM: Oh, right, right, right, right. Actually, Steve Rowland was more involved with that and Josh Bonde. I think Jill DeStefano went down there. So, she would be the better one to ask about that. Because I was not part of that.

VS: My question was that the public event we had where we secretly brought Jon Burpee out to introduce him to the public. Do you remember that?

HM: I think I do. Was that the one where we presented an award to the Director of the Museum?

VS: No.

HM: That was a different one then. Ok, I probably have the notes on that because I keep all the State Museum notes. July 18, 2015?

VS: Yes, so that's the date we introduced Jon Burpee. Jon Burpee flew in special for that so that would have been the first time you met him.

HM: OK. I will definitely look up that information.

VS: Ok, very good, excellent.

HM: Ok, cause I think the fossils were taken to the Las Vegas Natural History Museum. I'm not sure it was taken to the State Museum. But, that might have been a whole other incident.

VS: There were two different transfer of collections. The first one was in 2015. That's when we brought the first 10,000 specimens back. We did that at the same time we introduced Jon Burpee to the crowd.

HM: Ok. I probably have the newspaper collection on that one.

VS: Ok, I think that's fine.

HM: Great.

VS: I think that's good for today. There's a lot more things we can talk about in a future interview but I think on behalf of all of us we are so lucky and fortunate to have known you and to be able to interview you.

HM: The feeling is mutual. Honestly to everyone and the fact that we're moving forward. I think that is absolutely fantastic. Proud to be part of moving forward. I really appreciate the time and effort that you guys have gotten together. I will also try to compile the stuff about Harry's work with the legislative process. What he produced and everything. So, I think it is very, very important we get those things straight because those are really the documentation of what made things move. Also, Erin I will get to you a copy of the Harry Reid 'Thank You' also. In the next day or so.

EE: OK.

VS: Just wanted to comment that your recollection of details. People's names and dates and events is just remarkable. So, we really appreciate being able to chat with you today and record this history because Helen Mortenson is an important part of the history of Tule Springs Fossil Beds.

HM: Well, that's a very nice compliment but I'm just a repository of information. I have enthusiasm to stay there as long as I'm alive. This is a very passionate thing with me. And the thing that my husband was a scientist achieving good things in his own right. It made me really participate and document what I was doing. So, thanks to everybody who's helped. Tremendous help from Jill DeStefano and Dev and Sandy Croteau. Dr. Steve Rowland. And I keep contacts with these people quite a bit so we need to keep the story going. That's for sure.

VS: Well, until we get a chance to talk again – Thank You and have a great upcoming holiday.

HM: I will definitely and look forward to seeing you all after I get this vaccine done. (Laughter) Take good care people. I love you very much. So good to hear from you Jill and Jon and everybody. Thanks ever so much. Appreciate it.

JB: Absolutely. Thank you Helen. It's a real pleasure.

VS: Thanks.

HM: Same here. Take good care of yourselves. Bye, bye. Have a Happy Holiday if you have one. I'm not. I'm not visiting anyone. I'm just staying isolated. (Laughter)

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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NPS 2020/012, December 2020

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