An Oral History of

Dick Belaustegui

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

Interviewed: June 13, 2012

Published: 2014

Interviewer: Emerson Marcus

Dick Belaustegui grew up in a diverse neighborhood on Eureka Street, just north of East 4th Street, in the 1940s and 1950s. His father, Bonifacio "Bunny" Belaustegui, an ironworker, worked for Martin Iron Works, Macauley Iron Works, and Reno Iron Works. Dick worked at Pinky's Market on East 4th Street as a young man. An electrical engineer, he worked for IBM and later the University of Nevada, Reno.

The 4th Street | Prater Way History Project is a collaborative community history project launched by the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County in 2011. The project's website, with full transcripts, photographs, and other historical material about the 4th Street | Prater Way corridor through Reno and Sparks, Nevada, may be found at http://4thprater.onlinenevada.org/.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

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Marcus: I'm sitting with Dick Belaustegui, a longtime Reno resident who lived on the corner of Eureka and Sixth Streets and had a paper route on Fourth Street in the 1940s. He attended Reno High School, correct?

Belaustegui: Correct.

Marcus: His father worked at Martin Iron Works on Fourth Street. We are at his home in Southwest Reno. It's Wednesday, June 13, 2012.

Dick, can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents and why they moved to Nevada?

Belaustegui: Yes, my father's parents are from the Basque country in Spain, from Viscaya, which is the province, in a little town way up in the hills. My grandpa was, I think, number seven of twelve children, and there was just nothing available for him there, so he made his way down to Bilbao, which is a seaport in the Basque country, and became a ship's carpenter. He sailed apparently all over the world, and he finally jumped ship in Port Blakely, Washington, where he became a carpenter, building sailing ships for coastwise commerce on the West Coast. My dad was born there in 1903. He was a twin, but his twin brother died a day or two later.

A couple of years later, my grandfather was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and they said he had to move to a dry climate, so he came to northern Nevada and was a ranch foreman at Taylor Canyon. He worked up there for a number of years, saved his money, and then he moved to Battle Mountain and built the Commercial Hotel, which was a Basque hotel, restaurant, and bar. A couple or three years later, that hotel burned down and he moved back up to Taylor Canyon and worked there and saved enough money, and they moved back to Battle Mountain and rebuilt the hotel, which is still standing today and was sold four or five years ago to a family that's still running the hotel and restaurant there. So that's kind of a quick summary on my grandfather's side.

My grandfather was a sheep rancher in northern Nevada, and he helped get the first Nevada grazing law passed so that people could use public lands to graze their animals. He used to run sheep all the way from Austin—Grass Valley near Austin—all the way up

to the Snake River and back. My father, when he was fourteen, sixteen, seventeen, somewhere in there, was a sheepherder on that route for ten years. He walked from Grass Valley to the Snake River and back. He also had farms in Fallon that he used to raise hay on to feed the animals in the wintertime when they were down in Grass Valley.

It was when my dad was working at the farm in Fallon that he met my mother, because my mother's parents emigrated from Germany in the 1920s and were in the Bay Area, but with all the union strikes that were going on down there, my grandfather homesteaded a small ranch in Fallon, and it's that ranch that shared a well with the Belausteguis', where my dad met my mother and, later, they got married. So that's a quick background on both my grandparents.

Marcus: When did your parents move to Reno?

Belaustegui: 1939. I was just a baby. They were working a farm in Fallon that was owned by my grandfather. It's the first ranch below Lahontan Dam. It's on Cadet Road, and it was 640 acres, one-square-mile ranch. With the Great Depression and everything on, they weren't making any money on the farm. They were in debt at the end of the year after they sold their crops. Then the brooder house for turkeys burned down, so they lost that crop, and the ranch house burned down, so Mom and Dad put my sister and me in a car and drove to Reno. That was sometime in 1939. We lived in a motel for a while, and Dad got a job at Martin Iron Works as a steelworker.

Marcus: When did you move to the place on Eureka and Sixth?

Belaustegui: About 1944 or '45. We lived in a little house at 614½ Eureka in an alley. It was a rental house. I remember my dad put the first running water in the house, and he put a water heater in it, so it was pretty primitive originally. The house still stands.

It was about 1944 or '45 that the house on the corner of Sixth and Eureka was owned by Grace and "Loggy" Lagomarsino, the family that Lagomarsino Canyon's named after. It was a wedding present for them when they got married, and my family was good friends with him. They moved to a new house on Mill Street, and my mom and dad bought the 604 Eureka house. So I was just a little kid at 614½, and the rest of my years at home in Reno were at 604.

Marcus: What was it like to grow up there?

Belaustegui: Oh, it was a very mixed neighborhood. There were lots of kids. We had a black family across the street. Three doors down we had a Chinese family. There was a Polish family down on one corner. There was a Portuguese family across the street. We had Mormon families immediately next door to us. I don't know, there were sixteen, eighteen kids in that one-block section between Seventh and Sixth on Eureka, and we got along fine. We had a great time.

Marcus: With all this diversity, how did these groups get along together in this little area?

Belaustegui: We were just kids. They were all of our buddies. Actually, after I got out of the Navy, I got to thinking about who the different kids were, and I realized they were different, I mean in terms of cultural background and so on.

Marcus: So you didn't realize they were different when you were here.

Belaustegui: No. You know, we went to Orvis Ring Elementary School, just four blocks away. Grace Warner was the principal, and she was the first person in Reno who agreed to take the black children from Black Springs and the Indian kids from the Indian colony into the school. So we had those two groups of kids plus neighborhoods that were mixed like mine, and we were just one big bunch of people. We had a great time.

Marcus: Was there a group that you kind of aligned yourself with at all?

Belaustegui: I had good friends in the neighborhood, and some of them I went all the way through school with. Eventually when I was in the seventh grade, a girl who was my girlfriend at the time and her family moved in next door, and another good friend of mine moved from Spokane Street into the house at 614½ that I had lived in. So those were my really close friends in the neighborhood.

Marcus: Can you just talk about the paper route and what you had to do to get that route? There are two things you said you had to do.

Belaustegui: Yes. I tried to get a paper route and they said, "You can't have one unless you have a bicycle." So over on Keystone Avenue at Fourth was the Reno Brick yard, and they took in a lot of used brick there, and you had to get the mortar off of them, and then they'd resell them as used brick. They hired kids in the summer to come and knock the mortar off the bricks, and I heard about it, and so I'd walk over there. They'd give us a trial, and we'd knock the mortar off. We got a penny a brick for cleaning up a brick, but if we broke one, it cost us ten cents, so you didn't break too many. You learned pretty quick not to hit them too hard.

I saved enough money with that to buy a bicycle from Monkey Wards [Montgomery Ward], which was on Sierra Street in those days. So I got my bike and went down to the Gazette-Journal and I said, "I got a bike. I'd like a paper route." They gave me a small route, and then later they gave me another route. I covered from Spokane and Morrill Avenue over to Elko Avenue, and from Seventh Street to Fourth. That was basically my paper route.

Marcus: What do you remember about that route?

Belaustegui: Well, I remember they paid me an extra dollar a week to cross Fourth Street because it was U.S. 40 then. It was just full of traffic. A lot of wartime traffic was coming through Reno in those days, convoys of military trucks and troops, and so to cross the street was arduous, and I used to cross at Eureka and Fourth where there was no light. I had customers in the U.S. 40 Bar, the Riviera Bar, and the Mizpah Bar, and I'd have to go in the bar every day and drop the paper off, and then come in and collect once a week.

Marcus: What was it like as a paperboy going into these bars on Fourth Street?

Belaustegui: Sometimes it was embarrassing, but the people who were buying the papers were always good to me, and if somebody said something funny or started teasing me, "What's this kid doing in here?" they'd stand up for me. I just dropped the paper off and would get out of there.

Marcus: You wouldn't spend much time.

Belaustegui: No, no, I didn't spend any time in there, but I did get a good look. I mean, I knew what was going on in those bars. It was mostly working men sitting around, usually at the bar, not at tables, and having their drinks, mostly beer.

Marcus: You delivered the Evening Gazette.

Belaustegui: The Reno Evening Gazette six days a week, not Sundays.

Marcus: You were fourteen, about, at this time?

Belaustegui: Let's see. I started when I was nine. I had it until I started the seventh grade.
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Marcus: You say you just saw some people mostly at the bar, not the tables, and this was during the daytime around maybe five or six?

Belaustegui: Yes, we used to deliver anywhere between and five and six-thirty. Depends on when we got the papers.

Marcus: So these guys were getting done with work, maybe.

Belaustegui: That's what it was, yes. These guys would get off work. Martin Iron Works was up there. Macauley Iron Works was on the street, Frank's Foundry, a lot of other small businesses, and a lot of the men would come in after work and have a beer and then go home—I don't remember many women in the bars.

Marcus: You said they would give you a hard time, and some of the guys would stand up for you. Why would they give you a hard time?

Belaustegui: Oh, they'd just tease me, you know, "What's that kid doing in here? How about a free paper?" You know, that kind of stuff, mostly joking around.

Marcus: You talked about the wartime convoys too. How much traffic for the war was going on at that time?

Belaustegui: It was massive. All I could remember is that when a convoy would come through, they'd kind of try to keep them in one group, and you'd just wait and wait and

wait, and it was truck after truck after truck. Just south of Fourth Street there were train tracks, and troop trains and trains with big equipment were coming through all the time. Us kids used to go up and just watch the trains come through. There were all kinds of war material and people moving to the West Coast. Fourth Street was busy, because it was U.S. 40, the main route to San Francisco.

Marcus: So after the war, did it see a dropoff at all in traffic?

Belaustegui: Yes, it really did drop off. Another thing that happened is Sixth Street became the alternate truck route, at least in our end of town. It wasn't in the west end of town. And so we used to have a lot of tractor-trailers come through after that. I remember my mother complaining about the noise they'd make, because we had a traffic light at Alameda and Sixth, and they'd have to be shifting as they came by, and she complained about all the black smoke and noise.

Marcus: You said you earned a dollar extra a day?

Belaustegui: I think it was more like a dollar a week extra, because I only got a penny a day a paper, so if they gave me a dollar a day, that would have been way too much. I think it was a dollar a week. I remember the dollar, I just don't remember how often, but we turned our collection in every week and paid for the papers we bought every week, so I'm pretty sure it must have been on a week's basis.

Marcus: Just to go across Fourth Street because of all the congestion?

Belaustegui: Yes, and it was an industrial area, and they couldn't find anybody who wanted to deliver newspapers up there, so that was just an incentive, I guess. I saved enough money on that paper route so that when I was sixteen, I bought a used car.

Marcus: You did the paper route—I think last time I talked to you, it was '47 to '50.

Belaustegui: I was in the fourth grade when I started the route, and I ended when I started junior high in the seventh grade.

Marcus: So what year would that be?

Belaustegui: Let's see. Fourth grade I would have been nine. It would have been '47, '48, '49, and early fifties. They originally gave me just Alameda Avenue, which is Wells Avenue now, Spokane, and Morrill Avenue, and later I added Eureka and Elko and Fourth Street. That just about doubled the size of the route, roughly a hundred papers.

Marcus: How did you get that expansion exactly?

Belaustegui: I think either another paperboy quit or the district manager was having trouble with the kid who was on the route. I don't know, but they asked me. They said,

"Would you like to pick up these other streets?" I don't know if they were being delivered or not. They just gave me that route. I said I'd take it, so they gave it to me.

Marcus: What do you remember about that area of Reno during that time period?

Belaustegui: A lot of Italian families. It was all working people and lots of kids. There were just lots of kids around. I was one of the few who came by every day working, so I was kind of laughed at by some of them. "Hey, stop and play," and all this. I said, "No, I've got to deliver papers." But basically it was a good time.

Marcus: Were people outside a lot?

Belaustegui: In the summertime, yes, they were. Houses were not air conditioned, and most of the houses in those neighborhoods were relatively small, and so people were outside in the summer. At five, six o'clock in the evening, if they weren't having dinner or something, the kids would be in the yard, and sometimes the parents as well. It was just a good bunch of neighborhoods. I don't say there wasn't any trouble going on, but I didn't run across a lot of it.

Marcus: After the paper route, you went worked at Pinky's Market.

Belaustegui: Yes, Pinky's Market, which was on Fourth Street—at Valley Road, there was a gas station, and then Pinky's Market as you come east off of Valley Road on the north side.

Marcus: What was Pinky's Market like on Fourth Street?

Belaustegui: A lot of Italians shopped there. The Pincolini brothers owned it. They were twins, Guido and Bruno Pincolini, and they ran the butcher shop in the back. Then we had a full vegetable department and lots of groceries, and I worked Fridays and Saturdays as a carry-out kid. I don't know why, but we never took shopping baskets out in the parking lot in those days, but we carried everything, so it was my job to carry all these boxes and stuff out to the parking lot.

It's still there. It's a billiard parlor now. Is it the 500 block? I'm not sure what the address is. If you go to the corner of Valley Road and Fourth Street, on the northeast corner was a gas station, and then the next brick building is a pool hall now, and that was Pinky's Market.

Marcus: You said mostly Italians came in there.

Belaustegui: Mostly Italians.

Marcus: Because of the ownership?

Belaustegui: Yes, I think so, yes. One of my jobs was to go next door across the tracks to Levy-Zentner's and pick up fresh vegetables. They were a vegetable wholesaler, and had

cantaloupes and watermelons, tomatoes, anything that was in season. They'd give me a list and I'd go out the back door and I'd cross the tracks there and bring the produce into the store for them.

Marcus: How long did you work there?

Belaustegui: Seventh and eighth grade, and when I started Reno High School, I went to work at the Circle RB Lodge.

Marcus: You had quite a little résumé going on by eighth grade.

Belaustegui: I had a job from the time I started knocking that mortar off those bricks until I retired in 1999. Never was out of work.

Marcus: I want to talk to you a little bit about your father's job at Martin Iron Works. What was his name?

Belaustegui: "Bunny." His real name was Bonifacio, but when he started school in Battle Mountain, he didn't speak any English, and his given name was Bonifacio. It's a Basque name. Well, it's a Catholic saint, Boniface, and its spelling is Bonifacio. But his kindergarten teacher said, "Oh, that's too complicated. I'm going to call you Bunny," and so Bunny became his official name. He learned English in kindergarten without any ESL [English as a Second Language] program or anything else, and interestingly enough, my mother and all her brothers learned English in the schools in Fallon the same way. Their native language was German. My dad's native language was Spanish. They just learned it as kindergarteners.

Marcus: When did he work at Martin?

Belaustegui: Well, he worked at Macauley Iron Works and Martin Iron Works and Reno Iron Works depending on where the work was, but he mostly worked at Martin Iron Works.

Marcus: Which is right there on Fourth Street.

Belaustegui: Right down Fourth Street. Macauley Iron Works was at Fourth and Wells. Martin's was right almost where Valley Road comes in at Fourth Street, and Reno Iron Works in those days was out on Keystone. He was an ironworker for all of those, because in those days if they didn't have work, you were just out of work. I mean, it wasn't like you were employed. So if the contracts weren't coming in, there was no work. Prior to 1944, my dad worked at the slaughterhouse, Nevada Pack, it was called. It was at the corner of Fourth Street and Wells, and it was a slaughterhouse, and he was the guy who had to kill the animals that they had in there for the meatpacking.

When I was about twelve or thirteen, one of the kids in the neighborhood from Spokane Street burned that place down. We were told his name was Vance Marino. The walls in there were about three feet thick and they were filled with sawdust to keep it cool

so the meat wouldn't spoil—and, boy, that was a huge fire. When that sawdust went off, it just billowed up and exploded. It was a real, real bad one. There are probably pretty good records in the Reno papers about that fire.

Marcus: What do you remember from that fire?

Belaustegui: I remember that the Sierra Pacific Power used to have the whole block between Sixth and Fifth and Eureka and Wells, and it was their service yard, but they also had this huge natural gas tank there that supplied all the gas to Reno. I remember that they were getting ready to evacuate people out of the house because they thought the heat from that fire might blow that tank up, so it was pretty scary.

Marcus: How long did your dad work for Martin?

Belaustegui: He worked for Martin from the mid-forties until he retired, when he was sixty-five. He was born in 1903, so about '62 or '63.

Marcus: That's when Reno was really built, in that time period.

Belaustegui: He pretty much helped build most of Reno, yes.

Marcus: Can you tell me the story about what happened to your dad putting up the window at the Mapes?

Belaustegui: Yes, that was about 1948, so I was about ten, eleven years old. The Mapes was the biggest building in Reno at the time—it might have been the biggest in the state, but it went up to twelve stories. Martin Iron Works had the only big crane in town, but their crane wasn't big enough to reach to where the Sky Room was, and so they had these huge plate-glass windows they were putting in up there and the crane wasn't reaching, so they rigged a block and tackle.

They had a bunch of men pulling on the rope to raise these windows up, which were really, I guess, quite heavy, and there was one guy standing underneath him directing it so that it wouldn't swing, and they had two ropes on it, according to what Dad said, to keep it from swinging in the wind.

But it got up high—and I wasn't there, of course, but I heard Dad tell about it—it got up high and something happened and the window started to slip, and everybody was afraid it was going to fall, and so the people down below let go of the rope, and my dad was the only one who hung onto the thing. He held on long enough for the guy to get out from underneath it. It would have killed him when it hit. But it burned through his gloves and burned through his hands.

I remember they took him to the hospital, and the doctors and the police came to the house, and they wanted mom to sign a paper to cut my dad's hands off. They said, "We can't save them."

She wouldn't sign it, because she said, "That's the only way he can earn a living, is with his hands." So he went through a really, really long recuperation where we didn't have any income or anything, but eventually it came around and his hands were fine.

Marcus: What else do you remember about your dad working there and laboring?

Belaustegui: Well, when they worked on Harolds Club, I think they were working on the seventh floor, and it was structural steel. That building was put together with rivets, and so the way they worked that, you had a fire down below, and they'd heat up the rivets till they're red-hot. Then they'd throw them with a pair of tongs and they'd catch them in a big funnel. Then they'd take the hot rivet out of the funnel and they'd put it in a hole, and they'd have a jackhammer to hit it on one side and what they call a bucking rod on the other side, and you'd push against it.

There was a young kid who went to the university who was bucking rivets for my dad, and my dad started the rivet again and the back-slip or something from that knocked him off. Anyway, he fell off the beam. They were just sitting with their legs around it. He fell five, six stories down and was crippled. I think he was crippled for life. Years ago I knew the kid's name, but I don't remember it anymore.

Marcus: You told me also a story about Manuel.

Belaustegui: Oh, yes, Manuel Baker. He was a welder, and during World War II, Martin Iron Works got a contract to build a bunch of storage tanks for Russia as part of the lend-lease program during the war. They'd get these huge plates of steel, I don't know, 10 feet or so wide and 20 feet long, and they had a big roller that would get a curve in them so they could make sections for a storage tank, and then they'd weld them together.

They were having trouble getting this big heavy piece of plate steel down into this roller, and Manuel Baker got up on the iron there and jumped up and down on it, and someone hit the switch to take it in, and it got his toes. He lost all of the toes on both of his feet, and he was off work for a very long time. My dad said later he remembers Manuel coming to work, and sometimes the blood would just come right out through his shoes, and he never, ever complained.

The interesting thing was years later it turned out I worked with his son, Marvin Baker, at the university, and we'd worked together for some years. We just had a conversation one day and Marv realized my dad and his dad worked together about the same time I did. So Marv brought Manuel over, and I went with my dad, and they had a really great visit and some great memories. That's the only time the two people saw themselves before they passed away, but it was really a nice afternoon for both of them.

Marcus: That's a great story. Talk about—I think it was before or after Pinky's—when you got a job at Martin Iron Works.

Belaustegui: I tried. It was before I went to Pinky's.

Marcus: Tell the story about how your dad reacted.

Belaustegui: Yes, that was a tough one for me. I'd been on the paper route, and I knew I wanted to do something else because some of my friends had different jobs. They were delivering for drugstores or working in grocery stores, one thing or another, and they

were making more money than me, so they had more spending money when we went to do something.

So I went on my own over to Martin Iron Works that summer after I got out of sixth grade and got myself a job. They said, yes, I could help out in the shop. So when my dad came home that night from work, I very proudly told him that, "Hey, I'm going to work at Martin Iron Works on Monday."

He said, "No, you're not. You're not going to have anything to do with that. They'll break your back. They'll just wear you down."

He went over to Martin's and said, "You don't take this kid in there."

He and I were really kind of—it hurt. I thought he didn't trust me or he didn't like me or he wasn't—I don't know. Maybe he was ashamed of me.

Marcus: How long did it take for you to realize what his real intentions were?

Belaustegui: After I got in the service, so it was about seven years later.

Marcus: You realized then that your dad was looking out for you.

Yes, exactly. It bothered me for maybe a month or six weeks as kind of just a real hard burn, but then I finally realized, hey, you've got to get on with things.

Marcus: The way he reacted there, how much of that is a testament to the hard work that went into that job? He knew what it was going to take.

Belaustegui: Yes, he didn't ever tell me an awful lot, but what he did say was, "They'll just give you all the hard, mean, heavy tasks, and they'll just ruin you. They'll ruin your back." He knew about Manuel getting hurt. He knew about the kid falling off the Harolds Club thing, and he just knew it was tough, dangerous work.

There was a name for the kid that was just a general flunky in the shop, and I can't remember what that was, but they'd just give him all the dirty, heavy jobs there was, and he knew that. He really didn't want me in that business, and I bless him for that. I didn't at the time, but otherwise I still might be doing the same thing he did, and he just didn't want me to do it.

Marcus: Your dad died in 1988?

Belaustegui: Eighty-eight.

Marcus: What comes to your mind when you think of your dad?

Belaustegui: Very independent guy. He was very quiet. He never, ever told me very much, but when he told me something, it was like the deal with the job, he was pretty adamant about it. He had a tough time growing up, himself. He'd herded sheep for ten years and walked all the way from Austin to the Snake River and back every year for ten years before he met my mother, and then he worked the farm in Fallon and got that 640-acre farm finished. When Mom and Dad left, his cousin Eusebia Cadet took it over. The

road out there to that farm is still named after them, not my dad, but after his cousin. Dad, he was a good friend, but he was very distant.

Marcus: He was a working-class man of the time.

Belaustegui: Absolutely. Yes. Mom took care of everything at the house. I never saw Dad pay a bill and do any of the housework—but anything that needed to be repaired or fixed he always took care of. It was just expected—growing up, I expected Dad to be the guy that went to work and came home at night and had dinner with us. We never had any vacations that I can recall, because he only got paid when he was at work, and he never really made enough to be able to take a vacation, so we didn't have family vacations growing up.

Marcus: I also want to ask you about the history of Martin Iron Works. What do you recall of it, or do you?

Belaustegui: Well, I know about the history of what my dad told me, but Martin Schwamb, I guess, he was a German man, and he founded the company. When my dad first went to work there—and I found this out years later—Martin couldn't pay the workers until he got paid on the job, so I remember that there were tough weeks when Martin just told the guys, "You know, when we get the job, I'll pay you," and he always did. But early on with Martin Iron Works they didn't get a paycheck every week. Later on that changed when Martin got ahead of the curve a little bit and had some money.

Marcus: Your dad remembers that, or was that before your dad?

Belaustegui: Well, my dad remembers that, and I remember the hard times during the week, yes.

Marcus: They wouldn't pay him on time?

Belaustegui: No. They'd have a job, Martin, and maybe the job took a week or two months or three months to do, and Martin didn't get paid—or maybe he got progress payments. I don't know how the business worked. But I remember Mom and Dad saying that they got paid when the job was over. Martin used to ask them to do that, and they did. They were willing because there was no work anywhere, and he always paid them. It wasn't that he held out on them, and it wasn't until he got some money ahead that he was able to pay them every week on their salary.

Marcus: I want to ask you a little bit about urban renewal. What do you remember about that and what happened with that in that area of Reno?

Belaustegui: Urban renewal. Yes, it was in between Sixth Street and Fourth and Spokane and, I guess, Quincy. I don't remember how far east it went, but on Spokane Street between Fifth and Sixth I had a lot of friends. The Stockwells lived at the corner of Fifth

and Spokane, and one of my best friends, Ron Vrooman, was their grandson, and he lived with his grandparents.

The Savage family lived next door to them coming north, and then on the south corner at Sixth and Spokane were my aunt and uncle, Grace Sloan and Tom Sloan, and their sons, Tom and Chuck. The Sloans were related to me. Tom Sloan married my mother's aunt, so we were related through aunt, and Grace Sloan was Tom's wife, so that made her my great-aunt. It was her property and others on Spokane Street that the urban renewal came in for, and Grace helped get all the people in the neighborhood working together, and they hired an attorney and they tried to fight the urban renewal. It went on for a number of years, but they finally lost that case, and the urban renewal happened.

Grace was one of the prime movers and organizers of the coalition, I'll call it, to try to get urban renewal at least moved away from their neighborhood and taken away. They claimed all the way through that that that wasn't a slum and that didn't need to be done there. Long story short, they eventually lost that case too. I'm trying to think of the attorney.

Marcus: Les Fry? You told me about him before.

Belaustegui: Yes, Les Fry, and his son Robert Fry, Bob Fry, is still in business here in town and may have those records. His office is on Casazza Street right behind Shoppers Square there on the north side.

Marcus: Les was one of the key attorneys in fighting against urban renewal?

Belaustegui: Yes, he represented Grace and that coalition of people trying to fight that urban renewal.

Marcus: What do you remember of her fight?

Belaustegui: I was pretty small, I mean not small, but those things were not on my plate at the time. I pretty much went to school and worked, and what free time I had I fooled around with the kids in the neighborhood, but I do remember that it was a big struggle and a lot of concern and there was a lot of worry about it. There were quite a few—I don't know if they were court hearings or just hearings and arbitration. A lot of stuff went on. It took quite a while to get settled.

Grace, as I mentioned before, is still here. She's at Cascades of the Sierras out off of Pyramid Highway. She has dementia, but sometimes things back in the past she can well remember. It'd be a flip of the coin, but she's in her mid nineties now, and she's physically weak, but in good health otherwise.

Marcus: You said that it never really took off, the fight against it, like it should have. You said urban renewal never really took off in that area. What did you mean by that?

Belaustegui: Well, apparently what they did is they condemned a couple of city blocks and tore out all the buildings there, but then nothing much more happened after that. The fire station went in, First National Bank building went in, a couple of auto repair shops

were built, but then a lot of those lots just laid empty for a long time. In fact, some of them are still empty. So it never really went to anything big.

Marcus: Is that kind of the consensus now among people that have lived here all this time?

Belaustegui: I don't know. A lot of the people in that part of town are gone, particularly those who were in those neighborhoods that it really affected. Again, being a kid, it wasn't something—if I'd have been in high school, maybe I'd have picked up a little more. Well, Chuck Sloan is still around. Not sure what his address is. He may remember more because his parents were involved with it. His older brother, my cousin who's my age, he passed away, so he's not available. I hate to be so sketchy on that, but I know what's there now, and it's still a lot of empty lots and it was never really developed that much.

Marcus: So after you grew up in this area and went to school, you joined the Navy.

Belaustegui: Yes. After junior high school, of course, I started Reno High, and when I was a junior, I had enough credits to graduate. Two other buddies were going to join the Navy, and I talked with them. I was seventeen and two or three days old when I joined the Navy, and I was gone from then on for the next four years out of Reno.

Marcus: Then when did you come back to Reno and work at the university?

Belaustegui: In '59, I came back. I was working for IBM. I started with them in New York, and I had from May until November in school. There was an air defense of the North American continent computer air watch center out at Stead Air Base, and I was one of sixty people assigned out there to manage, maintain, and operate that system. That was '59 to '63.

Marcus: What was the system?

Belaustegui: SAGE, Semi-Automatic Ground Environment. There were eighteen stations all around the country. Reno was number seventeen to go in. They started back east and they went all around the north part of the country, and then went south. The purpose of those was to provide manned aircraft defense of the North American continent during the Cold War. We had radar sites on the DEW line and the Pinetree Line and the Mid-Canada Line that fed into us, and if anything was coming out of Russia in terms of a missile attack or airplanes, we would spot it and be able to give at least a fifteen-minute alert.

I can't remember the exact year, it must have been '61 or '62, but it was the Fourth of July, I was on duty. Most of the military was off duty, so there were not a lot of people in, but all of a sudden we started seeing a lot of targets coming in, and we had different alert levels, but we went to the highest actionable alert level there was. These sites were capable of launching ICBMs back into Russia. We got right to where we almost were going to do that and somebody at NORAD in the Colorado mountains realized there were

too many targets coming in to be real, and they put everything on hold. They didn't lower the alert, but they put it on hold.

Well, we found out later they had just turned on a big antenna up on the DEW Line, and it was so powerful it could see around the earth, and it went all the way out and it picked up reflections off the moon, and they were coming back. The range counter was like a speedometer in your car. It goes so far and then it starts over at zero. Well, just as luck would have it, the range came back in and looked like a range out of Russia, because the thing had spun over, and that's what caused the alert. Somebody was smart enough to realize there were too many targets. Russia couldn't have launched that much, and they called it off. That's been written up, by the way. You can find it in Reader's Digest.

Marcus: What was going through your head when that was going on?

Belaustegui: Well, that was panic time, because one civilian and one military had turned the key. We had missiles in Mountain Home AFB—there were nine of them, anyway. I can't remember where they all were. It was all top-secret at that time. But out of Reno we could launch nine missiles into some pre-targeted place, and that particular day, because it was a holiday, I was assigned to basically the War Room, where all the top people who made the decisions would come, and everything was projected up on a big screen. They had to make the call, and that was pretty scary.

But before the afternoon was over, before the shift ended, like I say, somebody at NORAD realized there was a problem. One, that particular radar was new. It was the first time it was online. Secondly, there were way too many targets. So good heads prevailed. They shut everything down. As I understood it later, with the fix they put in, they put the star tables in the computer's memory so it knew where the moon would be and where even near planets like Venus or Mars might be, so if we got a reflection, when the range thing had spilled over, it wouldn't look like it was coming out of Russia—so that was a big scare. The only big public write-up I know about it was in Reader's Digest.

Marcus: How did they find out, or was the story sent in?

Belaustegui: No, it came out some years later. It was one of those things like "The Day We Almost Went to War" or something like that. I don't remember the exact details.

Marcus: You were there for that.

Belaustegui: I was at Stead on duty. That was panic time. I think there were about ten or eleven of us IBM people on shift that day.

Marcus: What would have happened? What could have happened?

Belaustegui: Heaven knows.

Marcus: Were they really about to fire back?

Belaustegui: No, but we were in the top-level alert. We had two kinds of alerts. There were training alerts and there were colors that would go on. These lights would come on so you knew you were in a training cycle, and we'd been through a lot of training cycles, but you kind of know it's a training cycle, so your adrenaline's not going that much. You just have to do what you're supposed to do. This particular day this was not a test, and we went up to the top-level alert, but we never got to the point where somebody said, "Go ahead and arm your stuff and fire it." We never got to that.

Marcus: How close?

Belaustegui: I have no idea. All I know is we were alerted. We said, "There are targets coming out of Russia." They called in people who were off duty, because of all the military people, and they were heading in to see what was going on. But you've got to realize we were down kind of in the front line, and all the real decisions and the high-level management was elsewhere. It was at NORAD in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

Marcus: Doesn't matter if you're the low-ranking private. You can be in the War Room sometimes?

Belaustegui: Well, my job was to make sure everything kept working so they could decide what to do. My job was not to push any buttons, but I saw what was going on on the screen.

Marcus: Where was this satellite, or not satellite, but this—

Belaustegui: It was a DEW Line. The DEW Line was a Distance Early Warning Line up in northern Canada. They were huge radars. The antennas were a couple hundred feet wide and a hundred feet tall, big steel structures. They couldn't go around the curvature of the Earth, but they could look way over, so if a missile came out of Russia, or a large group of planes, as soon as they cleared a certain height, this radar would pick them up. Automatically then you could track them with a computer, their speed and where they were headed, so you had a fifteen-, twenty-minute warning that something was not right.

Marcus: But the thing that screwed you guys up was something in northern Canada instead.

Belaustegui: When that DEW Line system came on, yes. It was a simple problem once you knew what it was. The range counters were just like an odometer on a car, so the range counters went up, and then they reset, starting counting from zero again. When the return finally came in, it just, as luck would have it, happened to be showing a distance that looked like it was coming out of Russia.

Marcus: At this time you're an IBM worker.

Belaustegui: I was working for IBM, yes. IBM had a contract to design and build what was called an AFSQ-7, which was a really huge computer, and to maintain and operate it

for the Air Force. It was manned by active-duty Air Force personnel who did all the operational stuff. Our job was to keep it running and to maintain it. At that time in Reno there were about sixty of us, and we were twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, around the clock. We had a shift in there all the time.

That particular day, because it was a holiday, there were about a dozen IBM people there. Not a good day. [laughs] And we couldn't talk about it either. Everything was pretty classified.

Marcus: Top-secret.

Belaustegui: Yes. There's a good film out. If you Google "SAGE computer," you can find out a lot about that, because they show the computer and what it was doing and how it worked and everything. It was a big computer. It was about 100 feet by 200 feet. You walked around inside of it. It's like being inside of a memory. You could pull out a piece of it. It was all vacuum tubes. There's a huge building out at Stead, and we didn't heat that building; we cooled it. There were 50,000 vacuum tubes in each computer, and it put out so much heat that we just had to cool the building. It was incredible.

Marcus: You started working for the university when?

Belaustegui: Let's see. I went back to school in '59. I was still with IBM. In '63, I left IBM on a leave of absence and went to the university full-time. In '67, I graduated with a bachelor's in double-E [Electrical Engineering], and I went on to graduate school, and I stayed with that until '70, when IBM called me back.

During the fuel strike, there was no gas available in the country in the mid-seventies. IBM called me back, so I took a leave of absence from the university and went back to IBM. The idea was to finish up my dissertation for my doctorate, but with the energy crisis, IBM had abandoned the project that I was going back on, so I worked back there for eighteen months, finished up a job they wanted me to do, and came back to the university.

I was in the double-E Department from '63 to '67, '68, '69 as a student, and then from '70 to '74 I was there as an instructor. When I came back, then I went to Computing Services and I designed and built NevadaNet, which is the educational network for all of Nevada. It also includes all the courts, the rural hospitals, and the prisons in the network. It's a big network, with a couple hundred thousand users on it.

Marcus: You helped build that. You're the founder.

Belaustegui: I designed that. I was the founder and the designer and the first engineer on it, yes.

Marcus: When did that kick off?

Belaustegui: Let's see. I came back in '74, '75. The first connection was a real small one between Reno and Las Vegas. We had a remote batch terminal down there, and then we started doing dial-in access with teletypes around the state, and so it really all began in

the mid-seventies. It was really in good shape by 1999 when I retired. I've got a map in the back room. I'll show it to you.

Marcus: You showed it to me, yes.

Belaustegui: You saw it.

Marcus: Yes. All right, well, you retired in '99 and you've been living here in this house since?

Belaustegui: When we came back from New York on the leave of absence, I think we moved in here in '75 or early '76, and have been here ever since.

Marcus: So you're a Renoite.

Belaustegui: Except for the time I was gone in the Navy and the time I was back east with IBM, I've been in Reno the whole time.

Marcus: All these years in Reno, you started out right in this little area near Fourth Street that we're doing this project on. What have you seen in all these years? How has this area, particularly East Fourth Street, how has that changed, in your mind?

Belaustegui: Well, along Fourth Street, starting at Alameda Avenue and Wells Avenue where the underpass is, the big overhead bridge now, there were a combination of both houses and businesses east on Fourth Street. Now most all the houses are gone. I can't think offhand if there are any left. There's a trailer park just before you make the little curve on East Fourth Street that's still there. There used to be a Threlkel's ballpark out there.

Marcus: It still is there, but no one uses it.

Belaustegui: Yes, I think it's called Governor's Field now. The Johnson-Jeffries boxing match, the famous boxing match, was held out there. That was a busy ballpark when I was a kid growing up. There used to be chicken farms along there, and there were a lot of mom-and-pop groceries. There were three within a block, depending on the direction you went, from our house, and they were usually just a regular house, and they'd take a couple of rooms in the house and make a small grocery store in them, because the nearest big market was Safeway's, and it was at Fifth Street and North Virginia. That building is still there, but that Safeway Market's gone.

Reno was small. It was about 34,000, 35,000 when I was growing up, so it's ten times bigger now, and the point of it is we had two junior high schools, four or five elementary schools, and one high school in Reno, so you got to know just about everybody in town. Like in high school, at least you knew who the people were two or three years ahead of you and you knew the kids two or three years behind you, and they'd gone to one of the two junior highs, either Northside or Billinghurst, and went together to Reno High. Sparks High had a couple of hundred kids in it, and Manogue had only about

fifty, and you got to know those kids by sports, the basketball games, the football games, and stuff like that. So it was a close little community.

As I understand it—and I've heard this from other state people—it was always a very friendly place. It's gotten big. I mean, we have regional shopping centers now. I look at ads in the paper now, Spanish Springs or even out to The Legends, I say there's no need for me to run way over there. So in my opinion, we're kind of little towns within this big area now.

Marcus: That's how you think Reno's changed?

Belaustegui: I think that's one of the big changes. The other thing is, is there are a few events that draw everybody, like the balloon races or the air races or the rodeo, those kind of things draw people from all over the area, but it used to be if anything was going on, it was downtown. But now it might be out at The Legends or it might be out at the Summit or out in Spanish Springs somewhere. So to me, we've dispersed a little bit, and we have an awful influx of out-of-state people. I used to know the number, and I know it changes, but the number of native Nevadans around is a small number now, by percentage. When I was a kid, we were most of it.

Marcus: Well, your parents weren't native Nevadans.

Belaustegui: No, they weren't, but all the kids I grew up with were, so just about everybody I went to school with was a native Nevadan. When my grandson goes to school here now, most of the kids are not native Nevadans. Their parents have moved here and they're in the school system. So that's one of the big differences. I don't know if that's good or bad. It's just a difference. That's all.

Marcus: What about East Fourth Street?

Belaustegui: On Fourth Street, they had the U.S. 40 tavern, the Mizpah, and the Riviera. The Riviera had a hotel, and transits and tourists would stop in and stay in those places, but there was also a family market, Akert's Market, on the corner of Fourth and Wells. That's all a bunch of apartments now, and there were homes along there. Now that's all industrial. So Fourth Street has kind of moved from what was originally kind of a combination of business and homes to all businesses now, with the exception of the new apartments that have gone in.

Of course, there's a heck of a lot less traffic. When the freeway came through, Fourth Street wasn't the main corridor anymore, and a lot of the motels that were on there that catered to tourists have gone to weekly or monthly hotels, and especially on East Fourth Street, they've kind of gone downhill from the kind of place you might want to stay at.

I have a friend who did a study on single-room occupancies, SROs, she called them, and East Fourth Street is full of old motels that haven't closed down or faded away that are mostly monthly rentals now, so people are living in one room with no kitchen and they're trying to make do. So that's a big change. We saw poor people, but people were in houses, and just like us when my dad got hurt or when Martin wasn't paying, you

went without a lot, but you had a home and a place to be. Nowadays a lot of people are living in motels or on the street.

Marcus: What do you think should be done to better Fourth Street?

Belaustegui: Well, as I understand it—I don't know a lot about it—there's a Fourth Street improvement group or something. I know they've done new lighting. They've redone some of the buildings down there.

It's historic in the sense of the buildings, and if they wanted to put it back like the Gaslight District in San Diego—when I first went to San Diego in the Navy, which was 1955, the whole Gaslight District in San Diego was an industrial slum area, really bad off, and now it's a place people want to go. There are restaurants and nightclubs and all kinds of things. Young people, professionals have apartments down there. It's well lit, a good thing to do. Sacramento did the same thing with the Old Town Sacramento. When I was a kid, you didn't go down there. It was just a slum, and now it's a tourist attraction. I think something like those two places, as examples, would be a good thing to do for Fourth Street.

Marcus: So you think Fourth Street definitely has a chance to change.

Belaustegui: Yes, what it's going to take are people who are invested in the area to come together and come up with a good plan and work it out.

Marcus: What do you think that plan could be? Would it be more of a connection with the history?

Belaustegui: Well, that would ring true with me, because that was kind of my part of town.

Marcus: But how does it change its image?

Belaustegui: Good question. I'm not into urban planning or those kind of things.

Marcus: Well, you've lived here most of your life.

Belaustegui: Yes. One of the troubles is people with my recollections of that part of town, we're getting old, and there are not many of us left, and we're dying off quickly. There needs to be something that would attract young professionals and people who have extra money who could go out and do things.

It could go all industrial, but Reno's got some very, very nice industrial areas and the kind of warehousing and stuff that the city wants, and what was along Fourth Street wasn't necessarily that kind of industrial stuff. There were small places. Frank's Foundry was a steel foundry place, and Martin Iron Works did structural steels and so on. So I'm probably the wrong person to ask on what a good vision would be.

Marcus: What is the conversation like when you're talking to people who lived there, who grew up with you, who look at Fourth Street now? What are they talking about?

Belaustegui: They basically just talk about the old times and not so much about a revival out there or anything else. The halfway club, Stempeck's, out there, Mama Stempeck who runs it, that's right on the Reno-Sparks border, that business has been there since 1939. She's an excellent example of a business that's stayed there, tried to stay the same, and has hung onto the old traditions, and she'd be a great person to talk to about what's needed in that area. She's in her late eighties, early nineties, comes in every day and makes ravioli and spaghetti and serves dinner at night. Just a great place to go. Some of our friends, especially those who grew up in that area, we go there for dinner fairly often just because it's part of where we grew up. Coney Island Bar is another out there that's from that old tradition, and that's further out on Fourth.

Marcus: That old tradition definitely does bring back the old crowd.

Belaustegui: It can. The Gaslight District in San Diego, there's history in every building, and they've come up with a common theme, and it works. The lighting they put up on the streets, they're electric, but they look like they're flickering gas. The Cannery District in San Francisco has done that kind of thing. Like I say, in Sacramento, those things work, and if you've got some piece of history you can hang onto—Threlkel's Park, the Johnson-Jeffries fight, the Sierra Nevada Brewery was there—I used to deliver newspapers to him. The building is still there intact, you know, a brewhouse there in the old tradition. Those are the kind of things that could help out.

The old icehouse down there is a men's club now, but that building was where the Southern Pacific Railroad used to store their ice, and we used to go there in the summer and chip ice just to cool off, but it's a men's club now. So they've kept the building, but they haven't kept the history there. I don't know what would solve it. Like I say, that's not my area of expertise.

Marcus: Well, obviously you knew a little bit about what's going on in Sacramento, San Francisco, and San Diego.

Belaustegui: Well, yes, because we like to see that renovation and reuse. We've gone to Sacramento dozens of times, been down to Gaslight District in San Diego at least a half a dozen times, and those are impressive things. They're really well done.

A few years ago, we went back to Providence, Rhode Island and looked at the renewal that they did in Providence. Their river was kind of like the Truckee, and it was the sewer in the backwater part of town, and they made it the prominent feature in town now. There was so much junk on their river, they actually had a river fire at one point, and in order to commemorate that, on certain nights, and particularly in the summer, they have flares out in the river and they relight the river, but with flares, and people gather around and have lunch or dinner or whatever and enjoy it. So they've taken the river from being something they turned their back on to something that they present prominently, and Reno could do that with the Truckee River. Pretty much it seemed to me that from

Wells Avenue, Alameda Street, east, Reno was kind of forgotten. I don't know if it was out of the city limits. I think it was in the city when I was a kid, but it was seedy.

Marcus: It was seedy when you were a kid?

Belaustegui: Parts of it, because there were a lot of low-income people in rentals. They really didn't have the means to take care of their property properly. I would say around the mid- forties when the war hit, a lot of people moved out to go get jobs and stuff, and there was kind of a boom for housing, and it all turned into rentals. When land is owned by the property owner and they live on it, it seems to me they do a lot better job taking care of it than if it's rentals. So one big issue, I think, for any area is to make sure that when you've got tenants or homes in the area, that they're owned homes and not all rentals.

Marcus: It's easier said than done, though.

Belaustegui: I know it is, and I don't know what the tipping number is. We always had rentals in our neighborhood, but the neighborhood was always kept up just because the people cared about the neighborhood.

Marcus: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Fourth Street?

Belaustegui: A lot of good memories out there. Some of it's the same, because a lot of the buildings have stayed, but where the buildings have changed it's like, ooh, there's a hole in my memory there. That's probably the big difference.

It was a whole different place when it was the national highway through Reno, because it catered an awful lot to the traffic that was going by, and that wasn't always locals. It was mostly tourists. That's why both East and West Reno along Fourth Street had so many motels. They came there when it was part of the highway. When the freeway went in, they pretty much went into decline, so the locals kind of moved in.

Marcus: Well, thanks a lot for talking to me, Dick.

Belaustegui: No problem. I hope I've answered your questions.

Marcus: You have. I appreciate it. Thank you so much.