

Interview with
VINCEN ELIAS LEAVITT

March 28, 1969

**VOICES OF REMEMBRANCE FOUNDATION
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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VINCEN ELIAS LEAVITT

Vincen Elias Leavitt was interviewed on March 28, 1969 in Bunkerville, Nevada by Fielding H. Harris, a representative of Voices of Remembrance Foundation. He related his personal history of living in various parts of Nevada. His wife, Erma (Leavitt) Leavitt, also participated.

FH: Please give your full name.

VL: [My name is] Vincen Elias Leavitt.

FH: What is your birth date?

VL: [I was born] November 5, 1899.

FH: Where were you born?

VL: [I was born in] Bunkerville, Nevada.

FH: What was your father's name?

VL: [His name was] Thomas D. Leavitt.

FH: What does the 'D' stand for?

VL: [It stands for] Dudley, I guess.

FH: [What was] your mother's [full] name?

VL: [Her name was Mary] Luella (Abbott) [Leavitt].

FH: What do you remember when you started school?

VL: When I started school I had a teacher by the name of Miss Blanchard that I thought was the most beautiful girl in the world.

FH: How much [education] were you able to [receive]? What did you do in school?

VL: I [went] to one year normal that is the eighth grade, four years of high school and one year of normal training.

FH: Where was that normal [education]?

VL: It was here in Bunkerville.

FH: Did you enjoy school?

VL: I think so.

FH: What were you mainly interested in school? What did you study?

VL: I was interested in agriculture more than anything else.

FH: Can you remember the names of some of the teachers you had in school?

VL: I can remember a lot of them. Which ones do you want?

FH: Whatever ones stand out in your memory?

VL: There was the principal, A. L. Kelly, [who] I think was one of the top educators [in] the west. There was Jack Whiting [who] is now an ordinance worker in the Los Angeles Temple. He was my eighth grade teacher. There was a Romney [who] was the agriculture teacher and coach. I played basketball under Romney. He is a very good man. I do not know who all to name. There are thirty or forty of them.

FH: Do you feel your school teachers were quality teachers?

VL: Most of them. There was one or two that I would not call a good teacher, especially during World War I, because they had to pick up [whoever they] could get. I was not too fond of some of the teachers I had that year. I might say our principal that year was one of the best. That was LeRoy ["Roy"] Hafen. He is now [a] historian [and] teaching history [at] BYU [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah].

FH: Was there any specific reason why you did not go any further in school? Do you remember?

VL: We did not have the finances [for me to continue]. [My education] just came to [an] end.

FH: In those early years, did you [think] you would be a farmer?

VL: Yes, that is what I planned on [doing].

FH: Was your training in this field entirely at home under your father?

VL: [From my] father and school.

FH: Did they actually have teachers in school [that] helped in that area?

VL: They had ag teachers, yes. I think we had some of the best ag teachers there were in Nevada. Three of them took some of the highest ag teaching jobs in the state. They are teaching now.

FH: That proves it. When the barrel is shaken the good ones go to the top. Was there any adventure type [events] that happened to you in [your] early years?

VL: I do not know what you mean by adventure, but we were always out doing something that we should not have been doing. We liked to go in the mountains and chase burros and cattle. I used to do a lot of horseback riding with my dad when he had a bunch of cattle.

FH: This would be called an adventuresome life for most people.

VL: We had a lot of adventures. We had a lot of fun.

FH: Did you go after burros?

VL: I chased burros, yes.

FH: Did you ever catch them?

VL: Yes, we would catch them and turn them loose.

FH: What did you do with them?

VL: [We] just roped them.

FH: Were there quite a lot of wild burros?

VL: There were a lot of wild burros here [at that time], but there are not too many now.

FH: I have not heard of people doing this.

VL: They are doing it yet. There was a [group] from Cedar City [Iron County, Utah] down there last week chasing burros.

FH: Did you have any accidents?

VL: [Do] you mean when I was riding?

FH: When you were [young] or [when you were] riding.

VL: I had one accident. I was chasing a calf to brand it. The horse hit a badger hole and I went off about twenty feet from the end of the horse. He ran off and left me about ten miles down the [Virgin] River.

FH: You [stood] up without a broken leg, though.

VL: I never [was] hurt.

FH: What about the horse?

VL: The horse was alright. The only thing, I had to chase him about a mile before I caught up with him. I saw something one day that I did not know before. My brother-in-law was chasing a wild sheep on his horse. His horse would get about twenty-five yards and he could not get the horse close [enough] to rope that sheep.

FH: Why was that?

VL: He was scared of it.

FH: Was the horse afraid of it?

VL: He would run right over [to the sheep] until he would get about twenty-five yards from it. When he [came] to where he thought he could start to rope it, the horse would not go any further. That was it.

FH: Were they that mean?

VL: [Inaudible] They were mean, [but] I do not know why.

FH: Did they have long pointed horns?

VL: They did not have pointed [horns]. They have round horns.

FH: They had curled horns. Has there ever been anything in your life that was amusing?

EL: [Tell about] Box Canyon [Nevada].

FH: She said something about Box Canyon.

VL: That was not amusing. That was a tragedy. My Aunt [Ada] had a bunch of cows. They were always mean. I do not know why, but everything she had would fight a circle saw. We bunched up a [herd] of cows and were going to brand a calf. It was in Box Canyon only about thirty feet across the mouth of it. I said, "You watch it here and I will rope the calf." The cow made a break for that pass and he [Danks

Adams] threw a little rock and killed her deader than a doornail. While he cleaned her I had to come to town to get a buggy to go back and pick her up. We peddled her out the next day and got \$2.50 out of her.

FH: [Laughter] Did he make a lucky throw with that rock?

VL: Hit her just right.

FH: Who was with you, by the way?

VL: Danks Adams [was with me]. Another time, we were all down there riding. There were about thirty men camped right below that Box Canyon. They sent me and two other [boys] up from my herd to keep them locked in there all night. The other two boys [were] from St. George [Washington County, Utah], the Cox boys. The oldest boy had a six-shooter. In the night he tried to target practice a little bit and stampeded that herd of steers. [The herd] ran right down over their camp and tramped them all up good. We were gathering steers all the next day. Besides that, we [received] a good tanning for doing it.

FH: Who did the tanning?

VL: My brother and his dad. [Laughter]

FH: [Laughter] You did not forget that very soon.

VL: I never forgot that. I never pass that canyon now or never go fishing out past there, but I can see those cattle coming out of there.

FH: When you were growing up on this ranch, were you able to get [involved in] any activity in [The] Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]?

VL: We always had Sunday off. That is one thing — dad never had us work on Sunday.

FH: I find this unusual. So many people who lived the ranch life neglected church work.

VL: That is one thing dad never did. If an emergency came up, we had to [do the work]. [It] was very seldom we ever had to [work]. It did not matter on the Fourth of July or any [day] like that, we would work, but Sunday we had off.

FH: This tells a lot about your father. Did you go to Primary?

VL: Yes, I remember going to Primary.

FH: Also MIA [Mutual Improvement Association]?

VL: MIA [and] Sunday school.

FH: And Sacrament meeting?

VL: I got out of Sacrament meeting whenever I could.

FH: Did you? [Laughter] Were you active in Priesthood work?

VL: Yes.

FH: Did you go up through the Priesthood ranks?

VL: I went right up through the Priesthood.

FH: Did you think a lot of the church as you grew up?

VL: I guess, because I did not know anything else.

FH: Was it part of life?

VL: It was part of life because all the activity we had around here was church activity.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

FH: What can you remember about your father?

VL: My father was a big jaw-boned man. He was a very strong man. He did not know his strength. He was a man [who] was always a hard worker, always took his share no matter how many men or how much younger until he died. He would go in the ditch and would out-shovel any of his [children].

EL: [He was a] fast dancer.

VL: Yes. He was a step-dancer. He did a lot of step-dancing.

FH: Is that unusual for a big man?

VL: Usually every time they had a dance, dad had to [do] a step-dance while the rest watched. One time a circus came here and they had eight or ten men trying to load the center pole. They were fooling around there. Dad started laughing at them. They said, "I bet you cannot lift one end of it." He said, "I will bet you \$50.00 I can carry it ten steps." It was a fifty-foot pole. So they called him on it. He got down and [put] it on his knees and walked on his feet, but he doubled his knees. The pole was around his knees and stomach. He carried it fifty feet. Then they hired him to take them across the Colorado River down to White Fields [Colorado] so he could help with another pole. [Laughter] They were not going to

pay the \$50.00 because they said he did not stand up, but that was not in the agreement. He was just to pack it. The crowd made them pay [him] the \$50.00.

He had a voice that carried. I do not think anybody's voice would carry any more than his would. They used to call it Uncle "Tom's" telephone. Our field was down about a mile and a half, but he never went down to the field. If he was in the field and wanted us he called us. We lived right in this big house here.

[Arthur Hughes and Sons had a] horse-power threshing machine [and] we would have about fifteen men threshing. [They] owned a thresher and wherever they went that is where they would eat. The farmer would feed them. Every morning they would want to get started before it [was] too hot so they would start [at] the break of day. They would always get dad to holler, "Breakfast is ready" so everybody would get there. One morning he stepped out on the back porch. They were threshing at our place. He hollered a couple of times. [My] sister [Orilla Hughes] lived over [in] Mesquite [Nevada] five miles away. The wind was moving the right direction and she heard dad hollering. She could not tell what he said so she got her husband up and they hooked on the buggy and came over. They [thought] something was wrong. [Laughter] She was mad at dad. He had a strong voice.

FH: He really did have a telephone all his own.

VL: He had a telephone of his own.

FH: What do you remember about your personal relationship with him?

VL: I do not know how to say it, but dad was not a man to hunt trouble anytime. He would go around a bush, but he would never let anybody walk over on him. He was not afraid of trouble, but he never hunted trouble. He was a man that had a strong — I do not know what you call it. For instance, my wife took him to St. George. He had toes that were riding each other and cancer started. She took him to St. George to the hospital to have a toe cut off. Dr. McGregor wanted to put him to sleep. He said, "No. If you want to cut that toe off you cut it off. Nobody is going to cut on me without me seeing what they are doing." He would not let him give him a pain pill or [a shot]. He just sat there and let him cut that toe off.

He and I were down in the field cutting hay. It was in August and it was hot. He had a toothache. He was piling hay and I was cutting and the guard kept coming loose on the mower. He came over to help me and we could not turn the bolt so he was going to cut it off. He took a single jack and a coal chisel to cut [it] off. Quickly, he put that coal chisel against his tooth and hit it with a hammer and knocked it down his throat and it [almost] choked him. He knocked his own tooth out. I do not know what you would call it, whether it was crazy or just what it was. Pain did not bother him.

FH: He certainly had a lot of intestinal fortitude.

VL: That is the way he was.

EL: That was the first tooth he ever [lost].

VL: That was the first tooth he ever had out of his head. When he was seventy-three years old he had his teeth pulled because he was starting to get dropsy. The doctor said he had never in all his life pulled teeth as hard to pull as they were.

He was never [one] to take part in church activities. Mother was, but he was not. He would go most of the time, but I do not think he ever [held] an office in church that I know of.

FH: Do you remember his parents?

VL: I do not remember them very well. I remember grandpa "Lem." When you talk to Elmer [Leavitt], that is his grandpa, too and he is older; he can tell you more about him than I can. He was a very religious man. He believed in prayer more than any person I have ever seen in my life. I heard him say once that he kept his telephone in tune with his Father in heaven all the time. He was never out of tune. That is about all I know about grandpa "Lem" because I was just a [boy].

FH: What is his name?

VL: [His name was] Lemuel S. [Sturtevant] Leavitt.

FH: Do you remember your Grandma Leavitt?

VL: I do not remember her. I do not think I ever saw her. She died when I was a [boy] or before I was big enough to remember, anyway.

EL: [Inaudible] your father.

FH: Is there more you want to say about your father?

VL: I do not know [of] anything else.

FH: What do you remember about your mother?

VL: Mother was always active in the church. She worked in the Primary, Relief Society and Sunday school for years and years. She was always a hand to go around and help the sick. She was not a midwife or anything like that, but she helped the sick quite a bit.

FH: She was one of those Latter-day Saints who was a good neighbor.

VL: That is it.

FH: Do you remember anything about her homemaking?

VL: She was a good cook and a good housekeeper. One thing we always had at home was good meals. I do not think you [would] ever find anything out of place in the house [at] any time.

FH: Was she strict with you?

VL: She would get after us if we did anything wrong. If we [received] a licking, that is where we got it. I do not think dad ever touched me in his life.

FH: Can you remember getting lickings from her?

VL: Yes. I [received] them a lot of times from her for doing things I should not do.

FH: Did she rule the roost?

VL: Dad ran the outside and she ran the house.

FH: Do you remember her parents?

VL: I know a little about her mother [Laura Josephine (Allen) Abbott]. When mother was a little girl, her father [Myron Abbott] and mother [divorced]. Her mother went to Arizona and married another man and then [her father] married my dad's sister [Lovisa (Leavitt) Abbott]. I was a [boy] when he died, but we were married when her mother came here and lived with [my] mother. She lived here until she died. She was a beautiful [and] very intelligent woman. She did not do much in the church after she left her husband. That is all I know about her. She came here and mother took care of her until she died.

FH: How many children did your mother and father have?

VL: [They had] eleven [children].

FH: Did your father have another wife?

VL: [He had] another wife with eleven children.

FH: How many children were there altogether?

VL: [He had] twenty-two [children].

FH: Would you be able to tell the names of your own mother's children?

VL: Orilla [Leavitt] was the oldest [child]. Orilla married a fellow by the name of Charles Arthur Hughes. They built [a] home and lived in Mesquite all their married life. They had thirteen or fourteen children. The last I knew of, they had about 275 grandchildren. I do not know how many great-grandchildren, but a big posterity.

My second sister was Josephine [(Leavitt)] Truman. She married George Truman from Enterprise [Washington County] Utah. They lived there their [entire] married life. I do not know how many children they had. They have had about eight, I think. She is still living in Enterprise [Washington County, Utah].

My next sister was named Elzina [Leavitt]. She married Elmer Robison from Kanosh [Millard County] Utah. They lived in Kanosh and had five children. Her husband died. About five or six years [later], she moved back down here and died of a heart attack.

My oldest brother was Thomas D. [Dudley] Leavitt, Jr. He married Rhoda Wittwer from here. They raised a family of five [children]. They are both dead now. When I started working for the [Nevada] Highway Department, he was working [there] and I went to work with him. I worked with him [for] about fifteen years.

My next brother was John Austin [Leavitt] and he married Lillie Wittwer, a sister to Rhoda. John died about eight or ten years ago. His wife is still living here.

My next brother was Lemuel S. [Sturtevant] Leavitt. He married Agnes Leavitt and they had seven children. One of them was killed in World War II. John's boy was killed in World War II, too.

The next is Myron Leavitt. He married Stella Colby from up around Logan [Cache County] Utah. They had three children. She died about fifteen or eighteen years ago.

The next one is Eldon [Leavitt]. He married Grace Cooper. They are now ordinance workers in the Salt Lake Temple. They have six children, I believe.

I was [the] next [child]. Then my sister, Glenna [Leavitt], married Marvin Waite. They live in Logandale, Nevada. They have eight children.

My youngest brother is Loren A. Leavitt. He lives here and has six or seven children.

FH: I am beginning to see now why the name Leavitt is so profusely spread throughout this area. There are so many of them. Your father had a tremendous posterity.

VL: Yes. We have a family gathering every year as near his birthday as we can. Last Saturday was the closest to his birthday. We have 250 to 300 people here every year for that [event].

FH: Are all of them strong people?

VL: The majority of them work in the church. I might say there have been six of [his children] serve the church on a [LDS] mission, five boys and one girl. We had two of them serve in World War I and then he had [many] grandsons in World War II at the same time. Two of them were killed.

FH: Have there been any faith-promoting experiences in your or your parent's lives?

VL: We had one experience in the Canadian [Cardston] Temple that has been a testimony to me. We were up there when President Wood was president of the Canadian Temple. He asked us in to do some sealings. He started to seal and then he stopped and he told us a story of truth. He said he was doing some sealings there one day. He had the family name of all their children. He said he started to seal and he sealed two of the children to the parents. When he came to the third, something stopped him.

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

VL: It said, "Do not leave me out." So he asked the parents, "Did you have any other children?" "No, this is all of them." He said four times he was stopped. Finally, he said, "You stop and think. Have you ever had any more children?" He said, "We had one that only lived about an hour, just long enough to give him a name." He said that was it. Then he told them what had happened. He said he had been stopped four times and could not go on. He said as soon as he sealed that one, he went right on through and never had anymore disturbances in any way, shape or form.

On that same trip in 1948, we were having so much rain. We left Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] and we were never out of floods and rain until we [arrived] in Alberta, Cardston [Canada]. We went up there for a Leavitt reunion. We [became] stuck in the middle of town. The mud was so deep we had to go get a tractor to pull us out. We went to the temple Friday morning and President Wood asked President Anderson, the president of the stake up there, to offer the opening prayer in their meeting. He said, "Brother Anderson, it is very seldom that we call on the Lord to stop moisture. We are usually asking for moisture. If we do not get this rain stopped we are not going to get any crops in. The church welfare depends on these 10,000 acres of wheat up here for flour for the church. We would like you to ask the Lord to stop the moisture so people can get their crops planted." I might say that morning on the radio the weather forecast [was for] rain the next three or four days.

Brother Anderson [stood] up and he prayed just like he was talking to you and me. He was talking to the Father like he was talking to you. We went through the temple and when we came out the sun was shining. The clouds were all gone. There was a little breeze. When we pulled out that Monday morning it had dried up so the farmers had started to do their farming again.

Then another experience we had here in our own ward. It was in the summer and it was hot. Everything was drying up. The [Virgin] River was about to go dry. Our bishop asked my uncle, Jim Abbott, to offer the opening prayer in Priesthood and to petition the Lord for moisture. He [stood] up [and] we [boys] laughed at him. There was not a cloud in the sky anywhere and the sun was shining as bright as it could shine in August. He said, "Now Father, we need moisture. We want rain. We do not want any gulley washer. We just want a good steady soaker. We do not want any gulley washers. They do not do us any good. All they do is fill our ditches up and cause us more work. We just want a good soaker." We [boys] walked out of Priesthood and laughed. "You will get her."

Before Sacrament meeting at two o'clock it had clouded up and started to rain. It rained all that afternoon and all that night, a good steady rain. In August, or any other time, all you get is a thunderstorm and a washout. But it did come. I heard it and I saw it.

FH: There is very great power in the prayer of faith.

VL: The prayer of the Priesthood.

FH: What did you do for fun when you were growing up?

VL: That is the part I did not want to have to tell because I [was] in trouble a lot of times. In those days, we never thought anything of going out and stealing a chicken and having a little chicken supper or stealing a watermelon. But you never heard of anybody ever breaking anything up or destroying property of any kind. They would not do that. Like the old men would say, "I planted one row for me and two for the boys."

FH: Did the farmers [think] this was a natural thing?

VL: They [thought] if you did not get it it was your own fault. Their [boys] would go along with you and you would go along with them. I do not remember ever being with a crowd when there was any property damage in any way, shape or form.

I [was] arrested once for stealing a watermelon, I and two other [boys]. It cost us \$15.00 apiece. We could not pay the cash so we had to work it out. They put us over at Mesquite to work it out for \$3.00 a day. We worked five days until we were through and the sheriff said, "You are not done. You have only put in half your time. You only worked half the time so you have to work the other [time]."

So that taught me a lesson. He said, “You boys only worked half the time. You can put in three more days now to make up the time you killed [wasted].”

FH: If we had a little more of that maybe there would not be so much devilment. Did you ever go to dances?

VL: That was about all the recreation we had — dances and parties. Along [about] Christmastime they always danced every night from Christmas until after New Year’s. The streets were all dirt streets. The cows would trail around there. It would rain and the cows were trailing in. We would take our shoes off and go to the dance. We would get to the dance, wash our feet and put our shoes on, go in and dance, then we would take our shoes off and go home.

FH: [Laughter] What kind of music did you dance to?

VL: We had good music, not this junk they have now-a-days. We had good music. We had a music teacher in school and always had a good orchestra. Uncle Jim played for a lot of our dances. It was all according to what kind of music we wanted. We would go ask him if he would play at the dance and [he would say], “Well now, what kind of music do you want? Do you want \$2.50 music, \$5.00 music or \$7.50 music?” We could take a choice. That is the way he measured it. It was what we wanted — \$2.50 was a long wait between dances, \$5.00 was medium and \$7.50 he never stopped. It was all according to what kind of music we wanted — that was the kind we bought. My wife’s Uncle Ted played the accordion. We danced by it a lot. He would sit there asleep, but he could sure make that old boy [accordion] talk.

FH: Was this your community life?

VL: That was our community life.

FH: What kind of parties did you have?

VL: [Our parties were] mostly molasses candy [pulls] and parched corn. We would get together and play games and sing. We did more singing than anything. The whole bunch would get around the piano and sing.

FH: Did you make your own recreation in the community?

VL: We made our own recreation. It was usually clean recreation.

FH: Did you like to ride horses?

VL: I did a lot of riding. I never was a cowboy but I did a lot of chasing cattle.

FH: Did you enter into sports activities in school?

VL: Yes. I played basketball, baseball and track. That is about all we had. We did not have football in those days.

FH: Did you excel in any of these sports?

VL: I always played on the main team.

FH: [Did] you enjoy sports? Was it a big part of your life?

VL: It still is.

FH: Have you enjoyed music in your life?

VL: I have enjoyed it, but I have never been musically inclined.

FH: Do you like the music that is popular now-a-days?

VL: No, I like music.

FH: What do you remember about your courtship and your marriage?

VL: I know I had a hard battle to get her [Erma Leavitt]. She had two boys lined up ahead of me and I had to break in.

FH: How long before you knew she was the right one?

VL: I knew that a couple of weeks after I first saw her. She was the one I was going to have if I could catch her, but I was having a hard race. I had to put on a campaign. She was too popular for me.

EL: [Inaudible]

FH: It seems that you won in this race.

VL: I won, but I was about four years doing it.

FH: Where did you go to be married?

VL: [We were married in] the St. George Temple [on November 20, 1924].

FH: Can you tell anything about [the] trip?

VL: I can remember it was a long trip [of] fifty miles. We had to go up and stay overnight to be married the next day and then stay there that night to get home the next day.

EL: [Inaudible]

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

VL: It was in the fall of the year and was raining on our way up. All the roads were dirt roads and most of them [were] clay. I had an old Model-T Ford which is all there was in those days. It was practically a new Ford, but it was a Model-T. It took us about five hours to drive those fifty miles. That is the kind of roads they had [at that time].

FH: Would people think [those roads] were [bad] now-a-days?

VL: Yes, they would. If you cannot make it in an hour now-a-days there is something wrong. From the end of the [Southern Paiute Indian] Reservation on over to Santa Clara [Washington County, Utah] we were off the road about as much as we were on. The road was a rounded road and the clay would slip this way and slip that way. We [arrived] there and [were] married, stayed the next day and came home.

FH: Did it mean quite a bit to you to [be] married in the temple?

VL: Yes. It meant more to my wife than it did to me. She had already been to the temple and had her endowments. She and her sister went up and [received] theirs when they were in high school. She knew what she was going after and I was just going to get her. That is what I was going after.

FH: [Did] you know then what you were going after?

VL: I knew what I was going after.

FH: Where did you make your home after you were married?

VL: We have lived right here ever since our marriage. [We] came home and I went to farming. We were married in November and the next July I went to work for the [Nevada] Highway Department. I worked for the highway department until two years ago [1967]. I worked ten years and then I was off ten years. Then I went back and worked twenty-one years.

FH: What did you do in those intervening ten years?

VL: I farmed and dairied. I hauled milk to Las Vegas [Nevada].

FH: Which part of your life have you enjoyed the most?

VL: What do you mean?

FH: Which kind of work did you enjoy?

VL: I enjoyed the highway work more.

FH: What kind of work did you do on the highway?

VL: I was foreman for the maintenance in this part of the state. Being [the] foreman, I had to run all the heavy equipment — the loaders, the tractors and the trucks.

FH: Has [road] maintenance changed quite a bit over the years you have been [doing] it?

VL: Yes. When I first went on there, everything was done with [a] pick and [a] shovel. When I [was] done, everything was done with machinery. [There] was a big difference, about a third of the work [that] it used to be.

FH: [Did] you have a lot more roads to maintain?

VL: [We had] a lot more roads to maintain and [received] a lot better wages.

FH: Name your children and tell about them.

VL: Bert Junior [Leavitt] was the oldest [child]. When he was a senior in high school he took [the] V-12 Navy training [test]. There were only two in the state of Nevada [who] passed the examination and he was one of them. He spent four years in the [United States] Navy. Then he married a girl from Berkeley, California and they lived out there for about fourteen or fifteen years. He [started] selling business equipment, adding machines and [machines] like that.

FH: What is his wife's name?

VL: [Her name is] Joyce Hopkins. While he was there, he was elected two different years [as] president of the San Francisco [California] Area Businessmen Association. He sold out his business there and came to Las Vegas and went in the insurance business with my second boy. He is still in the insurance business in Las Vegas, Los Angeles [California], San Diego [California and] Victorville [California].

My second boy graduated from college and taught school one year. He decided he did not want to teach school so he went into the insurance business. He has been in the insurance business ever since. He represented [Iron County, Utah] in the House of Representatives for two years. He has been a [Utah] State Senator for [four] years.

FH: Where is his home?

VL: [He lives in] Cedar City [Iron County, Utah]. His name is Dixie Leavitt.

FH: Did he marry?

VL: He married Anne Okerland from Loa, Wayne County, Utah. They have five sons. [My] other boy, Bert, has three boys and three girls. Dixie has five sons. He is in the insurance business now in a big way. He has offices in Salt Lake [City], Orem [Utah County, Utah], Cedar City, St. George, Phoenix [Arizona], Mesa [Arizona], Los Angeles, Victorville, San Diego, Portland [Oregon] beside the [offices in] Boulder City [Nevada and] Las Vegas. He has made quite a name for himself.

Our daughter is the third one. She has three children. She graduated from the University of Nevada [Reno, Nevada]. She is living in Ogden [Weber County] Utah. Her name is Rhea [Ann (Leavitt)] Lindsay. She married Grant Lindsay. They have two sons and a daughter. He is [an] accountant for that big airplane operation, Thiokol, in Brigham City [Box Elder County] Utah.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

VL: He does the bid estimates on their jobs. Our [third] boy [Tommy Russell Leavitt] is in the insurance business. He graduated from Southern Utah [State] College. He is in the insurance business in St. George. He married Mary Lynn Frehner of Mesquite.

Our youngest boy [Vincent Leon] is teaching school in Mesquite. He married Katherine Abbott of Mesquite. He lives here in Bunkerville.

FH: What are the names of these last two boys?

VL: Tommy Russell and Vincent Leon [Leavitt]

FH: Are both of them married?

VL: Both of them are married. Tommy has five children. One died [and] four are living. "Vinnie" has three and one coming. "Vinnie" taught school for the church two years down in Tonga before he came here to teach. I did not say that Bert graduated from [the University of San Francisco, California]. So all five of the children have a college education.

FH: This [will] help them remarkably to get along.

VL: I did not want them to have to use a pick and shovel like their dad did.

FH: Do you feel your children are a credit to you?

VL: Yes, I do. I am satisfied with the way they are living and the way they are doing.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

FH: What have you done since you were married?

VL: In a civic way, I have been on the town [Bunkerville] board for the last twelve or fifteen years [and] have been chairman of the town board for the last ten years. That takes care of all the worries of the town. The chairman of the town board is about the same as a mayor of a city, but we do not have the authority a mayor does. We have to work under the [Clark] County Commissioners. Anything we [do] for the county has to go through the town board. I have been head of the culinary water [department] ever since it was put in in 1952.

FH: Where do you get your culinary water?

VL: We have it coming from the mountains, some springs and we have three wells.

FH: Do you have good water here?

VL: We have good water.

FH: That is such an important thing in this country [area].

VL: We did not have any good water until we drilled wells and put in pipelines. I might say that we have done practically all of [that] in the last ten, fifteen years. I tried to be active in church. I never tried to hold a teaching job. I never did teach a class — only in Mutual. I was in the bishopric for five years as second counselor. Then I was called as a Bishop for ten years. In those ten years we built our chapel, the first chapel that [was] ever built here. When I was released from that, I was called in to the High Council and the stake was reorganized. I was in the High Council for twelve years.

FH: What is your stake here?

VL: [We are in the] Moapa Stake. [When] I was released from that, I was put in as president of the High Priest Quorum. I was there until the church made the change and made the stake president the president of the [High] Priests Quorum. That released me from there. The last year and a half we have been ordinance workers in the St. George Temple.

FH: Have you been active in [the] MIA?

VL: Yes. I was in [the Boy] Scouts [of America] and was the Mutual president for two years.

FH: What did you do in scouting and Mutual?

VL: Our scouting activity was not too much. It was about like all these small towns. It was keeping the boys active, that is all. While I was assistant scoutmaster, I had one boy that made Lifesaver Scout. He saved a little girl's life. She fell in the ditch. That was my wife's brother [Aschel Leavitt]. He brought her back to life. I was assistant scoutmaster then. The main thing was to keep the boys off the street.

EL: [Inaudible]

VL: My oldest boy was the first Eagle Scout they ever had here. My third boy and two others [received] the first Duty to God awards that were ever given.

FH: During these years have you had some nice trips with your wife?

VL: Yes, we have had some good trips. We went down to the dedication of the Los Angeles Temple. We have been to [the] Cardston Temple. We went back to the World's Fair with a group from Southern Utah. [It was] a thirty-day trip. We really enjoyed it. We [were] in twenty-seven states. We went down to the South Sea Islands. We went to Hawaii and down through Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and back home. We stayed down there a month. We were gone six weeks altogether. Last summer we went to Montreal [Canada], Quebec [Canada], New York and Washington D. C. We have made several trips out [of here and] we plan on making more.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

VL: When we went back to Quebec, Montreal and through there, our three boys [who] are in the insurance business were going back to a convention. They made arrangements for eight couples. Only seven went so they took us along and it did not cost us anything. We had a free trip. When we [went] back there, the fellow I was taking the place of had the same name as the president of the company so they thought I was a big mucky-muck! They put my wife and me in the castle in the queen's suite. Our boys came up and said, "Now listen, our room is not anywhere near this good." But we really had a good trip. Everything was free — all but going to New York. We had to pay [for] that, but to go out and back and while we were there it was free. We really had a nice trip.

When we went down to the Los Angeles Temple, we took my cousin with us and our youngest boy. My wife and I had our tickets. You had to have a ticket to get in and they did not have one. So when we [were] down [at] the gate they were locked out. They could not get in. They would not let them go in on the lawn and listen to the dedication. I went in and luck would have it — one of our hometown men, Noble Waite, was president of the South Los Angeles Stake. Two of his brothers were bishops and they were all ushers. I went up to the business room to check in my tickets and one of the Waite boys said, "Let me see your tickets." I showed him. He said, "Those are for down in the basement. You will have to watch it on television. You might as well [have] been home."

I said, "I need two more tickets. My boy [Vincent] and Washington [Leavitt] are out there and they would like to get in. They cannot get in." He said, "Wait a minute. I will find a stake president and I will get you some tickets." So we got two tickets and [as] luck would have it, they sat right up on the eighth or ninth row in the chapel right up where they could see everything and we were still down in the basement. They laughed at us. Finally, we ran onto President Noble Waite and he said, "Let me see your tickets. I will get you better tickets than that." So he [gave] us tickets and we were up clear back at the back. It looked like 300 feet from the rostrum.

[END OF RECORDING TWO.]

VL: We still were glad to get up there. We were up in the main building anyway. The other two sat up there in front and waved at us and had all kinds of fun with us. The other Waite boy that was down there from here was an usher. He saw us there and a couple had just left. They [received] a [telephone] call and could not stay so he went this way [nodded] and I said, "Yes." He put us right on the front row in the middle of the aisle where we were only about eight feet from President [David O.] McKay while he was giving the dedicatory prayer. We were the first ones he shook hands with when he came off the rostrum. [Laughter] So that is [what it is like to] know people.

FH: It is not always what you know, but who you know. [Laughter]

VL: I will tell you an experience about Noble. When we were [boys], the big ditch of the water canal ran right behind the little chapel. When the Relief Society would sell cakes or pies we would slip in and steal a pie once in awhile. We were scared to take the plate back so we would sink it in the ditch. Sunday morning you would see all the women up there hunting their plates the [boys] had thrown in the ditch.

About fifteen years ago I was up at conference and happened to be sitting by a bishop from Los Angeles. We [were] talking and I told him I knew President Waite. He said, "He is our president and he is a fine man." I said, "Yes, he is a good man, but he was a mean little cuss when he was a [boy]." "What do you mean?" So I told him about [how] we would [take the cakes]. When we [were] done we would all holler, "Sink the plates," and get the cake eaten, break and run. [Inaudible]

EL: [Inaudible]

VL: He said, "We are going to have a stake Aaronic Priesthood banquet next Saturday night and Noble is going to be our speaker." He was the emcee. I said, "When you call on Noble Waite to get up and talk, ask him one question when he gets up. Just ask him what is meant by 'sink the plates, boys, sink the plates.'" He said why? I said, "Just tell him that. He will tell you. Do not let him kick you sideways,

though. Make him tell you.” So he did. When they [were] down there they called him up to talk and he [stood] up there and started to talk. He said, “Now there is one question I was told to ask you. I want to know what this story is on ‘sink the plates, boys, sink the plates.’”

The next conference I ran on to him. He hunted me up at conference. He said, “Boy, his eyes went open and his mouth went open.” He said, “Who has been talking to you?” [Laughter] Then I told him the whole story. That was just the way we [boys] were — we were in mischief all the time. It was not one of us, it was all of us. We were all together.

FH: Those were the good old days.

VL: Those were the good old days.

EL: [Inaudible]

VL: They got a big kick out of it.

FH: Nobody [was] upset by it.

VL: No.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

FH: In this part of the area water means a great deal. Sometimes it is treacherous and sometimes it is lacking. Have you had experiences with that?

VL: Yes. For about fifteen years that is about all I did. I was supposed to be farming, but I was working the water ditch keeping the water in the ditch. We had to haul brush and rock to make our dam. We would just get it in and the flood would come down and take it out. Then we would have to build it again. One time we worked six weeks every day, Sundays and all, to get the water in because the crops were all drying up. I hauled mesquite brush. If anybody ever hauled mesquite brush they know what it means. There are thorns on it about an inch long sticking into you. That is the way we had of keeping our water in. A lot of times we would just get our water in and the flood would come down and wash it and fill it full of gravel rock in July and August. We would have to get in and shovel that out with a number two shovel. It was a hard life.

FH: There is not anything easy about that kind of thing.

VL: Now they have the permanent dams in. They have cement ditches overshot so the floods do not fill them up. Once in awhile — they just had one a while back. The water just [came] back in yesterday, but it is very seldom.

FH: They have learned to control it so much better.

VL: They have learned to control it and the [United States] Government has helped. It is quite a bit different than it used to be.

FH: You are living here in Bunkerville and you have a lovely, comfortable place. Your wife here today just came back from the hospital. Tell about your wife and what brings you to this point.

VL: My wife has been a very good mother and a very good wife. She could not be better. I think I [have] the best wife and one of the best mothers in the country [area]. She is an extra good cook [and] a good housekeeper. She has talent, music or about anything you want. She has always had a testimony of the gospel. That is the main thing. She has trained that in her home and has been the backbone as far as church is concerned in our home. She will say she has not, but she has.

EL: [Inaudible]

VL: She has always had good health until just the last couple of years. She has been having a little trouble and the last month she has had an operation and had part of her stomach taken out. She just [came] back from Salt Lake [City] from that [operation] and I had to take her back to the [Dixie Pioneer Memorial] Hospital in St. George. She was there for a week with kidney problems. It looks like we are going to have to go back to Salt Lake [City] and have them operate on [her again]. We were unfortunate enough that we did not have any insurance at the time. We thought we did, but we did not. We thought she was on Medicare. They have been taking it out on us and told us she was on Medicare, but when we turned in the bill to the hospital they said she was not old enough so she could not have Medicare. We dropped our insurance because we were on Medicare. So it is going to cost us quite a bit with what little savings we have to pay these doctor bills, but we will make it.

FH: Sometimes it is rough when you get into that sort of thing. I need to ask you this question: have you learned anything from life?

VL: Yes, I have learned several things from life. First, I learned that honesty always pays. Another thing I have learned is it always pays to give a full day's work for a full day's pay. It will pay off. One of the things I have always tried to do is be able to get along with my neighbors, my brothers and sisters. I have never had any trouble with anybody that I know of. I do not know if I have an enemy on earth. I know that I do not feel that way towards anybody. I know if a man wants to have a good full life, he has to work in the church because that is the backbone of this life.

I have a strong testimony of the gospel. I know it is true and I know President McKay is a prophet of the Lord. I know the Lord will hear and answer prayers if we pray to Him earnestly and sincerely. He has done it. I have had the privilege of

seeing the blind made to see through prayer and the sick healed. So I have a testimony of the power of the Priesthood and the power of prayer. [Emotional]

FH: Would you like to give specific counsel to your children and descendants?

VL: Nothing; only to be honest in their dealings, do their duties to the church and to get along [with] members of the family. If they will do those things, they [will not] have much to worry about.

[END OF RECORDING THREE. END OF INTERVIEW.]