

Interview with Ernie Weber

Intro: Okay, we're talking to Ernie Weber. Ernie was a staff member with the Colorado River Board for a number of years. We're at the Crescenta Valley Water District where Ernie serves as a member of the Board of Directors. This is January, 23rd, 2007. So Ernie, thank you very much for agreeing to do one of the oral histories for the Colorado River Board. We were talking before, we started the tape so let's just get right into it with respect to how you wound up working for the Colorado River Board and when that was. I understand that you had started with the DWR, the Department of Water Resources. So how did all that unfold -- that you wound up at the Colorado River Board?

A: Well, I started with the Department of Water Resources; worked on the State Water Project and then the relationships and some of the issues coming up with the Colorado River Board. They started asking me questions and whether I was interested in looking at some of those things. To be honest, lay-offs were coming with the State, with the Department of Water Resources, as things slowed down. So there was an opportunity to join the Colorado River Board and the Colorado River Board got active and we were looking at Colorado River issues.

Q: What kind of work did you do for the Department of Water Resources before you joined the staff of the Board?

A: Well, I started out just looking at some of the facilities in their early development, just geological aspects. Then I got more involved in the groundwater side of the department's activities, the Department of Water Resources activities in the Colorado groundwater basin issues; looking at developing and utilizing imported water in conjunction with groundwater supplies.

Q: Did you work then on the California State Water Project?

A: Yes, yes, in fact I did. The first thing I did with DWR was I walked the state aqueduct alignment from the Delta all the way down to Southern California over a period of time.

Q: You walked for that distance before the aqueduct before was built?

A: Long before the aqueduct was...it was during the time the development was going on and so part of it was to look at the geologic conditions and the ground conditions. So we just hoofed that out.

Q: We probably should establish that you are a geologist by training. Is that correct?

A: Right, yes by formal training. I am a geologist.

Q: Was your job with the Department of Water Resources your first professional job?

A: Yes, it was the first professional job. I had other activities. I had grad school for a while and decided I needed to . . . got married and needed to support my wife and myself. So that's when I went to work. DWR was dropping off people at that point, they were cutting back and I had an opportunity to join the Colorado River Board.

Q: So what year would that have been, that you joined the Board approximately?

A: Boy, I'm really guessing.

Q: Who was the Chief Engineer or the Chief Executive Officer at the Board when you joined the Board? It was certainly before Myron Hulbert.

A: Oh yes, it was whoever preceded Myron.

Q: What kinds of things was the Board involved in when you joined the Colorado River Board? What kinds of things were they doing?

A: Well, I think we're just looking at water . . . how much yield to the river was there? What was the potential use for putting out water to beneficial use into Southern California?

Q: Okay, obviously, Metropolitan's Aqueduct had been built.

A: That's right.

Q: Coachella was taking their water. Imperial Irrigation District was taking theirs and PVID, which has the original right, was taking theirs. Were there any water supply issues at that time with respect to the six agencies?

A: I think there were, but I didn't get involved in them. I just looked at it . . . was off from the side so I remember there were discussions about who should be . . . whether one agency should be getting another, areas were being developed and needed water supplies. But I don't remember any of the details because I wasn't intimately involved. I just saw it from the sidelines, sort to speak.

Q: In what fashion did you use your geology background with respect to the activities of the Board? Were you looking at groundwater basins?

A: We were looking at groundwater yield. We were looking at where we could pump groundwater, where we could recharge some areas.

Q: Okay, but the Colorado Water River Board never did that.

A: No, no, that was all done . . . we didn't do that as the Colorado Water River Board. The Colorado Water River Board was dealing with the other agencies that had rights into the Colorado, like Coachella and Palo Verde. All of those people had some rights to the Colorado River, as I recall.

Q: Would it be fair then to say that you were doing technical work on behalf of the members of the Board?

A: That's correct.

Q: Does any particular groundwater basin come to your mind in terms of studying it and being concerned about it? While you're thinking about that, I'll give you one example and maybe you can build off of that. Only a few years ago Metropolitan started an experimental program out at Hayfield, the Hines Pumping at Chirarco Summit and they put some water in the ground with the hopes of extracting it later on and it turned out not to be a useful project. Were there projects like that, that you were looking at?

A: Gee, I don't recall. They were very similar to that. We were looking at areas . . . I can remember down in the Coachella Valley. They were looking at water supplies and utilizing it in various parts of the area and they were, as I recall, they were drawing on Colorado River water that was being put to use in some of those areas. So Colorado River water was being served in numerous areas and the desert areas out in that area.

Q: I'm not going to try and pin you down on an exact date.

A: No, that's alright.

Q: Are we talking early 60's, mid 60's? Keeping in mind, if you need to work back think about the State Water Project which began delivering water to Southern California in 1972.

A: It would have been in about that era, I think.

Q: That era being the late 60's?

A: Yes, late 60's to early 70's, somewhere in there.

Q I think you are aware that Coachella Valley Water District is a contractor to the State Water Project.

A: Yes, I knew that.

Q: But they do not have a connection to the State Water Project. They are not physically connected and so they exchange water with Metropolitan. In the process of doing that, they turn water out at Whitewater. They allow it to percolate into the groundwater basin. Were you involved in any of the studies that lead to that agreement?

A: Just peripherally. I did not get involved in any of the agreements. I just took it from a technical interest point of view.

Q: Well, let's talk about that for a minute, from a technical standpoint, because that had never been done before.

A: No, that's true.

Q: I mean there was certainly some natural run-off that would come down the Whitewater from time to time.

A: But what was happening was a lot of that water that was being released was percolating into the underground and then groundwater flow was moving down to the low end of Coachella Valley.

Q: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

A: Well, if you can get it down into the ground and it can move from Area A to Area B without losing a lot to evaporation you can move water without the loss you would get by surface flow down there. So if you can get it into the ground and you can get it to move as groundwater flow, the loss to surface evaporation is cut back.

Q: Did the other agencies, and I'm going back now to the 1969, 1970 era -- most of the agencies have fairly large staffs now, they've got engineers everywhere, did they not have those kinds of people?

A: They had a few, but usually the general manager often times was an engineer or a water expert and that's the kind of people I recall working with more than having somebody like CDM (engineering consulting firm) or somebody with a big engineering company that came down. A lot of it was done by local people. The local engineers and water people in Coachella, for example, I remember them coming out and I'd go out with them. They'd say, well what do you think about this or what do you think about that, sort of thing. That was sort of my role.

Q: I'm going to guess that you were one of the few geologists around, at least in the water business.

A: Yes, I don't think there were . . . most of the geologists in my era weren't involved in groundwater. They were all working on the State Water Project. That was my first job with the state; was to walk the state aqueduct alignment from the delta all the way down to Southern California and just look at the geological conditions.

Q: You must have crossed the San Andreas Fault a few times.

A: Yes, I'm sure I did, but I wasn't sure where it was (laughing) to be honest with you. I was young and stupid then. I mean at that time I was really in a learning phase. I had just graduated from college. You don't learn a lot of that.

Q: Well, let's talk about geology for just a few minutes. It's a fact that California, Southern California specifically, and Northern California to a lesser degree, contains earthquake faults all over the place, literally thousands of them.

A: Oh yes. That's right.

Q: So from a geologist's standpoint, given the Colorado River Aqueduct that Metropolitan owns, given the All American Canal and given the Coachella Canal, does the prospect of an earthquake interrupting any of those systems concern you as a geologist?

A: Not really. I think that the engineering that has gone into looking at those things - -- they recognize that there are going to be problems, but not all of the canals that deliver water are concrete lined, that are going to rupture. There are a lot of earthen lined canals, particularly when you get down to the low end of Coachella Valley. So I think they are a little less susceptible than if you were to break off a pipeline or you have the State Water Project where it's all contained in a concrete lining and if that whole thing lets go that puts it out of business for a long time where the earthen canals can sort of stand up. They can take a little more motion.

Q: Were you involved . . . were there any studies done by the Board, while you were on the Board with respect to earthquake vulnerability, either on the State Water Project or on the Colorado?

A: Not that I was involved in or even recall at this time.

Q: Let's assume you started with the Colorado River Board in the late 60's, I appreciate there is some overlap there with the Department of Water Resources. How long were you with the Colorado River Board then? When did you retire?

A: I can't remember when it was that I retired and then when I officially retired. I would do some consulting, if you will, to some of those local water districts if they wanted assistance.

Q: When you say local water district do you mean?

A: Well, like Coachella.

Q: Okay and Imperial?

A: Yes, those districts were the people I really dealt with. I didn't deal much at all with Metropolitan as such. They didn't have a role down there in that part of the area as I recall. I mean they were supplying water but they didn't have an integral hand in what happen with the local water districts sometimes.

Q: Well, since you spent some time down there and I will define "there" as Coachella and the Imperial County area. What can you tell us about the geology of that area? I mean it's kind of a valley. Don't know where that came from. You've got the Salton Sea below sea level. Here today in 2007, we're still trying to figure out how to solve the Salton Sea issues. You've got a lot of farm run-off that comes to the Salton Sea. My question to you is as a geologist, describe for us if you would some of the more interesting features that you had to deal with when you were working with these agencies, primarily out in the desert.

A: Well, I think to look at what was happening with applied water, water that was supplied sometimes in excessive demand and where that water went and whether it re-percolated or whether some of it flowed surface wise down to the next user. As you keep going further down into the valley and it gets closer to the Salton Sea, or not the Salton Sea, the border then you see all of those wet ones and then you've got the whole issues with the water moving across the border into Mexico. Those agricultural areas that are closest to the border of course end up with the water as it comes off. Now if you've got a lot of pollutants or saltiness that are picked up then the quality of that the water is not as good and it takes maybe more water application to get a good crop out, without some damage. I don't know enough about agriculture to talk about it.

Q: How about, one of -- let me frame the question this way: As you know, one of the issues right now is the lining of the All American Canal because it currently is earthen and it leaks. Mexico's position, as of this date, is that they have rights to that water because it becomes groundwater when it leaks from the canal. What are your thoughts again as a geologist and someone who knows that area, what are your thoughts about the permeability of the soil in that area and is that happening?

A: Oh, I think the soil is not as permeable as alluvial fan obviously because it is a lot of clay and finer grain material, but there is groundwater motion that moves down- gradient, down toward the border, towards the gulf. So any additional pumping as you develop more and more agriculture, urbanization or whatever it is, they're relying primarily on groundwater, except, unless whatever they pull off of Metropolitan's aqueduct. So any additional development you get as you go further south the less flow that's going to go down into the Gulf and that's what Mexico is complaining about. Those wetlands are, I don't know, drying up, but they don't have the ability and they rely on some of that water or they have relied in the past as I understand it.

Q: I met you probably in 1980 when you were with the Board and I was with Metropolitan. I believe Myron Holburt was the Chief Executive Officer of the Board at that time, the Colorado River Board. Myron was followed by Vern Valentine. Then he was followed by Dennis Underwood. Is that correct?

A: That's the last person I remember. I don't know who is there now.

Q: But you worked for Dennis?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, well that's good. That establishes a time frame for us there, because as you know Dennis left to become Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. Were you still there with the Board when Dennis left?

A: Yes, I was still there but just about ready to retire.

Q: So you and Dennis left about the same time, which would have been in the late 1990's probably 1997.

A: Somewhere in there, yes.

Q: Let's talk for a minute about the three people that you worked for at the Board. That would be Myron, Vern and Dennis.

A: Right.

Q: Let's start with Myron, not personalities, the kind of projects that you guys were working on during Myron's tenure and what your involvement was in any of those projects. Can you think of any major events or initiatives or projects that Myron got rolling that were important to Colorado River users in California or negotiations for that matter?

A: It seems to me there was some controversy with Coachella at one point. I don't, again . . . I'm sorry I'm not a good historian for you. There were various projects. There were some small canals that were lined. Coachella had quite an established office and a lot of staff that worked on helping to distribute the water to the various components of their system, because they had a distribution system, as I recall.

Q: Right.

A: Then that fed down to Imperial who had their distribution system. At the end, what was left over got washed down to Mexico. Of course the objective, as I recall, you let as little go into the gulf. You didn't want to waste it into the gulf if at all possible.

Q: Okay and as you know very little water actually winds up in the Gulf of California.

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: When you started working for the Board I believe you were located downtown in the Regan State Office Building, the Ronald Regan State Office Building.

A: Yes, wherever it was, it was downtown.

Q: So you were still with the Board when they moved into their newer offices in Glendale, California?

A: That's right we moved to Glendale.

Q: Which is where they are today.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about any changes that might have occurred when Myron retired and Vern Valentine became the head of the Board. Was there any new direction?

A: I don't recall any major direction. They were totally different individuals. So the way you sat down with them whether you . . . Vern was, Valentine was somebody that was . . . well in the first place, I used to ride back and forth to work with him. So you got into a lot of discussions that went on. Myron had a very strong opinion what he wanted, how he wanted things to go. You sort of followed the way he wanted to do that, which I found perfectly satisfactory to me. I mean, I was happy. I was still a young kid on the block. So I was learning and everything. I could gain knowledge of the river system by working with him and dealing with him. Vern had a little closer contact, because we used to carpool together and so there was a lot more discussion going on in the carpool or

wherever we were because we were virtually neighbors that lived a couple of blocks away.

Q: What kind of things interested Vern? I mean in the water business, in respect to the Board where did he seem to be headed?

A: Boy, that's hard to say. I'm not sure if I know where he was headed.

Q: I mean do you have a sense of what his priorities were?

A: Well, I think his priorities were . . . he was always one in my experiences with him in the years I worked for him. He was always trying to make sure everybody got treated equally and that everything worked out all right. He seemed to be able to develop in his presentation a way of dealing with the people, everybody being satisfied that he is giving everybody fair treatment.

Q: Okay, so he was looking after his staff and the members. The way you are describing him, it sounds like he was somewhat of a compromiser, which is not a bad word.

A: No, but I think yes, I think he was. I never had the feeling that he was going to sit down and stomp his foot and say "this is the way it's going to be". He was always trying to get everybody together and get a compromised position where he could get satisfaction or hopefully satisfaction between all of the members or the parties involved rather than get into a consultational mode.

Q: Let's step back then if you would. What do you think Myron's focus or priorities were? Myron Holburt.

A: Yes, he was a little earlier in time and I think he had his goal. He wanted to get this thing rolling and get it implemented.

Q: Now when you say "this thing"?

A: Well, getting the water distributed down and shared equally or get distribution down to where it needed to be. To make sure that Coachella got its share at the water it needed. The other water districts down there when they needed water would try to be a compromise when everybody got together because those water districts were somewhat combative at times. They weren't so combative as time went along as they got the water in and they got it distributed. I think there was a lot more harmony, but that was just observation from seeing the people down there.

Q: Well, moving forward from Vern that would be Dennis Underwood, how would you characterize his focus and priorities?

A: I think Dennis was more of a . . . I would look at him as more of a leader. I mean his was running the show. He said "well this is what we are going to do". You could argue with him, you know, but he was very decisive in what he wanted to do and I think he was very successful at doing that.

Q: Well, you had known Dennis for a number of years. He was on staff there.

A: Oh yes, sure and I had no problems with him. He didn't upset me at all. He was fine. I liked him personally. I thought he handled all the staff very well, some of them got upset but you know.

Q: I'm going to guess that you found it necessary to branch off from strict geology while you were working for the Board. Again, I'm guessing, so if I'm wrong, but I'm going to assume that you did things that were not necessarily geology oriented.

A: Oh yes, right. I looked at water quality. I tried to talk to the people who were using the water. How much they had to apply. Usually the geologists don't do that, the engineers do that. I found out a very interesting part of the activity and so I tended to try and work with the people. It was a learning experience for me. Then I felt that I could say "well you know if you apply your water at this time instead of the morning hours or the high heat of the day you could do things".

Q: Are we talking about agricultural users here?

A: Yes, now we're down in the Imperial and Coachella Valley.

Q: Would it be fair then to suggest when you were early with the Board that water may not have been used efficiently?

A: Yes, I think probably I felt that way, whether rightly or wrongly. I didn't feel that it was always the most efficient way to do things. They let water run down the canal, if it spilled over, it spilled over.

Q: Did you see a change over time while you were at the Board?

A: Yes, I think (all the agencies) became more efficient (in their) use of the water. A reduction in losses and all seemed to improve in my opinion as time went on. They became more and more efficient in putting that water to beneficial use. Better timing of crop applications instead of those guys that came out and turned the water on in the morning and came back at five that night, if they were lucky, or if they had something else to do come back the next morning. So you had a lot of water that was not being put ultimately to the beneficial use it could have been. Maybe it kept some of the native plants green but it didn't provide what it was intended for -- agricultural.

Q: Did you have occasion to travel with any of the directors to Sacramento or D.C.? I mean certainly there were meetings with state elected officials.

A: I would go occasionally to Sacramento. I never went to the East, to Washington.

Q: What kinds of things would you have the need to go to Sacramento for? Are we talking about meetings with DWR or are we talking about meetings with elected officials? What kinds of issues were there?

A: I don't know, some of the issues I wasn't sure why. For example, Myron would say, "Why don't you come along with us". Well, it was really a listening and observing opportunity for me to find out what all the issues were and then if somebody would complain about it at least I could have some intelligent answer if I thought there was one I could give. At that time, we were expecting shortly so I didn't really go away too long.

Q: Oh, you were expecting children.

A: Yes, so I didn't want to go away for long period of time. But I enjoyed going down to Coachella all the time. I went down quite frequently. I'd go down and spend some time and go out in the field with their staff.

Q: After you left the Colorado River Board, retired, you stayed in the area; obviously, you're here in La Crescenta. You did not get out of the water business did you?

A: No (laughing). I didn't know what else to do. No, I enjoyed it. Someone asked me if I was interested in considering running for a local water district. So I thought about it. My wife wasn't too happy with me (laughing). I really enjoy participating in the activities. I now volunteer at Descanso Gardens, actually what I do is ride shotgun on a train that runs through there. I have a lot of interesting time talking to the horticulturists who work in there, how they use the water and so forth. I just can't get out of the water interests, not that I do anything maybe productive, maybe I do if I say something to those guys that work at the garden.

Q: We should explain for the purposes of the tape that Descanso Gardens is a botanical garden located in the La Canada area, open to the public. I'm curious since you volunteer there, have you ever looked into their water supply? Do you know where they get their water?

A: Oh yes, it comes from the springs up in the mountains. I know all about the water supply,

Q: Why don't you talk about that for just one moment because I think people don't, they don't get it.

A: Yes, people, because people say . . . I say well, if you look up there on the mountain that's where the springs are and they belong to Descanso. The water supply belongs to Descanso and it comes down in a pipe. They say "Where do you get all the water?" I say because it comes out and Descanso has water rights to those springs. I say without that you wouldn't see all this water running through Descanso.

Q: And they probably have rights to more water than they actually use, do they not?

A: That I do not know. But I wouldn't be surprised because they recirculate everything. I mean water goes on those little streams through that whole thing and it gets pumped back up and started again. It doesn't get dumped out on the street. It's used as long as they can use it.

Q: Do you know where that water right came from? I mean not anybody can just go up and stick a pipe in a spring.

A: No, I don't know how. All I know is that they hold their water right high up on the San Gabriel Mountain. I don't know how they got it.

Q: You told me earlier that you're also doing a little bit of consulting for, once in a while, for other cities. What kind of work does that involve?

A: Ok, I basically just work for a couple of water districts (Tehachapi Cummings) and they're probably who I do the most work for recently. One was trying to get

them to use gray water or water that has a lot of high mineral contents. Forgot what it is now that's in there.

Q: Is it nitrates?

A: Yes, nitrate, high nitrates. I'm running out of memory (laughing). Anyway, up there, what's happening is they have all of the water in Tehachapi Cummings Valley (and it) drains down to the Proctor dry lake. So they're trying to get rid, what are they going to do with the water that's out there? They said, "Well, they have steam plants and they're discharging water." I kept telling those folks, you know you ought to, they were going to inject it, and I said, "No, why don't you evaporate it and use that water, it's high in nitrates". I said, "The turf grass loves that." And I said, "There's golf courses, there's parks, there's all kinds of things." "Why can't you take that water and apply it for beneficial use for recreational areas." Well, I was amazed when I started going up there how much turf grass is growing. You'll see twenty to thirty flatbed trucks a day go out of there with turf grass to Las Vegas and what have you. The high nitrate water, the turf growers just love that because they can't get rid of it. They're building as you move up on the "Fan" to the top to Highline Road. It's all housing tracts. KB homes are going in.

Q: You're talking about in Tahachapi?

A: In Tehachapi Valley. They're all on septic systems. Now they're having problems with that high nitrate moving down. So there're arguments about where they need treatment plants and what have you. But that high- nitrate water now is being used by the turf growers because they love to pump that out and put that on the turf grass because the turf grass just loves that high nitrate water.

Q: Well, it's like pre-fertilized.

A: It's pre-fertilized, yes. It's very good.

Q: Are you also doing some work for Beverly Hills?

A: Yes, I'm on a Beverly Hills Advisory Committee along with Mel Blevens and Glen Brown. Retained by them to look at things, and they're looking at trying to get them to develop more groundwater wells to utilize that groundwater supply instead of letting it move out and to maximize their local supply that they have. So I am involved with them. Then I'm on another committee, that's Beverly Hills, oh, Santa Monica Mountain Trust. Mel Blevens is a great one for calling me in and to say "Well, he'll do this." That's how I get on these things -- through Blevens. We have looked at their end and that becomes the big water rights out there. They want to pump it, the environmentalists want to pump it and grow big greenbelts. So they're drying up some of the creeks or they were endangered of doing that. So there have been all kinds of environmental issues. I try to stay away from those to be honest.

Q: Let's go back to the Board for just one minute. You're saying issues, which you're dealing with, with these three entities, issues. Is there one major issue that comes to your mind while you were with the Board that took a while to resolve?

A: I don't know. I'm trying to think if there were any. I think when we got water down into the Coachella Valley and some of those areas. I think that settled a lot

of dissatisfaction about the way water was used and I sort a felt good about...I had a hand in working with those folks.

Q: There's quite a bit of agricultural in Coachella Valley and a lot of people don't understand that or don't realize that because it's well off the freeway. Is that a good use of water, I mean it is an appropriate use of water? Is it a good farming area?

A: The climate is good. They can get crops almost year round. I think you need a food supply, produce that is grown. If it (agriculture) wasn't down, there pretty soon it would be another Palm Springs, I think, and all that water. I don't know whether . . . you could argue I suppose that that's an economic use of water.

Q: My guess is that the farmers down there probably use water pretty efficiently. Is that true?

A: Oh yes, they do. They use a lot of drip and lot of sprinkler irrigation where needed. They don't do a lot of flood irrigation.

Q: Is that because of the price of water, or is that because water is just a precious commodity?

A: I just don't know. I don't know enough of the farmers or talk to enough of them to deal with it. They seem to be very efficient in their application of water. Obviously if they're pumping it up out of the ground which I'm sure they're doing a lot of, it's all a matter of economics. If you can get maximum irrigation by something other than sprinkling, if you can get it down on the ground than you don't waste all that water in the hot dry air.

Q: Speaking of growing things, one of the major events that was going on while you were at the Board was involved in the Supreme Court Case Arizona vs. California and it had to do with irrigation land along the Colorado River that was owned by Indian Tribes. Were you involved in any of those decisions?

A: No, no I was not involved. I was aware of them.

Q: Over the course of your tenure at the Board, you worked with a number of different personalities on the Board. Virgil Jones comes to mind. Lloyd Allen comes to mind, a number of others. Do any of the Board Members that you worked with jump out at you as being interesting folks? You know, neither good nor bad just kind of interesting and interested in water.

A: Yes, I don't know. They were very friendly. I mean, I thought all of them had an interest in what was going on. For me, looking toward them, was they were all interested. They were businessmen. They were interested in doing whatever they needed to do in order to maximize their income, which I would anticipate they would do. Therefore, I think they took, if there was a way to use less water, have to pump less water, whatever they had to do I think was what they were interested in doing.

Q: Okay.

A: I was very impressed with the people who lived and worked down there and provided our food supply.

Q: You're talking about down in Coachella?

A: Coachella, Imperial, yes.

Q: Ernie, one of the events that occurred while you were at the Board was an attempt at the state level to do away with the Board as either redundant or non useful. Then, since you retired, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger also had an initiative where he tried to get rid of a large number of boards and commissions, including the Colorado River Board. Having worked at the Board for as many years as you did can you talk a little bit about the value of the Board? What does it bring to the table? Should it continue?

A: Well for one thing, I think it serves as a mechanism for communications between all the parties who are in the Imperial-Coachella Valley area in the Colorado distribution area. And it gives an opportunity for interplay, I don't know what it's like today, but when I was there, there was good camaraderie between the various water districts. And I think they were all concerned about water. I mean they were concerned about their pocket book as well, but I thought they were all very interested. I don't know what it's like today but I would think that they're interested in preserving agricultural and reasonable development without turning it into another giant housing track or something.

Q: Do you envision, having spent as much time as you did in the Coachella Valley, do you envision that area of California becoming overpopulated with homes and strip malls and things like that or is it the geology and the weather and the water supply, does all that mitigate against that? It gets hot out there.

A: Yes, to me, to me personally that kind of weather, I would not enjoy. I like the warm weather but I wouldn't want to live where I had to be in an air-conditioned

house twenty-four hours a day because it was one hundred and twenty outside. We go down to Palm Springs occasionally. I don't know if you've ever heard of that "Follies" that they have. We go down to that every year. We have a good time and we stay overnight and do some sightseeing. I look at all those wind machines and everything else and I think is this area really going to develop? What I guess is that the developers can build more houses, more condos, whatever they want. But I would think there's . . . and maybe there are enough people that like that kind of climate and I think it will probably continue to grow. The city of Palm Springs like I say, we go down there for the "Follies" presentation and we go down there occasionally for a day or sometimes we stay overnight for a couple of days and come back, but it's not a place I would choose to live.

Q: Are you originally from Southern California?

A: Yes, I was born and raised in L.A.

Q: In Los Angeles?

A: Yes.

Q: What year were you born?

A: I was born in '29.

Q: 1929, there was another big event that year.

A: Yes (laughing).

Q: Did you anticipate Los Angeles and the greater Los Angeles area growing the way it has?

A: No, no. Well, you know where Fremont High School is, that's where I went to high school. You rode to school on a yellow streetcar. I mean that's the way I got back and forth to school. Everybody rode bikes or something. Many people didn't have cars. A few people had cars. I think I had an old clunker I bought somewhere down the line. I think just the whole living in southern, at least that part of Southern California, I don't know what it was like if you lived in Beverly Hills or West L.A., but it was a low to middle income families. Very few people in our neighborhood owned cars.

Q: You live in a city called La Crescenta today, which is about fifteen miles north of downtown Los Angeles but when you were growing up La Crescenta, number one, didn't even exist and number two; that would have been like a weekend trip up to the mountains.

A: Oh yes. A lot of people, old timers who live there tell us about how they used to come up and pitch a tent and they'd go hiking up in the mountains.

Q: And those are now houses?

A: It's all housing tracts. I probably live in one of them now, for all I know (laughing).

Q: Ok, well, anything else that we didn't ask you that comes to your mind?

A: No, I don't know if I've given you much information.

Q: It's information we didn't have before, so it's a matter for those future historians watching the tape.

A: I sort of hate to think that eventually we're just going to see one condo after another and just in the La Crescenta area where we live there's a lot of griping about the fact that everybody's "mansionizing". In the little local throw-away paper everyday there are articles and articles written by the people, not articles but letters griping about, you know, I used to be able to see the mountains or I used to be able to see the valley. I can't see anything more now. There are just houses going up every place around me, in all I'm doing I might as well be in downtown L.A.

Q: Do you see that continuing?

A: Yes, I hate to say it, but I think unless somehow there's some sort of control in land use or something to say you know you can't do these things. Everyday where we live, I don't know they're forty years old or thirty-five years old, but everyday there are articles in the paper about somebody's building another house. They're "mansionizing" the area. That's the big pitch up where we live. Everything is "mansionizing". Used to have a view of the valley. I used to be able to see down in the valley. Nothing now, all I see is another house that I'm staring at next to me.

Q: There are some people who think that by limiting the amount of water available that you can stop that growth. Do you buy into that? Or are people going to show up and it's up to the water district to meet that demand?

A: I think the pressure would come on, being on a water district, I think the pressure would be there that you have to provide water. That's your mandate, is to provide good water supply to meet the demand. The other people who say I built this house; lived here for twenty years and now they're building a two-story mansion and all I can see is in their back window. And now they've taken away, so what they're demanding of the city of Glendale is to put in new ordinance that says you can't build a big house that's going to block other people's view. So I see that a lot. That's seems to be a lot of turmoil just in the local area around us.

Q: As a member of a local water board what I'm hearing is that you would not be in favor of using water to limit building?

A: No, I don't think we have a right too. Our charge is to provide water demand as needed. I don't think that it's the business of the water district to say, "Well we think there is enough development in here so we're not going to provide. This is all the water we're going to provide." As long as we have pumping rights and as long as we have the ability to buy water from Metropolitan or whoever the supplier is, buy it through Foothill (Municipal Water District), I don't see why we should be, we as a water district should be someone who regulates growth. That's the city's job, not ours.

Q: Ok, very good. Well Ernie thank you very much. We appreciate the time you spent with us.

A: Oh, you're welcome. I enjoyed doing it. Like I say, it was interesting some of the early days.

Q: Well, we'll leave that to others to decide.

A: Yes, somebody else can decide what they want to do. Probably in another year or two, our son and daughter-in-law and our only grandkids are talking about moving to Portland. They've gotten fed up with the traffic and everything else down here. Her parents live in Portland. So they're talking about going up there in the next year or so. That's our only family, so guess where we're going?

Q: So you're going to be looking for a house in Portland?

A: A house in Portland or someplace in that part of the country and I keep telling Judy, "Do you realize it rains everyday." So every day I show her "The Times" and the weather report for Portland. It's raining!

Q: Well there are some things more important than other things.

A: Oh, yes right and it's nice up there. We've been up a couple of times to look around to see what we would do or where we would want to go. It's all where your family is and what you're going to do. That's what going to drive you, regardless of what happens.

Q: That is true.

A: I mean if the kids were staying down here, we would be here. We wouldn't be anyplace else but here.

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