

An Oral History of Spencer Hobson

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

Interviewed: October 3 and October 17, 2011

Published: 2014

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Spencer Hobson was born in Reno, where his grandfather, Antonio Bevilacqua, emigrated from Italy. His family members owned several casino properties, including Virginia City's Frontier Club and Reno's Overland and Riverside Hotels. Spencer owns the Reno Brewing Company bottling plant building on East 4th Street, which his father purchased in 1956 after the brewery closed. He also discusses Reno's Italian community and the urban renewal project that targeted homes north of East 4th Street in the 1960s.

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SPENCER HOBSON

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Barber: I'm with Spencer Hobson at his office at Hobson Square. It's Monday, October 3, 2011. Mr. Hobson, I wanted to start by just asking you some biographical questions. When and where were you born?

Hobson: I was born at St. Mary's Hospital in Reno, Nevada, in 1943, and we lived at the Rosasco Ranch for a short time.

Barber: Where is that ranch?

Hobson: Rosasco Ranch is basically at the end of where the fairgrounds are, near Sutro Street. Wedekind Road runs through the middle of the Rosasco Ranch. We moved from there to Arlington Avenue by the time I was three years old. We had a family house on Arlington until I was in the fourth grade, and then we moved to Timothy Lane, which is in Southwest Reno off of Holcomb.

The first school I can remember was a day school at Marcie Herz. Marcie Herz was one of the originators of the Reno ski program. She would load a bunch of us little monsters up in her station wagon and we would go skiing at Sky Tavern. She was very well known for that.

That was in kindergarten. Then, Mt. Rose Elementary School was right up the street, so I went there through the third grade. Then, we moved to Timothy Lane and I went through the rest of my elementary school at Huffaker. After that, my family sent my brother and me to the Army-Navy Academy in Carlsbad, California, a military school.

Barber: How many years were you there?

Hobson: I graduated there—I was there four years. That was high school.

Barber: Do you know why they sent you to a military school?

Hobson: My brother got the choice of either going to Elko for reform school or going to military school. He didn't like going to school. He cut too much school, and being the little brother, I just went with him.

Barber: What was your brother's name?

Hobson: Richard Hobson. He was named after my uncle, who was "Pick" Hobson. Pick's real name was Richard Hobson.

Barber: Did you go to college?

Hobson: I went to numerous colleges and junior colleges, and I never graduated. I went to the University of Nevada; I went to Foothill Junior College; I went to one right outside of Carlsbad. Then, I started working for the family and never finished college. I got through the last half of my junior year and then got out of it.

I liked arts too much and couldn't find the arts I liked. I had trouble in military school because of that. I did photography for the yearbook there; that was my outlet.

Barber: What was it like growing up in Reno?

Hobson: It was a very small town. I remember when I was living on Arlington, every day I would come down to 505 Montello Street in the Fourth Street area. My grandfather, Antonio, had his business there—Bevilacqua House Moving. They were house movers. Most of the homes were moved either by my grandfather or his brother, John Bevilacqua. Each one of them had two sons. My grandfather had Aldo and Rumolo. Those were my uncles and they had their house moving, A. Bevilacqua House Moving, and then Janine had two sons, Johnny and Dario. They had Bevilacqua House Moving. One was A. Bevilacqua and the other one was just Bevilacqua.

Barber: Did your grandfather emigrate from Italy?

Hobson: He came here from a little place in Italy called Torriglia. It's up above Genova. You'd call that Swiss-Italian up there. It was right around 1900. He and a lot of fellow Italians moved to this area—the Capurros, the Oppios, the Avansinos, the Lagomarsinos, and the Caranos. You can line them up and they all came here because this was more like northern Italy. They all got established here and took over the valley.

Barber: Was house moving his first profession?

Hobson: No. In Italy he was a fireman, and he did terrazzo work. When he came here, he started doing terrazzo work and got into cement work. Then, he got into putting foundations underneath homes because most homes had rubble rocks. When he started

lifting these houses up, they then started moving them. I have pictures of him—I believe it's a 1907 picture—moving one of the big houses down through Reno, right in front of the courthouse. We'd move houses to Virginia City. We'd move houses to anyplace and everyplace. They became known for that.

He also did a lot of curb and gutter work in Reno. On California Street, there was a rubble cement wall built—he did a lot of that.

When I was a kid, I worked with him moving houses a lot of the time. I had a lot of fun with it. We had a real good time doing that.

Barber: What would you do as a kid to help out?

Hobson: My cousin, Mike Bevilacqua, and I were the smallest ones in the family when we got started. So we got to crawl under the houses and were the first ones to start getting them off the ground. We'd place the jacks and get everything set up so the house could be raised. We'd get the timber underneath it so the house was secure.

Barber: Sounds a little dangerous.

Hobson: Well, yes. We learned how to manage black widows very well. The house couldn't fall on you once we started blocking it up, though.

I would also do what they call "riding the roof." When you're moving the house, there are power lines and telephone lines in the way, so a lot of times you have to lift them up and walk them over the roof and then back down the other side. That was a real good job for my cousin and me because the other workers were busy managing the house as it was going down the street. That was a lot of the stuff that we did, and it was fun.

Barber: You got that great experience of riding a house down the street.

Hobson: Yes. We'd do it at sunrise, so I fell in love with sunrises. What a place to be. We'd move the house, and once we got it under way, we'd stop and have breakfast. It was a real family journey there.

We moved houses to Virginia City. We moved box trains to Virginia City—we put them out on cliffs, basically. Lake Mansion was first moved by my family. A lot of mansions around here were. There are quite a few on the way to Carson City that we moved.

Barber: By the time you were helping out with this, were they using motor vehicles to move them?

Hobson: Yes. I've got a picture of him with an old truck. I think it was called a *fragile* at that time. They did the first moves with horses and pulleys, so there was a lot of labor to it. Then, they got a big truck called a Corbett. The Corbett was an ex-war truck, and I don't think it could go past 35 miles per hour, but it could pull anything. We pulled to Carson City on the Old Road, so that was fun. We went to Gardnerville. It was a crazy circumference around there. They were the first ones all around and they're still very well known for what they did.

Barber: We have a lot of oral histories in our collection that mention houses being moved by the Bevilacqua family.

Hobson: My grandfather designed a system that was called the *bosta* system because there was a beam in the front. It was a triangle system. The first ones had steel wheels that were about fourteen inches wide, and they were all steel-spoked. He would balance this thing in a triangular way and then the rear ones would steer together. You put a plank between them on the tongue so that the front wheels of the rear dollies would steer, and then the front one would steer and it was hooked up to the truck. You could spin a house on its own diameter.

Barber: You mentioned 505 Montello. Was that his house? Did he have a separate office?

Hobson: No. He worked right out of his house. It was a duplex, and there was always one of my uncles living next door.

Barber: In another house that the family owned?

Hobson: Yes, because the whole house-moving part was in the backyard. He had garages where he could maintain everything. I think that's where I got a lot of my mechanical ability, because they'd turn me loose in there. I couldn't touch a lathe or the welder, but I could use any other tool I wanted. They were Italian, so we had a lot of stuff to work with. I was always making something. I was always doing something back there. My grandmother, Gemma Costa, and mom were very artistic. They were real talented people.

Barber: Did your father work in the business too?

Hobson: No. My father was the Welsh side of me. He was born in Homer, Illinois. They moved out here in the early 1900s and settled in Corning, California. My father was going to college at Berkeley to be a doctor, and his father passed away, so that ended that. Then, my father worked with the U.S.G.S. There's a book called *The Three Iron Men in the U.S.G.S.* He and some fellows by the name of Smokey Moore and Scott Peterson did all the trinities here. They rode on horseback, and wrote a book about them because they figured a way to do the triangulations and set all the topography on it. They did it in record time.

Barber: That's a kind of surveying, trinity?

Hobson: Yes. That's how you calculate elevations and find the mountain—like you see drawn now, you see the elevations. They used what they called an *alidade*. I got my dad's original alidade. The U.S.G.S. gave it to him, so I had it restored. They would set it up on a table with a rod, and they'd go out and do this work. One guy would stay on one side of the valley, and the other would go over to the other side.

It was before the survey equipment they have now. You'd set the alidade up on a table and level it. It had power to it, and they'd run a rod on the other side. Then you

would calculate elevations with it. Basically, it made a topographical map of the area. They were the first one in the trinities to do that. Smokey Moore ended up being the head geologist for the U.S.G.S.

Barber: When did your father move to this area?

Hobson: He came here in 1939 or 1940. When he first came here, he worked at the Palace Club with Sil Petricciani and Sil Petricciani's father. Sil just passed away.

Barber: I saw his obituary just this weekend.

Hobson: Yes. Silvio's sister, Marietta, was married to my uncle, Pick Hobson. I know that family pretty well.

Then the war started happening. My uncle went in the military. My dad couldn't go in the military because his whole shoulder was basically pulled off of his arm from playing football. So he went to Hawthorne, Nevada. He and a guy by the name of Harry started Harry's Club in Hawthorne, Nevada.

Barber: What was your father's name?

Hobson: My father's name was Joseph or Joe. They started Harry's Club there, and they cashed the payroll for what was the largest Navy ammunition dump in the world at that time.

At that time, there was no bank in Hawthorne, so my mother would come to Reno. She was lucky because she had a Buick. She would bring my brother, who was four years older than I, and our chow-chow, into Reno to cash the checks in order to maintain the business.

Barber: That could have been some large quantities of cash.

Hobson: There were some pretty good quantities. She would drive to Reno and get the cash, they'd go down to 505 Montello Street, park the car, leave the cash in the car, and spend the night. Then, they'd get up in the morning and drive back to Hawthorne to maintain this.

Barber: It seems like a bit of a leap for your father to have gone from surveying to working in the Palace Club. How did that happen?

Hobson: In between that, he got out of surveying and he and my uncle came to Reno because there was work here for Topaz Trucking Company. Topaz Trucking Company is the company that moved the concentrates from Virginia City down Geiger Grade.

Barber: That's concentrates for mining?

Hobson: That's gold and silver concentrates. The trucks were so old—Geiger Grade is pretty steep grade—and you would hit the flats up there about four miles outside of

Virginia City. They would tie a log on a chain on the back of the truck so that it would drag the log down the road and slow them down. Then, when they got down to the bottom, they'd take the logs off. So there was a pile there, and I guess they moved them back and forth. That was their brakes. [laughter]

Barber: So he worked for the trucking company for a while?

Hobson: He worked for Topaz, yes. Then, they got into working at the Palace Club. My Uncle Pick also worked there, and that's where he met and married Marietta. He worked at the Palace Club first, then he ended up going to Hawthorne and working there. In about 1940, they came to Reno and my father bought some property on Virginia Street. They built the Frontier Club there. The Frontier is basically the north half of the original Harrah's that's on Virginia Street. They had Bingo there for a while. Then they got into Keno and table games.

They moved Virgil Smith, who you may or may not interview. They worked the slot machines together in there.

Barber: Let me back up just to link these two sides together. Can you tell me your mother's name and how your parents met?

Hobson: My mother's name was Thelma Bevilacqua, and she worked here at Grey Reid's. I don't know exactly how they met. I imagine it was probably through Petricciani. I know my mom said she ran him off a number of times. She would get off work, and he was always there. They decided it was a match, so they got married before the war. My brother was born in 1939.

Barber: Is your brother your only sibling?

Hobson: Yes. He died at thirty-one in an automobile wreck. He crashed a car coming off of Virginia City right by Silver City in what they called the "Devil's Gate." He was pretty wild, though. He was pretty notorious around town—he was known for a lot of things. [laughter]

Barber: Can you describe your father?

Hobson: My father was a real gentleman and very true to his word. He was a very intelligent person. He would do mathematics in his head. I'm a lot like that because I'm always jumping around with things to do.

He was always getting involved in different businesses. We had property in a lot of places that didn't pan out for oil wells. He was there when Charlie Steen made his discovery in Moab. My dad was up there with some sections of land, also. They just didn't have anything on the land. He knew Charlie very well—he knew him when the family was living in a one-room cabin up there with all four boys.

He wanted to be a doctor and he should have been. He could read a book by just turning the pages, and then recall it. You'd tell him, "Page thirty-one, second paragraph," and he would read it to you.

Barber: So he had a photographic memory?

Hobson: Yes, not mechanical at all. He couldn't do that, but he was always playing with different businesses, land, and ranches. We've owned ranches and property all over this area.

After we moved to Arlington Avenue, they began building the ranch house, so I moved to 245 Bonnie Briar, and 240 Bonnie Briar was one of the El Reno apartment houses that my grandfather moved all over town.

I lived there for two years, and then we moved out to Timothy Lane. We had a ten-acre ranch out there. After Timothy Lane, when I started college, we moved out to Washoe Valley and I grew up on my family's ranch called the San Antone Ranch. San Antone was 5,000 acres.

Barber: Where was that located? Is it still open land?

Hobson: If you take Franktown Road, when you get to the end you start curving around. If you look off to the left there, you'll see a little point of trees and it looks like a small home there. Well, the small home is really not a small home; it's huge. We had twelve bedrooms on the hill, with two guest houses and this immense house. It had an Olympic swimming pool and ten acres of lawn. It had orchards and fish ponds. It was completely self-sustaining.

It was built by a Frenchman at the time of the war. It went from the Frenchman to another old gaming name you'll hear, Jim McKay. Jim McKay was a very good friend of my father's, so we bought the ranch from him. All through my high school years and start of college, I'd come back home to that. That was my summer home.

We went all the way to Washoe Lake. Where the golf course is sitting now was really part of the San Antone Ranch, and then the Lightning W bought it. My dad always sold stuff a little bit early. It's where all those nice homes are up there.

It was controversial, but supposedly one of the oldest schoolhouses in Nevada was on the property there. I've still got the school bell from it.

Barber: So your parents lived there for quite some time before they sold it?

Hobson: Yes. We sold it because of my mom, but we should have kept it and developed it because it's major estates. My mom would drive into Reno every day to see her mom. At that time, that was quite a drive.

They believed that a Frenchman built the house and the estate. We had walk-in ice boxes on the property and there were other houses. When you shut the gates it basically became a dynasty. When we moved in the house, it had a lot of Navajo rugs, but it also had all of this German stuff. I had a table that had German werewolves on the end with the swastikas in it. I still have some of the jewelry that came out of there. The kitchen was huge, and there was a staircase that went up over the kitchen, and up above it was a cedar room. In the cedar room, there was also a shortwave radio and it was all German. I still have those.

They believe the Frenchman was watching Hawthorne ammunition dump, and

was basically a spy. His idea was the Germans were coming and he could be completely self-sustaining. The property had huge greenhouses. It's something to see. It's something to really investigate. I'd like to know myself.

Barber: What ended up happening to him?

Hobson: Well, he ended up dying. Then, Jim McKay got it, and I don't even think he had it for a year before we bought it. My dad fell in love with it and we moved out there.

Barber: Did they enjoy ranch life?

Hobson: Yes, my dad and my uncle both did. My father owned two ranches outside of Elko, Nevada. He shouldn't have sold them when he sold did. They're in a little town called Lamoille, and they're now called Spring Creek. It's a resort area today. I used to go up there and buck bales with him in the summer and go fishing out of the old ranch house. It was just a working ranch.

Barber: When you were growing up, you really had experiences in city life and out in the country working on ranches.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Talk to me a little bit more about this neighborhood that your Grandfather Bevilacqua lived in, around Fourth Street. Was it an Italian community?

Hobson: This was a real Italian community. There were a lot of brick homes. There was a lot of Italian life. There was the Reno Brewing Company. The Hook family was very involved in the Reno Brewing Company and lived right up the street. I'm trying to think of what Italian name wasn't here; they were all here. A lot of them were concentrated around where the Ramada is today, but it was the Holiday Inn before. Reno then came through and did what they call urban renewal.

You know, Fourth Street is the old Lincoln Highway. It used to be a real fun street. There were small businesses. The motels were always busy with people traveling through, because Highway 40 came through here. That was the main thoroughfare, so most of the motels and some little restaurants around here were always busy. I believe that Johnny's Italian Restaurant—which is up on West Fourth Street now—used to be down here. They called it Johnny's Little Italy at that time.

Barber: You mentioned a place to me called the Subway.

Hobson: The Subway bar, yes. That was on Wells Avenue before the overpass. It went over the Truckee and the train was above it. There was a tunnel that went underneath it, and the Subway bar was right there. The Subway bar was an Italian bar, and it had bocce courts on the side of it. We'd come down here on Sundays with my grandfather and I'd play bocce with him with most of the Italian kids and everybody. I was the only little blond Italian that was running around. [laughs]

Barber: So, there were a lot of Italian homes and a lot of Italian businesses.

Hobson: Yes. They were neat homes. Most of the Italians were pretty proud of all their homes. My grandfather had property on what would be Fifth and Quincy now, which is in the dead center of where the Ramada sits. There was a little market there that he rented out. He had some rentals there and some homes. My Uncle Romolo ended up living with my grandparents in that duplex. My Uncle Aldo lived on the corner of Quincy and Fifth, on the north side.

Barber: Were there a number of small commercial buildings in that area as well, or was it mostly residential?

Hobson: It was all mostly residential up there and here on Fourth Street. On the corner of Montello and East Fourth Street here, there was another little convenience store that was here. Then, if you go across the street, on the east side of that, there was a Dairy Queen type of building. My grandfather built that. It ended up being a Dairy Queen-type place for a while, and then it ended up being a drive-up liquor store for a while.

It's on Fourth. It's still there; the little building is still sitting on the corner. It sits on the northeast corner of Montello and Fourth Street, right across from Ernie's.

Barber: In one of the newspapers I saw reports of a Mrs. Ginocchio who was protesting that her house was going to be demolished in the urban renewal project. Did you know the Ginocchios?

Hobson: Yes. There were some beautiful real granite rock homes here. As you know, most Italians use brick or stone when they build. That was the Ginocchio family's forte. Then, in the later 1950s, the black community started down here. So, we had the Poor Butterfly across the street from us on Montello. The Poor Butterfly was a business that would do cleanup. If you needed junk removed, they would haul stuff away from your house. They'd clean the stuff up, and sometimes they'd sell it. They were very nice people.

Barber: Do you know who ran that?

Hobson: I can't remember. Of course, Montello Street and Fifth Street were dirt at that time, and there were little lights hanging out over the streets. I can remember when they put the sewage in down there. We would play hide-and-seek, and they would have what they called oil lamps burning. They were round. They called them smudge pots. They'd have smudge pots burning down there so you could tell where the hole was so you didn't drive in it. We'd sneak down there and run up and down through where all the sewage was going in and we had fun with that.

Then, right next to my grandparents' home, there was a home owned by Mrs. Davis. She owned a whole little section there, and there were some little rentable units. I guess you'd call them mini-apartments. It had about four or five units with people living in it. Later, Luther Mack lived right next door to us.

Barber: Did any of those apartments cater to the divorce trade at all, or were they just for residents?

Hobson: Most of those were for residents. Most of the divorce trade was based out in southwest Reno, but these were out on the southeast corner of Fifth and Quincy Street. There was a woman there by the name of Mrs. Orange. She was a black lady, and she was like the lady on Aunt Jemima pancakes. She was number one. When I'd have a birthday, Mrs. Orange always had something going for me up there.

She had a couple of little units in the back. When the first black entertainers came to Reno—and we're talking Sammy Davis [Jr.]—they couldn't stay downtown Reno, so they would stay at Mrs. Orange's place. Then, later Bill Harrah built that place on Mt. Rose and the entertainers would stay there.

Barber: He built a house on Mt. Rose?

Hobson: Yes. It's on Mt. Rose. When you first start up the hill, there's nothing on the right-hand side to turn into. You turn in and go around the lake that's there, and, you'll see this real nice 1960s-era home that Bill Harrah built for the entertainers. All of the entertainers that he took care of spent time there.

Barber: This was really quite a vibrant neighborhood where your grandfather lived, with a lot of businesses and families, mostly black and Italian, it sounded like.

Hobson: Yes, and there were little grocery stores. My grandfather owned property on Montello and Fourth Street—the first little building that you see on the northeast corner there—they did ice cream in there. It was a drive-up—not a Frost Top, but it was like a Dairy Queen. He also built the building next door. You can still see it. It says “Bevilacqua.”

I'm trying to remember what was first in there. I remember helping build it—everybody in the family helped build everything around town. That's what we did in the winter or in the spring; we would build homes for the family. We'd end up either mixing the cement or doing other stuff to help.

Barber: So he built it to lease out to other people?

Hobson: He built it and leased it out. It was two stories. Of course, it had a full basement, because all the Italians have full basements. If it's an Italian house, 90 percent of them have full basements because it's the cheapest thing you could build in a house at that time. It was all about family. They used the basement a lot of the time for aging salami and wine. That's the reason those were in there.

Barber: Do you remember a lot of that happening in your household—a lot of eating, making wine, Italian food?

Hobson: We would always do wine. When we had the house on Arlington, it had two

apartments and an older garage in the back. I remember deer hunting and deer salami. We had a lot of family that was down in the Modesto area, so they'd come up. There would be wine and all these fun things going on. It was always a party. That's what it was for. My grandmother was a very good cook, and we'd have the whole family meet down on Montello Street on Sundays. I grew up with all my cousins and all the family. There was always a barbecue, especially in the summer, and just fun things going on.

In the summer, we'd go to Franktown Road where you go out on the old [U.S.] 40 there. There's Bower's Mansion. At Bower's Mansion, there was always a big Italian fest. It would just fill up—everybody would be there. Kids would go swimming and hike the mountain. We grew up that way. It was a real tight community.

Reno was small. Reno had Reno High, Manogue, and Sparks when I grew up, as far as high schools. B.D. Billingshurst was a junior high. Central was almost done, which was right up where the bowling stadium is today. Then, there were Southside and Northside junior high schools. You went through to seventh or eighth grade in grade school, went to junior high for two years, and then went to high school.

They started phasing B.D. Billingshurst, which is on Plumas. I believe Southside is the school on the corner of Liberty and Sinclair.

Barber: Right, that's the Annex Building. I want to go back. You mentioned that some of those areas around Fourth Street were targeted for urban renewal. It looks to me like the urban renewal area started between Fourth and Fifth Streets going up to Sixth Street and then was east and westbound between Wells Avenue and Sage Street. This was in the early 1960s. Can you talk a little more about that?

Hobson: I was young; it was in the 1950s. The idea was they were going to improve Fourth Street. All that property ended up vacant because they did the urban renewal project and took it all over. That was the original spot where the convention center was supposed to be.

Barber: We're talking about where the Ramada Inn is now?

Hobson: No. Up the street from that, because there was no Wells Avenue overpass at that time. If you look up there, you'll see all kinds of vacant land and some newer tilt-up warehouses. They were going to build the convention center there, and so John Hammond built the Holiday Inn in that area because it was supposed to be the gateway to the convention center.

My father obtained this piece of property [the Reno Brewery bottling plant] in 1956. I can't remember the exact dates, but he bought it because he was looking at building a casino here to link in with the convention center.

Urban renewal came in, and the intent at that time was to put the convention center here. So, they came in here and took all the old Italian community out, and just kind of said, "Here's going to be Reno's convention center. All at once, we're going to have all these things going on here." They came in and took it over and tore all the houses down.

That's when Hammond came in, and built the Holiday Inn where the Ramada is now because he was planning on being right next door to the convention center.

Hammond is the guy who owns all of the Holiday Inns and is a very wealthy person. Now he's in Florida and builds all the ones with the golf courses. He's one of the biggest Holiday Inn owners in the world.

All at once something happened with the plans for the convention center and some politics. Norman Biltz and Virgil Smith ended up getting the convention center moved out to South Virginia and leasing it—I don't know if it was all of it or just part of it—to the city of Reno for the convention center. It was still a very small operation at that time.

When you went down South Virginia Street at that time, Reno ended at Moana. Things started picking up outside of there. On the corner there was the Big Hat, which was in the brick building that's an Italian place now. It sits on the southwest corner of Moana and Virginia Street. It's called La Vecchia now, but it was called the Big Hat. It had a big neon hat sign. Then, there was the Golden Road restaurant, and there was a motel in the back of it. It was a lot like the Peppermill. I believe it was Hill & Sons motel that sat off the road there. It was a little place, and the property across the street was also owned by them.

Norman Biltz owned the Golden Road, which was out on South Virginia Street. I believe they also owned the property where the convention center is. They talked the city of Reno into leasing the property and building the convention center out there, instead of in the Fourth Street area. Today, that's the Atlantis. I don't know if you notice there's a walkway now that goes over right into the convention center. I believe Farahi still owns that property. That's why there's a walkway from the Atlantis to the convention center. They just kind of turned their back on Reno and went out to the most undesirable place to put a convention center in the city of Reno. It was just one of those tactics.

It just kind of shut down everything on Fourth Street. Fourth Street had big plans because the convention center was going to be there. The motels could handle it—everything could handle what was going to go on. There was no Eldorado; there was no Silver Legacy; there was no Circus Circus. All gaming was on the south side of the tracks.

Barber: If they had intended targeting this area around Fourth Street for urban renewal, for a convention center, but then that didn't happen, did they still end up demolishing a lot of houses?

Hobson: They had cleaned all the houses out. They went in and took them all down with the rumors of the convention center. Then they walked away from it. They just threw their hands up and it sat for years with nothing going on.

Barber: Do you know of anyone personally whose home was in that area, whose house was lost due to the urban renewal project?

Hobson: My grandfather owned a little corner store and everything that was on the corner here. Quincy and Fifth Street is right where the hotel sits, and my grandfather had property across the street.

My uncle lived there, and also a fellow by the name of Joe Mazeo left there. Joe Mazeo was a piano player, and he played either at the Mapes or at the Riverside. I took

piano [lessons] from him.

I'm trying to remember the Italian family that had really a beautiful old home right next door. It was all made out of squared granite block, and they just went through and basically took it out of there. Some of the people really didn't want to move; they were older Italians. Then, there was Mrs. Davis. Mrs. Davis lived behind my grandfather, and they took all of that property out.

Barber: Was she Italian?

Hobson: She was related, yes.

Barber: That house you were just describing was in very good condition and part of the idea for urban renewal was that you were clearing out slums—that you were cleaning out private properties that were blighted in some way. So, in your memory, was this a blighted area?

Hobson: No. It wasn't a blighted area. I think, at that time, you would call it middle-to-lower income, but the people that had the houses here...most of them were in pretty good condition.

Right across the street from my grandparents there was the Poor Butterfly, which was a cleanup company. It was a black family that was there. They were really neat people. Mrs. Orange lived there. She had some really neat little homes. It's nothing like it is today. At that time, people took care of their lawns; they took care of things. A lot of units were lower-income, I guess you could say, but the people took care of their property. It wasn't anything like what you see there today. So that's what we've got to improve.

Barber: Was your grandfather's house at 505 Montello part of this urban renewal project? Did it get demolished?

Hobson: No. My dad found out that, through the urban renewal, they had to match any offer for anything that was coming in if there was another offer on it. They used some politics there because we didn't want my grandfather to move. He was getting older and he did not need to move at that time. So, my dad put a big offer in on the property and they couldn't match it, and that's why it's the only house that you see. There's only one home that's all the way up, now it's on Sixth Street. But if you look up there, there's only one home that's there on the corner of 505 Montello Street, and that was his yard. Anyway, it didn't get wiped out. Everything around it got wiped out, everything.

The house is still there. Now they went in and made it more commercial. The people who bought it stuccoed it and it was a little duplex. They had Italian parties in it about every Sunday during the summer.

Barber: You said that the city had to give the homeowners the value of their home. They had to pay them?

Hobson: Yes. They went through, and I don't know what kind of appraisal they did, but I

don't know if it was what you'd call fair compensation. I'm not aware. I know they didn't match at least the value on my grandfather's piece.

Barber: In your recollection, did those families who lived there stay in Reno and just move somewhere else?

Hobson: Yes. Most of them moved around—my grandparents and the next-door neighbor on the west of them. The last tenant in there was the Luther Mack family. Luther Mack grew up right next door there.

Barber: So they moved to another part of town?

Hobson: Well, Luther Mack, yes. When you take an old community and tear all the houses and residential out of it and leave it all barren, people start moving. Of course, they compensated them, but then they turned around and walked away from the project.

Barber: When the urban renewal project actually started demolishing houses, did that happen all at once?

Hobson: Yes. It was massive. I was away at college when that went through. I think they did that in 1965. I was going to school down on the coast and I know when I came back, there were a lot of things going on. I was doing a lot of other things, and so I guess I kind of ignored what was going on, probably because I wanted to. I didn't like seeing what was going on with this area.

Barber: They must have rezoned that whole area commercial. Then it just became open to private development?

Hobson: Well, yes. They started selling some of it off, and they got the clinic that's on the corner of Wells and Sixth Street now. Some of the warehouses were put there, and some of them became distributors. There were liquor distributors up there because they figured they could be closer to downtown.

Barber: So just private business, then.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: How did that change the area? It was still an area that was very vibrant and rich as a community with residences. Is that what changed?

Hobson: Well, the residents all moved out and got new locations, and we just sat here with nothing going on. Next, they got the fed money to do U.S. 80. So U.S. 80 started and, all at once, Fourth Street wasn't vibrant anymore because it was the old U.S. 40.

When 80 went in, that also divided the homes that were around here. Where the fairgrounds were, there was low-income housing at that time, but the residents were working people and everybody really liked it. When they put U.S. 80 in and cut Reno in

half, they didn't do Reno any favors.

Barber: You remember houses being all the way north where the freeway is now? Did those all get demolished?

Hobson: Oh, yes. There was a little grocery store on the corner of Quincy and Fifth Street. We had baseball fields here for kids, and, yes, it was really nice. There was a kid in the Air Guard who had another hall here. They'd have a lot of people come down and they would have special events going on at the hall.

At that time, it was Sixth and Quincy. You came down Sixth Street, and at Quincy you would turn left and then you would turn right again, and you'd go into this little area.

"Swede" Matheson owned the area.

Swede had this little place down there, and there were a lot of Italian things that went on there also. A lot of things also went on at Laughton Hot Springs here in Reno for the Italians. That's when Fourth Street was very vibrant.

Barber: Was the area that Swede Matheson operated actually demolished for I-80?

Hobson: Yes. When you go underneath there, if you look to the right, there's some kind of a goods store there. He was right about there. You can see across the street there are still some of the brick homes the Italians owned.

Barber: When I-80 was going to go in, do you remember discussions within your family, within the neighborhood, or within the community that were protesting that location? Was it a big public controversy?

Hobson: No, because urban renewal had already come through and cleaned out most of everything. It was basically, "This is what we're doing," and they just did it. They moved the baseball park, Governor's Park, right alongside of I-80.

As you can see, everything changed across the street. RTC is down there now, and there was a fellow who had a warehouse that was just up the street in the space where RTC is now. That's on Sixth and Sutro streets. It sits over on the northeast side where RTC does their bus maintenance. That's still in there; I'm sure it is.

Barber: What do you recall personally about when the interstate was completed? It was completed through Reno in 1974, and clearly that would have been many years in the making. Do you recall that time?

Hobson: I remember it going on, but I was living in the southwest part of Reno. Even if I went down to see my grandfather, I was still going out about two blocks away from him. I do remember not being able to go through Montello Street anymore. A lot of those things were going on, but you just kind of stay away from construction areas. It's like when McCarran went the ring route and there was controversy on doing the ring route around here. There were a lot of things going on at that time.

Barber: I would imagine that the Fourth Street changed enormously once the interstate

was done.

Hobson: Once urban renewal came, Fourth Street just started dying, as you can see.

Barber: Do you think it started changing immediately?

Hobson: Yes. You could see things going on here. West Fourth Street had a better survival because there were still residents, homes, and businesses there. Down here [on East Fourth Street], things just really started tapering off. People don't migrate to dirt. That's what happened down here. Once U.S. 80 was put in, I don't think it was very long before Ernie's Truck Stop went down. Ernie's Truck Stop was right on the corner of Montello and Fourth Street.

Barber: That was a very thriving stop?

Hobson: Oh, it was real thriving. He had a great stop there. It was a lot of fun. Well, then they started building truck stops outside of town. On West Fourth Street, just on the other side of Keystone, there was McKinnon and Hubbard's Richfield truck stop. I worked there for a couple of summers filling trucks up, and it was real thriving. There were a lot of trucks in there. Then, all at once, 80 was just a bypass to get by and truck stops started showing up, and so they'd pull off the freeway there instead.

Barber: Was that one of the first types of businesses to suffer from relocation with the interstate?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Do you recall other businesses suffering pretty quickly, too?

Hobson: A lot of people don't know it, but next to McKinnon Hubbard, there was a roller skating rink. I forget the construction company that's in there now, but there was roller skating before.

All the little motels and everything started dying off, and, of course, during that time downtown started to get major hotels and casinos.

Barber: In the 1970s you had the MGM Grand going in, and then a lot of construction downtown to make a lot of the existing ones bigger.

Hobson: The little motels here just started dying off.

Barber: A lot of these motels do date from before Interstate 80 went in—the ones that are still there.

Hobson: Oh, yes. They were there in the 1940s and 1950s.

Barber: They must have a very different clientele now. Do you remember when that

really started to happen? Now, the majority of them are weekly rentals. Did that happen pretty quickly?

Hobson: I think it just kept tapering off, and the casinos made rooms more affordable than motels. Everybody was into seeing the flash of what was going on at that time. So, these started dying off. I'm glad to see that back East the Lincoln Highway is really catching on.

Barber: Is this redevelopment of the Lincoln Highway that you're talking about?

Hobson: Well, they're restoring them. There are people and families now who are taking the old highways—like the original Lincoln Highway, which was a bunch of different numbers and highways—and they're restoring the motels and old restaurants along them. People are taking those now instead of the freeway because, at 65 miles an hour, you don't get to see any of America anymore.

The old motels are filling up with people now. We don't have that big of a movement here, and I don't know how to really get it moving, but that's what should be done here before it isn't too late. We have a real little piece of gold in the motels and their deco. I mean, they were pretty fancy in their time.

Barber: Let's go back a little bit. As you were growing up, you would help out your dad and your uncle in some of their casino properties, right? They had the Cosmo Club and the Frontier?

Hobson: Yes. They had the Frontier Club. The only thing I did in the Frontier Club was I was small enough so I could get between the slot machines and take a coat hanger, and make a pretty good income. [laughs]

Barber: This was without your family knowing?

Hobson: No. They gave me the coat hanger. The casino business was pretty cool at that time. It was all family. It was real gamblers in Reno at that time. There were no big-business gamblers. These guys were real gamblers at the time before Harrah's sold. Once Harrah's sold, the whole gaming industry became more corporate.

Barber: So you remember it being a real family business industry.

Hobson: Oh, yes. It was fun.

Barber: Were you getting coins that had dropped on the floor or were you actually getting into the machines?

Hobson: No, no, just dropped quarters. The machines were set up on these little stands so things would roll around. I'd go in there and dig the money out.

Barber: Did they not patrol too much about having kids in there, or was this after-hours

that you would go in?

Hobson: Well, there was no after-hours. You were open twenty-four hours. I'd go in there, though. I'd go down and see my dad. I'd go run around in there. Big money to me was a buck or a buck and a half then. I made a fortune at that time. [laughs]

Barber: They had the Frontier for about ten years or so, didn't they?

Hobson: Yes. Then the Frontier Club sold, and my father bought this and then they got involved in the Overland Casino, which was on the corner of Center and Commercial Row. Across the street from it was the Palace Club; catty-corner to it was the Golden; south of the property was the Greyhound bus depot; on the other side of that was Parker's Western Wear. That was basically what was in there.

There was a drugstore on the corner of Second and Center, and then Bill Harrah started Bingo there. The rest was the Golden that the Tomerlin brothers started. Then, Sil Petricciani and his family had that gaming. As things went on, the family kept getting the Commercial Row property. There was the Depot Bar and a pawn shop there at that time. The Depot Bar was right about dead center.

When you walked out of the depot, you walked right into the Depot Bar. Down on the end was the Cosmo Club. That area at that time...when you went on Commercial Row, when you went east of the Overland, they were considered derelicts down in there. A lot of the blacks would go to the Cosmo. Bill Fong had Bill Fong's New China Club there. The Santa Fe was there as well. This is the Lake Street area, and where the hotels are that burnt down about two or three years ago—the Mizpah and those.

Barber: So, just one street over was considered a very different kind of character?

Hobson: Yes, there were all these rumors. They said at the bottom of Bill Fong's there were opium dens. I never saw them, so I don't know. I know there were walkways that went underneath the trains, but I don't remember any of those.

There was a little building called the Flyer Building or the American Flyer, where Bill Harrah started his collection of cars. He used to park them down there. He would keep the maintenance on all his trucks, because they were meticulous. I don't know if you ever heard about him doing that, but they never left here. If it was snowing and they were here, they were washed and sent back up to the lake, and if they got up to the lake and it was snowing, they were washed and sent back down here. They all had whitewall tires on them, and they were painted light turquoise. They all had "Harrah's" on them. If he found them dirty and he was going up or down to the lake, heads rolled. He was very meticulous with his actions.

Barber: Once you got older and moved on from scrounging for coins under the slot machines, you started to get a bit more involved with these casino properties.

Hobson: Well, then I went away to high school. So, that was in the era when things were changing—from 1956 to 1961.

What was changing?

Hobson: What my family was doing. They were looking into ranches and my dad was playing with his oil wells and stuff that didn't pan out. He was doing that, and I was away at high school.

I came back home and still worked with my grandfather. I moved houses up until about 1960. Then, I turned sixteen and got my first car, and I ran the elevators at the Overland.

Barber: They had a person who was always in the elevator to run the elevators?

Hobson: You ran the elevator.

Barber: Oh, you actually physically ran it?

Hobson: Oh, yes. It was physical. You ran it with the old controller. Larry Fix, who's a federal judge here now in town, got his first job there, and other friends of mine.

It was a good job. It was fun. You would take people up to their room and you always got tokes. The wages weren't really heavy, but you got to work different shifts, so everybody had some time. You'd work graveyard shift, night shift, or day shift. In the night shift, you would go up for insurance. They had a round clock in a leather bag, and it had a little receptor. You'd start up at the penthouse at the top, where my grandmother lived.

Barber: Which grandmother was this?

Hobson: My grandmother on my father's side. Her name was Rachel Spencer Hobson; that's where the Spencer comes from.

She lived in the penthouse, because her husband died. My dad's father died when my dad was seventeen, so she was a widow all that time. Everybody took real good care of her. She was another great cook.

Especially if I was working night shift, I would hear the buzzer go off to go up to the penthouse. I'd run up to the top of the penthouse and open up the door, and there was always a stool sitting there with a glass of milk and homemade cookies. [laughter]

Barber: You were telling me about this clock.

Hobson: Yes, the clock was a leather clock and there was a timer-type device and you put a round piece of thin paper in it. You would go up to all of the exits. You'd walk all the hallways that were up there, and when you got to the end where the exit was, you'd stick paper in there and it would punch the paper for you. They called it punching clock.

You'd go down through all the floors there and do it all. That was a record for the insurance company for security and if it wasn't punched, you'd get in trouble. I think we had to do that every couple of hours.

Barber: Was there something mechanical on the actual wall on these different floors?

Hobson: I think what happened was the clock rotated around and it had a set of punches in it. When you pulled up this little lever and put the paper in there, you'd activate the punches and they would punch, and the paper would rotate around through this thing. So when it punched it, you could see the time. It had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and on each floor it would punch the time and location. I have the clock.

Barber: So you ran the elevator and then you performed those checks.

Hobson: We'd perform those checks. My aunt was the bookkeeper there.

Barber: What was her name?

Hobson: Her name was Mabel O'Brien. She was married to Jim O'Brien, a famous pilot around here.

Barber: That was your father's sister?

Hobson: That was my father's sister, yes. At that time, they lived on Lakeside and Moana. My uncle had a ranch back there. My aunt lived in the front house and my uncle lived in a little house clear up a dirt road. We had horses. There's a medical unit on the corner of Baron Lane and Lakeside now. There's a medical brick building there, and my uncle built that house. Reno ended at Moana Lane. It was all dirt after that.

Barber: *So you look around Reno now and you see your family history everywhere on the landscape?*

Hobson: Yes. There's property on every corner that my family has had. Topaz Lodge was my family's. I can go around this town. I wish there had been more Italian on that side, because they would have never sold any of it. [laughs]

Barber: Clarence Thornton was interviewed by our program in 1982, and he said that the Salvation Army had a soup kitchen on East Fourth Street, and the building belonged to A. Bevilacqua.

Hobson: Yes, they did. There was a Salvation Army soup kitchen. That is the building that you'll see on the north side of the street right there.

Barber: What's the cross street of that?

Hobson: That's Montello Street.

Barber: Oh, okay. So A. Bevilacqua was your—

Hobson: My grandfather, Antonio.

Barber: Thornton was interviewed in 1982, and said the building was still there. It's an auto parts place now, or was in 1982.

Hobson: Yes, and now I don't know what it is. When my grandfather moved houses, he knew all the police and everybody at the courthouse because he got his permits at the courthouse.

Around the house, everything was Italian. I didn't learn to speak Italian because it was during the war, and after the war it wasn't proper to teach kids Italian; they had to learn English.

Anyhow, my grandfather would go in the courthouse and he'd get a little bit excited. When he got excited he didn't know whether he was speaking English or Italian. He'd go "tut, tut, tut," like this. So his nickname at the courthouse and everywhere was Grandpa Tut Tut. [laughs]

Barber: Your father bought this brewery building [the Reno Brewery bottling plant] right after the brewery went out of business, and you said he was intending to build a casino here.

Hobson: Yes. I'm trying to remember what exactly went on with the whole transaction part of the property, because I was away at school. I know that Redfield came here and completely redid the well on the property.

Barber: Is that Lavere Redfield?

Hobson: Yes, That is Lavere Redfield. He completely redid the casing and everything was put in new. The first well was in 1903, and it was all rebuilt.

Barber: He rebuilt it while it was still the Reno Brewery?

Hobson: Yes. It was still the Reno Brewery. In the 1950s, the Reno Brewing Company was the largest distributor of beer in the State of Nevada. They distributed Sierra Beer, One Sound State, and Malt Rose. There are pictures you can see where they had their 1953, 1954 Chevy delivery trucks. They would deliver all over Reno.

Well, the lobbyists, influenced by some of the bigger brewing companies, had a law passed in the State of Nevada that, as a brewery, you could not distribute your own beer. So, once Sierra Beer and Reno Brewing Company had to go to a distributor, the beer basically sat on the shelf and Coors, Budweiser, and Pabst were all at once distributed to the casinos.

Barber: Because they didn't distribute their own beer, they couldn't get it into the market? Is that what happened?

Hobson: I think basically what happened was it went into the distributors and the big boys said, "You want to distribute Sierra Beer or do you want to distribute...?"

Barber: Then it becomes the distributor's decision.

Hobson: It just sat on the shelf, because the Frontier Club was the largest single identity of Sierra Beer in the State of Nevada. The Hook family lived right by my grandparents. We knew the Hook family and everybody that was involved in it. So, once that went down, my dad bought it. The only reason the big building came down is because they had already partially started taking it down.

Barber: That was the building where the offices were that was right here on the side?

Hobson: Yes. The big actual brewery was here. The building that stands now as the DeLongchamps Building was built in 1940 and it was the bottling and distributing building for the beer.

Barber: The well is on what's now the empty lot, where the actual brewery was?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: So Redfield made those improvements, but then the business failed.

Hobson: Yes. They failed, so Redfield backed out of it. There were even rumors—I saw a clip from the paper someplace and verified—Lavere had some problems with the government at that time. They came in and he went to jail. He had a ticker tape in there. He had a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. They said that he was probably looking for a way to launder money through the brewery, which I don't think was true, but that's one of the old fables.

Barber: So your father bought the building from the Hook family?

Hobson: Yes. In the transaction, there were two different families involved—German people, and I can't remember the other ones. My dad bought that from them. That was this piece of property here on Spokane, and it was the main piece of property that's over on Fourth Street. That was an L-shaped piece of property.

Barber: Do you remember, when you got back from school or when you came back to Reno, what this property was like then?

Hobson: Yes. There was nothing back here. There was an old building sitting here, and it was full of cases of empty Sierra bottles and all the labels.

Barber: We're in a building that was constructed in the 1970s right here on Spokane.

Hobson: Yes. There's another old brick building that had a loading dock. I can remember it vaguely because I was running the elevator at the Overland, and when I had time off, I went to Lake Tahoe. [laughs]

I remember this being all vacant here. I remember that "Tank" Smith, who was a mayor here, had a concrete company and rented the bottling plant building for quite a few

years.

In fact, there was a stoplight put in on the corner of Morrill and Fourth Street because of Tank and all the things that were going on. Morrill Street went across the railroad tracks then and went down to Sutro Street or along the river; Sutro Street never went over the river, anyhow. The closest thing was Wells Avenue if you wanted to get over the river or you had to drive all the way down to Kietzke, further east.

Barber: When do you remember being around Fourth Street and getting more involved in it again? How long did your parents own this property? Did they decide to develop it or were they just going to lease it?

Hobson: He just kept it leased out and had some different businesses in there. Tank Smith moved out in the early 1960s. Then the building went vacant for a while, so I came down here and started building cars over in the big building.

Some of the floats for the University of Nevada were built over there. It was a big beer bust in there. Keggers flew very easy and it was a lot of fun.

Barber: Because you're pretty close to the university here, so it was pretty convenient.

Hobson: Well, it was a big building and they could build a float in there. I believe the float was for Nevada Day. It was that time of the year, so it was a nice warm place.

Keggers went real freely in there, and I'd work on cars and have fun. I started being around the property more and started falling in love with the DeLongchamps Building. People weren't into history and who built what or anything at the time. We were down on Fourth Street and we started deteriorating, and we deteriorated pretty quick.

The Eldorado got going and then Circus Circus got going and then the Silver Legacy got going, and, of course, The Sands on the corner of Arlington and Fourth. The Peppermill was out there, and it was just a little restaurant with Hill & Sons Motel clear at the back of it. Two young guys started that. I kind of grew up with that. Once that thing got going and they started a casino, they got out of the contract pretty quick. They got in and the rest is history. But, for a long time, clear in the back was always a little part of that motel. There was a dirt road that you went up.

Barber: The Peppermill you're talking about?

Hobson: Yes. Hill & Sons Motel sat pretty far off the back, but on the right-hand side there was an old white house. I don't know if you'd call it a mansion, but it was a very nice home. That's where Jim McKay lived at that time. Behind that was Virginia Lake.

Barber: When this building was being used by the university kids and you were working on it, was this the 1960s or so?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: What else was around in your immediate neighborhood here? We have some

businesses around here. Were they still operating?

Hobson: There was a building here on the corner where Ray Heating is. Steve Scolari had that, I believe.

Barber: The grocery people?

Hobson: No. Scolari, I may be off on that. I know Steve. But there was a little business there. This back here was warehousing at that time.

Barber: Back here to the east of us?

Hobson: Yes, where the Spice House is was really Rainier Bottling Works. Then, during Prohibition it shut down and became known as the Ice House. Reno Brewing Company never did shut down during Prohibition. They did near-beer and soda pops.

Barber: Was Rainier Brewing still operating after Reno Brewery closed?

Hobson: No. It went down during Prohibition. It was called the Ice House at that point.

Barber: On the other side are ironworks and a lumberyard.

Hobson: Well, yes. Over here on Morrill and Fourth Street, on that northwest side, there was a gas station. I can't remember whether there was one or two in there at that time. Then, of course, there was the motel that was very busy.

On the corner where you just go underneath Wells Avenue was that old restaurant, Sambo's. If you look to the right, there's that big motel that sits there. Then there looks like a little restaurant that sits there.

Barber: Oh, sure. The Rancho 777, is that the one you're talking about, with the building in front?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: That was Sambo's?

Hobson: Yes. Sambo's was a big deal, and it was full all the time. The street was moving pretty well. I'm trying to remember when I-80 was done, and I don't remember.

Barber: I think it was 1974. I think it was the mid-1970s, and I'm wondering if things changed instantly when that happened. Do you remember Fourth Street suffering immediately?

Hobson: Yes. I was going down to Foothill College and when they started the 80. I can remember driving the 101 and going to San Francisco before the real 101—it's called 101 Business today—and it was vibrant. Then, when they put the freeway in, it died. From

San Francisco all the way to San Jose, were all motels.

That's where I think we ought to look today, at what people are doing with these. People ought to look at what's going on with the old Lincoln Highway back East, and we should start on it yesterday.

Everybody gets into teardown mode. After the teardown mode, they all look at it and say, "We took a valuable asset, something that really was Reno, away," and they can't build it back like it was. They just can't do it.

Barber: Talking about this time period, the 1960s and 1970s, is really fascinating, especially in the 1960s, this being a building that went through a couple of things with the bottling plant and the university kids using it.

Hobson: Well, we were in there building the float for two weeks. It wasn't a big deal. Then, Blue Seal Transmission came in and a radiator shop came in for a while. Blue Seal Transmission was John's. He came from a very wealthy family out of California. He was notorious for driving while intoxicated and playing with the Highway Patrol. He was a real character.

Then, Ray Tires came in. Now, Ray Tires has a little tire shop down the street.

Barber: The last name is Ray?

Hobson: Yes. He can tell you stories.

Barber: Were they in the bottling plant building?

Hobson: Yes, they were in the bottling plant building.

Barber: Was it getting more and more industrial and car-related?

Hobson: Yes. You had to put anything in the building, whatever could keep us moving. There was a Commercial Hardware where Salvation Army is today on Valley and Fourth Street. I want to say that was the Horgan Brothers. That was the neatest hardware store in Reno. Everybody went there.

It was huge and it was like Ace's is today. When you went in, you didn't have to buy a bag of anything; they just had everything there. It was really friendly. Everybody went to Commercial Hardware. Commercial Hardware was on the corner of Sierra and Commercial Row and the old building was there.

Then, they built that big building here and moved out of there. It's the one that's all brick right now and has the arches in it. If you go over the railroad tracks on Commercial Row, it sits on the southeast corner.

Barber: Oh, you're talking about the really old commercial building by the old Reno Casino? It was the Masonic Building very early on.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: So that was Commercial Hardware. Well, that was very small. So they had more room out here then.

Hobson: Well, yes. They expanded. Reno was really small.

Barber: There were some viable businesses. It sounds like it was hardware stores, tire stores, and some restaurants that were still on Fourth.

Hobson: We had restaurants through here, yes. Alpine Glass moved in there. The original Tripp Plastics was where Davidson's, the bar, is today and next door to it is the Harley shop. Warren Tripp could probably tell you something about that.

Tripp Plastics came here and the guy that started it was Wally Tripp. Wally Tripp was very intelligent. He could really put things together. If you go to Tripp Plastics today down on Gregg Street, it's huge. They're the ones that invented the Keno machine that works on air. They invented the dealing shoe.

Barber: The dealing shoe?

Hobson: Yes, when you go in now, all the cards go into a dealing shoe; they deal them off like this. [demonstrates] They did that.

He and a doctor invented transportable incubators for kids. If you go in the shop now and look in the back, they've got a little museum. You will see plastic, what were called candles, at the time. They took about a one-inch piece of plastic rod and he drilled a hole in the top so that it would reflect down.

The first one you'll see in there was made for the Frontier Club. It was the first thing that went on the slot machines to let somebody know there was a jackpot. It was wired in the jackpot and had a bell on it. It had what they called an awards card on the front of it. It tells you the payoffs for that machine. If you hit a jackpot, the bell would go off and the change girls would come turn off the switch, record it, and pay the jackpot.

Barber: It sounds like this was really a hub for all of these innovative inventions for gaming.

Hobson: Yes. There was a lot going on here.

Barber: A lot of entrepreneurs.

Hobson: Yes. Old Redd, which was Bally's machine, was out on the end of Dickerson Road.

Barber: Who was that?

Hobson: That was Si Redd. Si Redd was Bally's and IGT, and he started out pretty small here.

During the summer, another one of my jobs was slot machine repair out on Baring Lane, right off Lakeside, which was my uncle's ranch. We bought some barns. They were

basically loading docks from Stead Air Force Base. They moved one of them out to Baring Lane, and they moved the other one out to our house on Timothy Lane. With the one on Baring Lane, we would do slot machines.

With slot machines, at that time, there was a Bally and a Mills machine. We hired a guy by the name of Tony out of Chicago. He was one of the best slot mechanics around. He worked all over this town for a lot of people, but he worked for us first. They designed a slot machine that was called a Mills. They had castings made back in Chicago. On the Mills machines, you could get in the coin acceptor with a hook. You could get in there and play the machine. It had a window that was supposed to recognize it, but a lot of times that didn't happen.

So they took the two machines and made the coin acceptor from the one go into the Mills mech, because the mechanics of the Mills mech were better. They were all mechanical machines, so they were better than the other machines. So we would build those things down there. At that time, at the Overland there were all these crazy-looking slot machines—a mixture of two slot machines—that went in there.

Barber: So you were very mechanical too.

Hobson: I'm very mechanical. The other thing that's interesting is when we started Keno at the Frontier Club, it was the first club in the State of Nevada to have a \$12,500, 55-cent eight-spot. The Overland was the first casino in the State of Nevada to have a \$25,000, 55-cent eight-spot ticket.

You'd play it for 55 cents and if you got all eight, you got \$12,500. At the Overland, if you got all eight, it got moved up to \$25,000. They told us every casino went nuts when we did that at the Overland.

Barber: That's a huge jackpot.

Hobson: Well, I was twenty-one at that time. We started about a year before that at the Overland. We were the first to let blacks come into our casino and sit at the restaurant. That was in the 1960s.

Barber: Was this before the Civil Rights Act?

Hobson: I think it was starting to happen.

Barber: It was a voluntary thing you did? It wasn't because anyone was forcing you?

Hobson: It was the right thing to do. They would drive all the way up from Oakland and they were gamblers. We put the \$25,000 ticket in and, of course, everybody was hitting. I've got the original winning tickets at home. Also, I was writing Keno at that time. With one of the \$25,000 tickets in there, I wrote it, called it, and paid it.

Barber: Immediately?

Hobson: Well, yes, but that's when there were the old Keno queues. You wrote Keno. It

wasn't like today. It was really fun because you became an artist on all these 190-way eight-spots with 24s. Or, you could play all these 4s and these people would just mark these things up really crazy.

You had to write it all down the side, and then they took a Keno ticket, and when you called it, there were Ping Pong balls in a cage. You'd pull it and push a button and the number would come up. You had a guy alongside you and he would have a stack of Keno tickets, and he would physically punch them.

Then, after the game, he would check them. You'd put them out on the counter and they'd go up to the checkers up above. It was also your responsibility, so you checked each ticket. If somebody said there was a winner, you had to check it and figure out the payoff. The checker up there would be your verification. We had [Reginald] "Arkie" Parker up there as a Keno manager, who ended up doing quite a bit of stuff around here and doing Keno because he was very good at it.

The casinos were fun. The machines were mechanical, so all these things were going off with these machines. You always had change guys running around and you had change girls giving people change. You didn't put a card in. The machines were mechanical, so you'd hear five clicks, "ch, ch, ch, ch, ch." Then you'd hear the alarm and the bells going off for jackpots, and the bars were packed.

It was human, you know—it was a human organization. There were no mechanics to it. It wasn't to where everything just lights up and you go up and get a Keno ticket and look at the numbers and say, "Yeah, we owe you \$100." You checked the ticket—a Keno checker checked the ticket. On a good night, behind the counter we'd be wading through Keno tickets that came in.

When I was twenty-one, I wrote Keno. That's what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be at table games. I liked Keno. You had a stool you sat at, so these guys would take a piece of string and hang it up underneath your stool and light it with a cigarette. There's all this paper around and you're sitting there writing Keno tickets. You go around, and, "Something's on fire!" It was a big roar. Everybody had fun with you with that about the first or second day you were there.

I grew up in that casino. If you were new in there, they would tell you to go get the Keno crank. The Keno crank was so you could roll up that cage for the Keno ball. You flipped it by hand and everybody had a rhythm. It was like playing a tune. When you got good at it, it was like, "ch, ch, ch, puh, ch," number three.

Well, they sent me to Harrah's at the time. They'd send everybody out for a Keno crank. You got to meet everybody in all the casinos because it was a joke, and they knew you were a new Keno writer. Because I knew the people and I was working graveyard shifts, I could go to the lake during the day. So I just went home. I showed up at work the next night, and they go, "What happened to you? You didn't find the key to Keno?"

I said, "I couldn't find the Keno crank and it was almost time to go home, so I just went home." All at once they kind of figured out what I did. Then I pulled slot machines. I worked with a big guy by the name of Dickey. At that time, Nevada Bank of Commerce was butted up against the alley on Virginia Street right across from the Mapes. If you go by there where the Bruka Theater is, it was there. So, we did business there. We'd walk across town with the same thing, checks, and come back with money. Sometimes, we had to go in the car. We'd loaded up with coin. You'd

load up with bags of real silver dollars. A lot of them were new uncirculated silver dollars—put them downstairs.

Barber: You never ran into any trouble with that? Because everybody was doing it.

Hobson: Well, at that time, you couldn't get out of town, and if word got around, the best thing you could do was turn yourself in. [laughs] You couldn't get out of town because they were trying to build the 80 and all that, so you're running on these real small roads.

The airport was so small, you couldn't fly out if you wanted to. There are four roads that go out of Reno, so where would you go?

Barber: So it felt like a very safe town?

Hobson: Oh, it was a safe town. It was absolutely safe. That was the YMCA there next to the Mapes parking lot, and City Hall was across the street at that time.

Barber: The theater was right there. Did you go to the Majestic?

Hobson: The Majestic, yes. Good friends of mine, the Swansons, owned the Center Street Hotel at that time. Lucille Rose ran that hotel. Her son, Johnny Rose, and I were very good friends. I'd come down to town and we'd spend the night there. The bowling alley was next to it at that time. We'd go bowling, run around Reno, go to the YMCA, and go to the Majestic. The Crest Theater was on Second Street and Sierra.

There was a Wigwam Café there at that time. That's where everybody went for apple pie, and it was the big café. Next to that was the Crest Theater. The Crest Theater had a thing with Model Dairy where they had these square quart bottles and you'd get this red tag that said "Model Dairy."

If you took those and turned them in at the theater, you could go to the theater for free. They had it all figured out because the parents would go next door to the Wigwam, and then you'd go and have lunch at the Wigwam. So on Saturday morning we would go down and go to the free show at the Crest Theater and watch the Bowery Boys and the Three Stooges. It was a big deal to do.

Grey Reid's was downtown and I. Magnin's was downtown; Menard's was downtown; Gotchy's Shoes was downtown. My mom would meet all of her friends. They'd go to the Wigwam and go shopping. It was fun.

Barber: When did it seem like that kind of character of downtown as the center for residential life changed?

Hobson: Well, the casinos started getting staggered around and then I-80 went through. I think that made a big impact. Then, Park Lane [mall] opened up. When Park Lane started going in, downtown started to deteriorate.

I think one of the reasons that downtown Reno did deteriorate is because there wasn't sufficient parking in Reno at that time. There wasn't the parking like we have today. There was a parking lot that was right across from the Majestic Theater on the east side of Center Street. The telephone building was on the north side of First Street on the

corner. That was the original telephone building, and the other one was called Reno Central. You kind of drove down, and that flooded.

Harolds Club tried pigeonhole parking that was on Plaza. You'd drive in and they'd pick your car up and stick it into a spot there. There was no parking, though. Then, the city of Reno decided that they were going to make money and came in and put parking meters in. Well, you'd get a parking ticket a couple of times and you'd go, "I'm not going to go to Park Lane." They had one-hour and two-hour limits on the meters. People don't want that.

The best thing Reno could do to help downtown is to take a big cutter out. They cut them now. Now, you have to go down to the corner with your credit card and put it into the machine. The best thing Reno could do would be to eliminate parking meters. If what they're making in parking meters was spent for commerce down there and the taxes and starting to build the city back up, I think it would more than pay for what those parking meters have brought in.

I go down now and park on Arlington Avenue someplace and I just walk down. I enjoy the walk. If I'm going to a baseball game, I park off Court Street and walk down there because the walk is good and fun. I don't like parking meters. When I was younger, I had too many tickets. [laughs]

Barber: You came back here and you were doing some things in the 1960s in town. At what point did you start working in Virginia City? How did that come about?

Hobson: Virginia City came about, I believe, in 1968. My family went up there and bought the Bonanza Club and the Skydeck right next to it. Right on the block there was the Silver Dollar Hotel. We bought those two properties, and then we went across the street and bought the Comstock and the Cartwright.

We ended up with the small building in there that was Red the Candy Man's for quite a while. We had the Comstock and the Cartwright Hotels, which were boarding houses that went all the way from C Street up to B Street. I lived in one of them for quite a while. It was an old boarding house and I lived upstairs. That was fun. We kept those leased out for quite a few years.

Our idea was to try and get a hold of the Silver Dollar Hotel at that time so we could build something there, but that didn't come to fruition.

We had slot machines in the Bonanza Club. We had all of the Polk carving slot machines which were done by Frank Polk and were very famous. There are some still around, but we auctioned most of them off and collectors have them.

They were full stand-up wooden carvings done by Frank Polk, who is in the Cowboy Hall of Fame for his carvings. They were just very unique. There was a Mexican and a big Indian with headdress. One of them was said to be John Wayne, and there was supposed to be an original there of Frank Polk. So they're very unique.

Each one was all hand-carved, and they put a Mills mech in all of those machines. It was real unique. When you walked in the Bonanza Club, there were rows of slot machines, but they were all cowboy characters.

Barber: Were these all ventures that your Uncle Pick and your father were working on in partnership?

Hobson: No. These were my dad and myself.

Barber: What role were you playing?

Hobson: I was basically the manager. I ran them and took care of them. We had a gift shop. I brought up a fellow by the name of Ed Blankenship, who was a very famous glass blower, and he blew glass in the windows.

Ed was from Reno. He and I got to be real good friends because we had a slot machine repair shop in the back of the Bonanza Club. I always asked Ed why he didn't blow glass a little bit larger than what he was doing. He said he couldn't get a torch tip the way that he wanted it. I told him I'd build him one. So, I learned to blow glass, and Ed got his bigger torch tip.

Barber: You learned how to do that in Virginia City?

Hobson: I learned how to do it in Virginia City, yes.

Barber: How would you say Virginia City at that point differed from how Virginia City is now? Was it a very popular tourist destination?

Hobson: Yes. It was very popular. There was the Stope and there were two or three little bars around there. We had main entertainers all the time playing music, and in the Bonanza Club I brought a piano player into the bar. He sat down and played the piano and I couldn't believe what this guy would do. We ended up getting him a room at the Silver Dollar, and he would come down and play this world-class piano.

The guy was unbelievable, and he was kind of like a little Liberace kind of guy, had rings and stuff. During the evenings we would end up with a guy by the name of Pappy, who was a little character, and he'd play the bass fiddle. He'd lie on the floor and put it up between his legs and play it. Then we ended up with another fellow there and he could really play the piano.

I would close the Bonanza Club a lot of times at two or three o'clock in the morning. I would try to get everybody out of there because it became a real local little place to go. Then, you could go down to the Stope and listen to music. Like I said, that was more jazz-type music. Virginia City at that time had the nickname of a "drinking man's Disneyland."

It was just real casual and a lot of fun. Everybody really worked together. Now I've seen it change; it's changed quite a bit. It's still Virginia City, and I think that Hugh Roy Marshall is doing a lot for up there. Hugh Roy really wants to see some things happen, and he's trying to push them. I've met Hugh Roy a few times. I've been on his TV show. He's a Nevadan out of Texas, but he says he's a Nevadan.

Barber: I just met him this summer, and got on the show, too.

Hobson: Did you? Isn't he something? He's a character. He belongs in Virginia City. He fits in Virginia City. We had a lot of characters up there who would move around. Most

of them have passed on or moved down the road a little bit. It was a fun town, though. It still is a fun town.

Barber: There was a whole rock-and-roll scene up there that had links to the Bay Area too. Was that happening at that time or had that already passed?

Hobson: No. We had the Red Dog Saloon, which was a real hippie bar. You'd go down there and, yes, it was rock-and-roll, but there were a lot of drugs and a lot of pot, so I didn't go down there too much. They tried some concerts and quite a few things in there.

Barber: It sounds like there was a real diverse musical scene, lots of different styles of music.

Hobson: There was stuff all over, yes. The Bucket of Blood always had music, and the Union Brewery was a really fun place.

Barber: Is that still there?

Hobson: Yes, but it's nothing like it was. When I was younger we would go down to American Flats. That was in the 1960s, and there was a full-on hippie scene down there with bands and all kinds of things playing out. That was an experience that went on. [There were also] the Sutro tunnels.

Barber: They had a little town around there, right?

Hobson: Yes. Well, at the Sutro tunnels there were a bunch of old cabins. There were a lot of things around there, so everybody went down and played pretty good too. That was another place that was played.

Barber: How many years did you live there?

Hobson: I was only there for three or four years. I finally bought a little house right across from Hugh Roy's mineral place, his museum that's there. I lived there for a couple of years.

I was on C Street, and I would drive out at two o'clock in the morning when I was living here in Reno.

Barber: You went back and forth a lot?

Hobson: For a while, I'd go home and go to bed at two o'clock in the morning and then get up and have to be in there by nine o'clock and have it open by ten. I was very lucky because a lot of times I don't remember riding home. I was just tired.

Barber: So you finally got a place up there?

Hobson: I got a little place up there and lived there, yes. Then my brother got killed going

down by Silver City. He flipped his car at Devil's Gate, it's called, and he died. I moved to Hawaii in 1970 and blew glass, thanks to Ed. That was a fun experience for about a year, and then I came back.

Barber: Came back from Hawaii?

Hobson: Yes. I was married to my first wife, Judy Wade. They were out of Texas, and so we came back and got a divorce.

Barber: A Reno divorce.

Hobson: A Reno divorce, yes, here it was. It was fall of 1971 that I came back here. We then started liquidating things that were in Virginia City. I kept one building up there that was Red the Candy Man's. I went in and completely restored it. It ended up being Julia Bullette's. Before that, it was Calamity Jane's. It was run for quite a few years as Calamity Jane's, a bar. It went through a couple of different owners, and things started happening up there and so I had to liquidate it to maintain the brewery building here.

Barber: Did you gain control of that from your parents at some point?

Hobson: Well, we sold off the four pieces of property we had up there. I really liked this building that was there, and I was single at the time. So, I went and put an apartment upstairs in it and was planning on living there. Then, I met my current wife, so that didn't happen. I just sold it two years ago. I miss it because I put a lot of work in it myself.

Barber: That's a lot of time to own that property.

Hobson: Yes. Well, what was interesting in the piece of property is when I was remodeling, first the mortar on the walls on one side was what they call a lime mortar—there's nothing to it. There was really no foundation in some of those old buildings, so the floor had fallen down in one corner.

I decided I was going to fix it and fix the leak in it. When I got down to the one corner, there were about two or three floors that were built on top of one another in that one corner. The floor would slump down and they would just build it up. So I said, "I'm going to tear this whole floor out of here." We tore the whole floor out and I decided to put a foundation underneath it. We designed the whole foundation underneath the thing.

Barber: Was there no basement?

Hobson: There was no basement in it. There were rumors that the mines were underneath it and you'd fall in. Well, if this building goes, the whole building goes now, because this foundation is overkill.

While I was digging out down there, I kept kicking a little square thing with my toe. I finally got mad and decided I was going to get it out of the way so that I would not trip. When I dug that out, it was a book. I have that book at home. It's in excellent condition, and on the back of the book it says "W.F. & Company, Virginia, Nevada." The

book starts in 1867, and W.F. & Company is Wells Fargo and Company. It's the out-commission book of the Douglas family that's very famous here that's from Gardnerville; that's why Douglas County is here. I have a record of all the gold and silver bullion that came out of Virginia City up to 1913. All the numbers of the bullion are registered and you can tell whether it's gold or silver. The penmanship...it's really an interesting book. It's amazing. I keep saying I'm going to go through every page, and I just don't get to it. That's when Carson City first started minting silver dollars. It went down to Virginia City to be made into coinage. So not only was it gold and silver, the coinage is listed there also.

Barber: This was just in your building, just sitting there in the floor?

Hobson: It was just in the floor. It was under the dirt, because in 1913 there was a fire there. I guess this thing got underneath the floor some way. However it got there, it got there.

Barber: What was the building?

Hobson: I don't know what it was before. At one time, it looked like it was something to do with a millinery shop. I don't know if Wells Fargo was really in there or what was in there. Why would that be buried under the corner of that building?

Barber: What's the address of that building now?

Hobson: Well, 55 South C Street is what we got as a number. The numbers on C Street are very confusing, because NDOT came through and renumbered them. So, I found it as 55 South C Street. I got a window made up that says that, anyhow.

The book is real interesting. The reason I want to follow it through—all the signatures and all the writing is done by the different people that were there—but it also has the Douglas family. They were moving \$3,000 or \$4,000 a week out of there at that time.

If you had a watch you were going to send to San Francisco to get work done on it, it'll say "One watch, San Francisco," and there were little deeds that got transferred back and forth. It's a really interesting book.

In that book, all at once, the rubber stamps started coming out for the date. So in 1911 and part of 1912, you would see that only certain people would use that stamp. It was too modern. Finally, in 1913 it got to where everybody was using the rubber stamp, and the penmanship started falling away. The old penmanship is beautiful.

Barber: I want to talk about your specific properties here, your plans for them, and what you've done with them. Let's catch up a little bit here. In the 1970s, you were in Virginia City. You came back here. Your father owned the bottling plant building.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Can you fill me in on the intervening years and what happened with this property up through now? Obviously, you own these properties, that building and a lot of other

ones.

Hobson: Yes. With the bottling building, the main brewery was torn down because it was just too old and they already had started demoing it.

Barber: On the corner of Spokane and Fourth?

Hobson: Right. My father wanted to put a casino in here, which would have been really nice. That's what his idea was, because there were whispers of urban renewal coming through for quite a few years, but that didn't happen.

Then, we had Tank Smith in here. Tank Smith was a mayor here and had a concrete business here for a while. In fact, because of Tank, we had a spotlight on the corner of Morrill and East Fourth Street for a while so that his rigs could get in and out. That was power.

Then we had Blue Seal Transmission in here. I think it was called A-1 Radiator. Ray Tires was in the building, and Dunlop Electronics was in the building. After Dunlop Electronics, it was R Supply, a plumbing supplier. That was the last business in the building, and they were out of here in 1989.

R Supply was the irrigation division of Record Supply, which was up on Valley Road, where all the homeless are. That's how they ended up with that piece across the street on Fourth and Valley, where they built the temporary firehouse. That was part of it. They bought all that property from them. Then, they went out on Rock and built the new R Supply out there, and that got sold to a bigger outfit.

Barber: So then this building was vacant again?

Hobson: Yes. That was around 2000. Peter Wilday, his adopted son, and myself designed a full House of Blues theater to be put on this property. It was designed very well.

Barber: Had you been working with the House of Blues organization?

Hobson: Well, I met a fellow there through some family. His name was Kevin Morrill, and he was the senior vice president of the House of Blues. At that time, the House of Blues was going public. They really didn't want to step into another building here, but Kevin was setting me up with all of the entertainment and venues to go on with this piece of property. He was very excited about it.

When he came up here and I showed him what we had, he said, "This will be one of the top four venues on the West Coast," because the building stands alone. So if you went over to the Holiday Inn and said, "Coming to you from Reno and old downtown Reno, the Reno Brewing Company presents..." the whole building just lights up because of the DeLongchamps design to it.

There are a lot of entertainers who come through here on their way to Salt Lake City. We were zoned industrial and it ended up being a very big problem trying to get a special-use permit to do what we were going to do. I think it maybe had something to do with the fact that that's when the Events Center was coming to be born.

I think some of the hotels and casinos there were a little nervous about what we

were going to do. What they didn't realize is that we could bring in a thousand people for three shows a day. Plus, we would have a restaurant, a bar, and an espresso bar. If a thousand people a day came to our theater, where would they stay? The venues that we had coming through were venues that are not interested in the Eldorado and they're interested less in the Event Center. They like the House of Blues atmosphere, and so it was a completely different venue. I've got the drawings clear down to the heat lamps done for this thing.

The whole thing was designed and we had investors and venues lined up. We got the thumbs-down, so we walked away from it.

Barber: You were applying to the city for a special-use permit?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Did they give you any reason why they declined?

Hobson: No. It was just a put off. The city should have said, "Wow! You guys are doing something for Fourth Street. What can we do to help you get this?" Not, "Here's what you have to do." As you can see, we have the parking. We have everything going for us. The little place down here under the old Martin Iron Works was slated to be what I want to call a speakeasy. We had some people interested in opening up a jazz bar restaurant down there.

Barber: This is on your property now?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: You owned that property at that point as well?

Hobson: Yes. I bought it.

Barber: What's the address of that property?

Hobson: 300 Morrill. It had been the Martin Iron Works Building and then it was Sierra Engineering, where they built the chairlifts for the Olympics. Then, George Pimple had it and that was Reno Forklift. He just used it for storage, so I bought it from George Pimple.

Barber: Did you buy it in the 1980s sometime?

Hobson: No. I wanted to have a whole block because I didn't want anybody in the middle of my [properties]. I bought that piece and then I bought the piece next to it, which was Reno Vulcanizing—not the Menantes but the Bessos.

I wanted that piece of property because I felt if I had a whole block, there was nobody that could tell me what I could do with my block. There was nobody who could hold me up by owning a piece in the middle of it like sometimes happened. Santa Fe is one of them. Dr. Iliescu became pretty famous for doing that sort of thing around town. I

didn't want that. I wanted a whole block so we could design it, and that's what we did; we designed a whole block.

There are some drawings of what we were going to do here. It was pretty amazing. This would have been all commercial retail with little shops, and that would have been a whole plaza over there. There would have been outdoor entertainment and farmers' markets going on outside—a whole different venue at that time.

Barber: So, you owned this building that we're in now, which is 315 Spokane, at that time, too. This building was constructed in the mid-1970s?

Hobson: My dad and I built it in 1974.

Barber: In this building now we have your offices, the Hobson Gallery, and then you lease out some of these other spaces?

Hobson: Yes. I have Feed World that started in here right after we built it. We have a body shop that's next door. We had about three different shops in there, and the body shop was real successful for a long time.

Barber: After your special-use permit was denied for House of Blues, where did you go from there?

Hobson: At that time, we designed a bottling company to go in here.

Barber: A bottling company?

Hobson: Yes, for water. I've got the bottling building. The water is available, and that's still on the back burner. We designed the whole blueprint on a bottling building. I had some investors who wanted to come and do the bottling building, but we just didn't see eye-to-eye on the way that they thought I should participate in it. I didn't feel like putting up my property to have them run a business and tell me how much money I was going to make and sign the property over. So that went away.

The Reno-Sparks Corridor Business Association got started here, so they set up certain bylaws of what could be done and what couldn't be done in the Fourth Street corridor.

Barber: That's a community organization.

Hobson: Yes, and I was part of that for a while. One of the big things was there could be no homeless shelters or anything like that in this area. Of course, you can see what happened over on Valley Road. Well, the other thing they were concerned with was automotive dealerships.

They didn't want that kind of thing because they didn't feel it would bring traffic here. I would have it running if they would back off. At first, I wanted to take my big building and put Private Party Cars in it, like Private Party Cars over on Mill Street. Private Party Cars is a display area where you bring your car to sell and you rent a spot. I

wanted to take my big building and turn it into a Private Party Cars, because there are a lot of people with hot rods, motorcycles, and real upgrade cars who don't want them parked outside on a lot all the time. Our address and our location are as good as theirs. I tried to get it so that I could put this in, and they told me no. I'm still fighting with [the city] a little bit.

The reason I'd like to do that is I think it would bring a lot of people down here. All at once, it'd be like a Hot August Nights venue because we would have nice cars in here. It gives me the ability—without the huge expense of trying to start a business and grow into what I'd really like to be—to create income on my building. I don't have an inventory; all I'm doing is renting a space. It would bring more class to Fourth Street because the cars I'd have would be upgraded cars. We'd put a coffee and espresso shop in it. It would give me the ability to have a real good cash flow and start taking care of my property here.

Then, as Reno grows into where we are, the big building would be done and I could say, "Okay, thirty days, I don't have inventory." I can do the dream that I see. I think, because of Hot August Nights, we would really start drawing people in and this area would pick up. Let's go for the arts. I'm handicapped now with a big building. What am I going to put in it?

Barber: So, that building is still zoned industrial and some of the buildings around here were at one point industrial, but clearly have been zoned commercial in the years since, right? I'm looking over here at the Spice House now.

Hobson: Yes. That happened way back, though. Things went on and special-use permits [were given]. See, the Spice House here wasn't a threat to anybody.

What I see is, I should be given the ability to do what I want over here. Cattycorner to us is a building complex, and there's medium-income residential in the back of it. Fourth Street is not zoned for that one bit. They got their special-use permit to put that in. We are not supposed to have any residential on Fourth Street at all, and that got built over here.

Barber: Now, what about the motels?

Hobson: Well, they're a commercial identity, but the motels are all grandfathered in.

Barber: You had a number of commercial businesses that were in your large building.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: So did those all have special-use permits?

Hobson: Well, they were all considered industrial or automotive. If you go down to Metric Motors, they'll have their cars out on the lot. At one time, that lot was a used car lot. So, why can't I go back and show its use? Let's believe in what can happen. They'd rather see it turn into dirt, I guess, than to see it turn into practicality.

Barber: It sounds like there are a lot of different issues with zoning and special-use permits, and other inconsistencies along Fourth Street as it stands now, as far as development goes. Do you see that as one of the major challenges?

Hobson: I see it as a major challenge. I look at the city of Reno and what's going on and I think they ought to step up to the plate and say, "What do we want to do here? Do we want to turn this into a community? How do we entice people to come in here without a bunch of obstacles before you get there?" You can go to a lot of other cities with a lot less obstacles to go through. In fact, if you want to see what happens, go down and look at Las Vegas. Reno was bigger than Las Vegas. We had more casinos and we were a lot bigger than Las Vegas, but Vegas said, "Build it."

Instead of building the Atlantis, the Peppermill, and those outlying casinos, we should have said, "If you're going to build the casinos, they're going down Fourth Street to Sparks." What kind of an impact would that be? They're always talking about community impact from casinos. Well, if all the casinos were on Fourth Street, there wouldn't be any community impact. We would still have Reno and all the casinos would be here.

We are right off of U.S. 80. We have 395 right here. We could have impacted it—really built something up and down Fourth—and it would have made it a lot better for downtown. But we have some casino owners here who have very narrow tunnel vision in a "me, myself, and I" environment. They're afraid to see things come in, which is why we're starving here in Reno.

The other thing that had a big impact here was the Wells Avenue overpass.

Barber: How did that fit into this?

Hobson: The Wells Avenue overpass basically took everything east of Wells Avenue down to Sage Street and, all at once, isolated us from downtown Reno and any development going on there. We ended up being isolated in that way. The Wells Avenue overpass is still, to me, like the Berlin Wall. That was built by Helms Construction.

Barber: What was the reason for having an overpass there?

Hobson: They wanted to get over the railroad tracks with a major four-laner that now goes over the river and the railroad tracks. If you look underneath there, there's the old Wells Avenue Bridge, but that went underneath the railroad tracks.

Barber: The old Wells Avenue went under the railroad?

Hobson: Yes. For some reason, they wanted to jump the whole thing and give it more of a link to Highway 80.

The Wells Avenue overpass is not the most structurally sound piece of property. It's been redone two or three times now. The original construction was a little shady, let's say. I think they should have, when they had the railroad right-of-way there, lowered the track down because of what's sunken in there now. I think they could have done that, and it would have been a major improvement for Fourth Street because we wouldn't have a

barrier there now. It's not a very good-looking structure to start with.

Barber: Before that overpass, do you remember Wells Avenue being a very busy thoroughfare as it intersected Fourth Street?

Hobson: Oh, yes. There was a stoplight up here. It was still an easy connector at that time. It's just that it was two lanes instead of four lanes. I think it was more viable and better for linking Fourth Street to Kuenzli and incorporating the river, though. Now you start over on Sixth Street and when you come down you're clear over and you don't come out until Second Street. It kind of creates a dead area.

Barber: Underneath it?

Hobson: Well, yes, and where Kuenzli is. They have the old bridge that's underneath it all blocked off. You can't get to it and it's probably more sound than the new one. Why can't we link that across the river? There's plenty of room for parking there.

The nicest part of the river—nicer than uptown and Wingfield Park—is right along the river there, and right now all the homeless enjoy it very much.

Barber: Right along Wells?

Hobson: Yes, Wells Avenue up to the [National Automobile] museum. It runs on the south side, but on the north side there's plenty of room for parking there. Why can't they take that and go down to where the old Wells Avenue bridge is now, open up the whitewater that Dave Aiazzi is working at now, because the whitewater seems very successful for us. Open up the whitewater so it comes all the way down there. That means that you could park all of the rigs from the guys with canoes and stuff on the north side of that piece, instead of having them park where they do around Reno.

We open up that river and make it so people can enjoy it. Not only is it good for that, but there's also the ballpark. People are parking clear up at the Eldorado and the Cal Neva to walk down to ball games. I know that the casinos probably like that, but why couldn't we use that parking underneath there where you could just walk up to the game? There's nothing there now. There's one little power plant, but there's nothing down there. If we could put in a walking/bike path at the Wells Avenue bridge, that would come up over and I'd like to see it tie into Morrill Street. All at once, it opens up. If we put residential in here, people have a walking/bike path so they can enjoy the river, which more and more people are doing.

Right now, if we want to enjoy the river, we have to go down to Sutro Street or all the way up to Evans Avenue to get to it. With a bike path and a nice way to do it, all at once we could bring Kuenzli together. We make the river the center of Reno, which it should be. Like everybody says, how many cities have a river running through them, and how badly have we ignored ours? It's kind of sad. I think it would make everything come together. It would make Reno really viable, and I think Reno should look at doing things for younger people and recreation.

Barber: Clearly the development of the city is moving eastward. You were mentioning

the ballpark that went in. I can't recall what year that was. It's been a couple of years now, but not very long.

Hobson: Yes, right.

Barber: That would kind of overcome some of what you've identified as the isolation of this area through some of those major projects, the Wells Avenue overpass being very significant.

Hobson: Right. The Wells Avenue overpass right now is one of the major accesses to get to the ballpark. People have found that, instead of getting off on Sierra Street and going all the way through Reno and trying to find parking, they get off on Wells Avenue and go over Wells Avenue and use Harrah's parking. The Harrah's parking is blocked off after the game, so if you're going to go downtown, you have to go over Wells. They could do the same thing with lowering it, and it would be like what San Francisco did with the Embarcadero Freeway. You went into one of the prettiest cities in the world and you saw a freeway in front of it. I was there for the earthquake. I was at the marina for the earthquake in 1989.

A friend of mine owns buildings there. He has a restaurant there called E'Angelo's Pizzeria. Ezio is a Rastelli. He came out of Italy and I met him through one of my aunts. This Rastelli family started the Crystal Springs on Center Street. I was helping him pass bricks off of his roof at five o'clock in the evening because they said there may be an earthquake; we were passing bricks down the staircase.

Barber: There was a warning for the earthquake?

Hobson: No. A building inspector just came in there earlier. A lot of times I go in and eat with Ezio because the cooking is really good. I go in to see Ezio and he says, "No, no, no. You have to help me get the bricks off the roof first. I promised the building inspector we'd do them." We passed the bricks down—about four of us—and the earthquake went off at 5:07. I was there.

I didn't even realize what went on. Luciano, another guy who was in a big earthquake in Italy, threw me underneath the staircase, and said, "Earthquake! Earthquake!" I'm stacking bricks down there, and when we walked out on the street, that's when we realized everything that was going on. All Ezio's water bottles and wines were on his second floor, and that stuff fell off there. When we went out on Chestnut Street, it was really—

Barber: You could see the damage immediately.

Hobson: Yes. Ezio lives on Bay Street, so we ran around the corner. I was inside that building that burned before it caught on fire. We smelled gas and everybody pulled me out of there.

So that was different. Anyhow, everybody said, "No, no, no. We have to rebuild the Embarcadero." They didn't want to see that freeway come down. Instead, they made the Embarcadero a wide boulevard. Now when you drive into San Francisco, [the view]

coming over the Bay Bridge is unbelievable.

The only thing that happened to Chinatown and the Italian community is now you drive down that huge boulevard to get there instead of the freeway. The whole Embarcadero just came to life.

Barber: It's just been revitalized, yes, and it's interesting to think about that in a comparative way.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Do you see this as a critical time to make some sort of larger decisions and commitment about Fourth Street?

Hobson: Yes. It's so critical. We're a couple years behind. Everybody goes, "Well, there's a recession." So we want to put people to work, and there are a lot of grants that can be brought in here to redo this area. We need to center our focus and say, "Let's do Fourth Street and let's finish it," instead of going to other areas. We need to get into the construction right now—get construction workers, get materials, and get this under way. It's going to take quite a few years to get it going.

If we put the money into it now, there's about an eight-year cycle when everything is really good—we have this whole cycle. My idea is that we be the first one up to bat, instead of saying, "It's really good and we got an eight-year cycle, so let's put two years or three years into building this," and then saying, "Well, it's a failure because it was only four or five years of good." Let's get it done. People would be here like mad. This area would grow.

Around here, we have some stuff with permaculture that we're playing with. We're so lucky now for what we have on East Fourth Street, and we should take advantage of it because we have the ability to build a community, like what Zappo's is doing in Las Vegas, except we're way ahead of Zappo's.

We don't have to wait a year and a half for City Hall to be vacant so we can start doing something. We can start doing it right now. We can do permaculture. We could do gardens and housing around here. We can revive Fourth Street. I'd really like to see it look like art deco; it is art deco. If you look at the buildings, it's 1930s and 1940s art deco. I looked at them again this morning. We could build a community that would be inspiring to a lot of people. We have the ability to put in residential. Like I said, we have the ability to do permaculture. We can truck water. We have water. We could make things grow here, and permaculture is now a big thing. Solar is another big thing. Instead of tearing down and rebuilding, how do we use what we have and turn it into something? It all doesn't have to be new. I believe you can build a whole community.

Of course, the arts are a favorite of mine. I know that some of the Burning Man artists, like David Best, are looking around here and thinking about coming. Let's inspire them to come here, because if we could bring in six major artists from Burning Man, the culture for the arts here would just grow.

Barber: I want to ask you to elaborate on two things. One would be your involvement

with the arts community and how you got involved with having more artists involved in your property here. The second thing I want to make sure we talk about is how you think Fourth Street could, from this point forward, be improved.

Hobson: Well, in 2010, Sierra Arts and Dave Aiuzzi decided to do pianos for Artown. Dave Aiuzzi brought that up because he had seen it done. Artown did it, and Sierra Arts were involved. Anyhow, Dave Aiuzzi heard about my building and came in and said, “Can you work with us? We need the building for about a month or so. We’d like to build the pianos for Artown here.” I said yes.

Barber: What were they doing with those pianos?

Hobson: There were about fifteen to eighteen of them that were placed all over Reno. They did it at all locations—on California, on West Street, at Wingfield Park. They were all over town. The idea was to turn the artists loose so they could do their artwork on a piano, and these pianos were placed all around Reno. That that was a theme for last year’s Artown.

We did that, and I saw the artists, these young people, come in. They were kind of helter-skelter, but I loved the arts going on because that’s me. They got in here, and when they put pianos out, Dave said, “Well, after Artown is over, we’re going to bring the pianos back down there so we can do something with them.”

So they came back down here and the artists started working around. I invited the artists—I said, “I want you guys to stay around, okay? If we get this thing going, maybe we can create something and I can be entitled to a little rent on this.” I wanted to start a community and to start things going.

Anyhow, we brought the artists back. I’ve got two of the pianos. Six or seven of them were burned at Burning Man, and the frames to them sit right over here. There was an art piece inside of a big building for a while with them.

I kept the artists on, and they formed The Salvagery. They were in the big building and they went through the year. We had various open houses and things going on, and they started to do art together; they started putting collaborations together. I liked that, and we started getting things moving down here. Then, the Hobson Gallery at 316 Spokane was available, so they decided they wanted to put on a gallery show in there. So we took this and painted it and put on a gallery show.

Barber: Was it named the Hobson Gallery then?

Hobson: The Salvagery named it. They came in here in June of 2010 and we worked all the way up to May of 2011. The Temple of Transition for Burning Man approached us. Dave brought them down, and we started talking to the temple people about building the temple here. So we moved The Salvagery over to Morrill Street basically.

Barber: Did you have anything in the other building at that point?

Hobson: No. I stored my things in it. It had been rented a year before that, but then in 2009, things just started falling apart around here. There was an ambulance service that

was right here. Then we had Drake cab business in here for a while.

Barber: So Dave Aiazzi introduced the Burning Man artists to you?

Hobson: Yes. They knew the arts were down here and so there was some interest. They didn't want to build in San Francisco. So Kiwi, Irish, and Risky, who were the main instigators in this, came down and we negotiated. I said, "It'll be good for Reno. Let's get some notoriety. We're the gateway to the Black Rock Desert here. Let's see what we can do and instill that into people."

Maybe we could get that feeling down here for Fourth Street because that's what we are. We are the gateway to the Black Rock Desert, and that includes Burning Man and a lot of other things that happen out there that people should be aware of. So that's how that got going. The temple is supposed to be out of here within a few days now.

Barber: Did they spend the whole summer constructing it in the big building?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Then they brought it back after Burning Man?

Hobson: No, they burnt it; the temple was burnt.

Barber: Are some of the artists still here?

Hobson: Yes, Kiwi and Irish and some of the artists are still around. They're cleaning up the building to supposedly leave it in pristine condition. We'll see what happens there. Now The Salvagery is down there in the corner, but I think they're looking for another location.

Barber: Would you like to see collaborations with the Black Rock artists continue?

Hobson: Yes, and that's what we're trying to do here. Right now, we have the interests of about six major artists from Burning Man. One is David Best, who is known all over the world. He's the builder of the temples, and he wants to come here. In fact, I think he's going to be here talking to us about this building, maybe.

If we can bring that here, I think we can bring the full feeling of Burning Man here, which is a real different feeling for people to have. I think we can make Fourth Street unbelievable. Time-Life has made a book that's out now about the one hundred most famous sites in the world. Burning Man is the center of the book.

Burning Man is growing, so why shouldn't we capitalize on it, if you want to use that word. We are the gateway to the Black Rock Desert and we can create something that no other place, not even San Francisco, can create for the Burning Man feel. We have a whole community—a whole piece of property of urban renewal—that we can build with residents and artists. We can build hydrocultures in there. With the Burning Man community, we've started something that is pretty outstanding to be one of the top hundred in the world. There's no place else that can do that. They can't do that in San

Francisco.

We have the proximity and we have land here that there's nothing on and something needs to be done with it. The city of Reno ought to say, "Let's get it on." There's a way to do it.

Barber: Are you talking about these properties that are north of us right here?

Hobson: Yes. Right now my focus would be Sutro Street up to Evans Avenue, but up to Valley Road if you go over between Fifth and Sixth Streets. There is a lot of room to build a lot of things. You could really make a real community here.

Barber: Is The Salvagery now running the Hobson Gallery?

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: Then another piece of the puzzle is the permaculture organization. Can you talk to me a little bit about how that relationship started and what that is?

Hobson: Well, it really started with Mark, who was one of the temple people over there. There's a whole permaculture group here in Reno, bigger than people realize. Then Gadget got involved, who is Jonathan Lewis, and we started laying out what we could do here because of the water we have. It's very interesting. This piece of property is probably the greenest piece of property in Nevada. We have a DeLongchamps Building that was a 1940s green building; we have 65 acre-feet of water on the property, which can cool or heat anything that's on the property.

Our exposure for solar is unbelievable. Because of the railroad tracks, there's no way a structure can ever be built that will take away our solar and what we want to do. We have the ability to go up on top of the bottling building and put wind generators on top of each one of the skylights that are there, which wouldn't be an eyesore; they'd be more like a piece of art. We could create a whole block here that would be absolutely self-sufficient, which probably TMWA and the power company [NV Energy], should embrace. Here's a community that's doing it, so be proud of it.

They're trying to build the most efficient green building out here. It's being built here in Reno. We don't have to go build a new building. This building is a green building. They never turned on a light bulb during the day for the whole building of the temple. Everybody's karma and feeling was excellent because they used all natural sunlight building something instead of fluorescent lights.

We have water that comes out at 55 degrees. So, with that 55 degrees we can swamp-cool it and cool that whole building down. It's pretty cool. We have the perfect exposure and enough property to build all the solar we need so we can heat the water. We can put electric solar panels up so we can create our own electricity. We can create more than enough to take care of this whole piece of property. We can put ten wind generators up on top of the building, which will also help us generate the power that we need. We're here with a little jewel, and right now, it's like when the temple moved out; it's like all at once we're trying to start over again. Dave Aiazzi was down here two or three times a week on his bicycle and I haven't seen him since the temple moved out. Why

should we let this die? Right now is when we should be doing something.

This block will make a statement in Reno. It'll bring Fourth Street in. It will also bring in a lot of interest for the Black Rock Desert. It could be shown as something that's a green statement; take something that's old and make it green rather than trying to build new. To build new is millions and millions of dollars. This is not that much to do. This, for a couple million dollars, can be a jewel.

Barber: Are you open to other types of uses for the large building?

Hobson: I'm trying to take anything. Like I said, a car lot is one. We're looking into what we do for artist co-ops. We put in galleries down there. That's what Reno is lacking—artists with their own workshop or gallery to sell out of. The Riverside was a good idea. It brought the artists here. But where did those artists go to sell their work?

Barber: You mean the Sierra Arts Gallery at the Riverside?

Hobson: Yes, upstairs all the artists live there. If there's an Open House, you can go up and see their work. Most artists don't like that, because artists are artists. They live and they work in it. One of my ideas was to take part of this property and do artists' lofts in it, and take the main building and do artists' workshops. So the artist gets up in the morning and comes down here and does his work.

You put two artists, minimum, in a work area. One artist is always responsible during the work hours to be working in their workshop. You put a manager in to help them sell their artwork, and put a gallery in. So we put a gallery in and we have a manager who knows how to sell art. When people come in interested in some art, the manager says, "Can I help you?"

They look at the art and say, "Oh, well, how about—."

"Alicia has that. Let me introduce you."

In five minutes they get to talk to the artist. The artist should be doing art. That's where these arts fall down that we have here right now. That's where we're having problems with The Salvagery. I tried to do something and they won't allow me to do what I want to do.

Let me sell you the work, or else the artist ends up trying to sell his own work. The problem an artist has with selling his work is that it's a part of him, so it's real hard for him to let go in the first place. The next thing is he'll talk for hours about his piece of art if you want him to. So, if he even has \$1,000 piece of art hanging on the wall, if he looks at the time he's put into it, it probably cost him \$3,000.

Managing the artist. I'm not thinking of anything new because it's been done now and that's called Studio on the Park. It's in Paso Robles. They have got it. I walked in there and said, "My whole idea works." They're doing well. The woman who started that is part of the Torpedo Factory, which is real famous back East for doing what we want to do with the arts. That's what I'd like to do with the arts and I think we could grow.

I'd like to bring in the steel art and the metal work from Burning Man and place it around Fourth Street. I'd like to become the broker for the artists. I've already talked to quite a few of them. They say, "Yeah, can we do it?"

For 2011 right now, we'd be assembling art around Fourth Street. It would spread

all over Reno. What would happen with that is, we would become the broker for them. We sell it; the artist has work to do for 2012. Then, when Burning Man is through in 2012, if any of our 2011 art hasn't sold yet, it's probably not saleable. So, every year we have new art here. That causes people to want to come to Reno because everybody wants to see the Burning Man art.

So if you want to see 2011, be here. If you want to see 2012, you'd better be here, because every year we change. That would create a real community here because it would be changing all the time. We'd have a lot of artists in here because it would become a real art community. That's my dream, but it's hard. I feel like I'm starting all over again from what I've put over a year and a half's work into.

Barber: Why do you feel that?

Hobson: Well, The Salvagery's got their thing. They're going to put it down. I asked them to pay some rent and they told me no. They've had it for free all this time. I've been sponsoring them. Now they're raising money to rent another building, and I'm thinking, "Okay, there are a lot of real talented artists here. We just need to manage it a bit more." I think it has to be a whole new venue the way you do it.

With Paso Robles, the artist walks in there and is told, "Here's what you pay for rent. You pay rent and you do it." What's happened here is they think it should always be gifted to them. The idea of them having to pay rent, for me, was like, "You guys are going to have to get off your butt. You guys now have a responsibility to do something," and that's really hurting them. So, the next time, I'll tell them "Here's what we're renting; Here's what it is." That's the way you get accomplished artists. These people are very talented, but they don't have a clue what business is.

Barber: Is the Hobson Gallery space being leased?

Hobson: I'm not getting anything for that either, and so one day I'll probably just scratch out the Hobson Gallery. They now informed me that the Hobson Gallery is their name and they've got a business license in that name.

Barber: So you have a real vision for this area.

Hobson: Yes.

Barber: In the meantime, what do you think could be done with Fourth Street that would really help your vision for your own property and the surrounding area? You are very community-minded, and I'm thinking specifically about some physical things for the street, transportation, or for sidewalks. What do you think?

Hobson: We need all new sidewalks put in and we need some creative landscaping. I like the way that Stremmels did it. I like the way it goes all year-'round. I think they did a neat job. We don't need it to be the same as California with every other street; that's unique.

I think we need to cut it down to basically three lanes, like what California

Avenue is right now. We have a center lane for turning and two lanes for transportation. We have on-street parking, which we really need here because it'll make people feel comfortable again. Right now, with every place you park, they want you to park around the back of something.

We are not there yet. Remember, we're the derelict part of Reno. So, we need to put in on-street parking, put in real good lighting, do the sidewalks very well, and put three lanes in. It's a main corridor, so there's supposed to be money coming in to do that. I think those changes will help.

If we have the center lane going through the middle of it, we now also have the option of the streetcars. Those used to run here at one time, and I think people would park here and ride the streetcars, like in San Francisco; that's fun. It's not fun to ride the bus, but it's really fun to ride the streetcar. With it being three lanes like that, I think we should open this up and make it a main corridor for Hot August Nights to get to Sparks.

Barber: So it's not now used for that?

Hobson: They were using it, amazingly, because of the freeway construction—everybody's finding out about it. But wouldn't it be fun to open it up and let them know that we can have some of the venues also? Hot August Nights is a part of Reno now. Are they going to be selfish and keep it downtown? What they should do is open it up, which would help disperse the little bit of friction that goes on around downtown Reno—the fights and things—because we've got now six thousand cars that come through. Everybody's supposed to be in downtown Reno, shoulder to shoulder, if they want to watch the cars, and that can cause friction. Wouldn't it be nice to just have the sidewalks here so you could come down here with your picnic and your lawn chairs, and sit and watch cars cruise instead of going on the freeway trying to get to Sparks?

Barber: With Sparks, Victorian Square is a big area for Hot August Nights also. You're not really seeing Fourth Street used as a way to get from downtown to Sparks?

Hobson: This year I noticed it because the freeway was shut down and there were all the pains with getting on the freeway. So, there were more and more cars using Fourth Street. I started getting a smile on my face. If we did Fourth Street up like the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s era, we wouldn't have to worry about someone trying to beat up the Hot August Nights. We would have something where people would just go down through there and say, "Man, it's like 1960s was. This is fun." We have a venue now like Long Beach, where they wanted to do it. There are quite a few towns doing Hot August Nights venues. They don't have the ability we have, though.

I've even designed some parts of East Fourth Street where we could put in garage communities because they store individuals' cars all over town here. People pay a lot of money for that. Stead is full of them. Wouldn't it be nice to have a place where everybody would be sitting with their cars in their garages, with little cafes, and they'd get to show off these cars that they have?

This is no new concept on my part. They're doing it back East. A guy has started one little place back East, except he's out in the country. He can't stop building it because these people are putting their hot rods into these really neat garages. They're spending

\$500,000 to go in and remodel the garage so that people can have their cars there.

They come down on the weekend and set them all up. Wouldn't it be a nice venue? Instead of Hot August Nights being a one-destination weekend, let's create a Hot August Nights town. Let's create something where hot rods are welcome. We can create a venue here, and the venue would still match right in with the arts and the community that's going on here. There's a lot of area here to work with. There's a whole area just west of here on Fourth Street—just a couple blocks away from us—where you can build a real neat community.

Barber: Do you think that this vision for revitalizing this area, in particular East Fourth Street, is compatible with it remaining a pretty busy transportation corridor between Reno and Sparks?

Hobson: Yes, but here's what we can do. When the freeway [U.S. 101] went in between San Francisco and San Jose, it turned into blight, just like what we have. They created incentive and cleaned it up. Now, from Burlingame all the way down to San Jose, the 101 is really neat.

Where we have the advantage—even over what 101—is that we have Sixth Street. Sixth Street can become the commercial corridor. If you want to get downtown and you have to get downtown, that's what you've got to do. Our problem here is we have four lanes, and, if people are going through here to get to Sparks, they're coming through at 35 or 40 miles an hour because it's allowed. Slow it down so people can start looking around and seeing things.

We also have Fifth Street, which is a very wide street that comes down to Morrill Street. So, for the Fire Department, that is a main corridor so we're not choked there. We're very fortunate. We have Sixth Street with all the commercial stuff; we have Fifth Street that can be a main corridor for the Fire Department. The Fire Department's just up here anyhow. If they had to go down one block, if this was blocked bumper-to-bumper. They can still get through here.

Barber: Those don't go all the way through to Sparks, so at what point would they need to shift down to Fourth?

Hobson: Right about at Sage Street.

Barber: So just try to give this part of the street a different character?

Hobson: Yes, let's do the three lanes and see how it works. There's a center corridor. Well, what can we do there? Sutro Street is a divider right now, like with Wells. But if we can build this through from Sutro Street to Evans and go from the river to the railroad tracks, to the freeway, that is a big chunk.

We can create a whole community here and I think it'd be unbelievable, and we could really be proud of what we've done. All it would do is make downtown thrive, because the housing units and the residential that we would put in here would be affordable, whereas the condominiums in downtown in Reno right now are more for upper-middle-class. It's a half a mile from East Fourth Street to downtown Reno. So if

you can create something easy with bicycle transportation and everything, I think it would thrive.

Barber: Do you see better provision for bicycles being an important part?

Hobson: Yes, exactly like with California Avenue. I think California Avenue is what we need to look at.

Barber: Is that diagonal parking on the street or is that just straight parking?

Hobson: It's straight parallel parking. We do have huge avenues like Morrill and Spokane; they're 70 feet wide. We can put diagonal parking there with no problem.

Barber: How do you see these ideas as being compatible with the services for the homeless that were put in on Record Street? Do you have a lot of engagement with that community?

Hobson: I don't. I think they put those in in a rush, without really looking and considering what they were doing. They moved the homeless community closer to downtown Reno, and they've also now impacted the Triple-A baseball stadium they put in across from it. Maybe we should have put homeless services in on Parr Boulevard. I believe in taking care of the homeless; we need the homeless taken care of. I don't know if I feel the same about some of the street people who are around with the advantage they take of us.

Barber: The advantage they take of the properties?

Hobson: Well, yes. Let's help the homeless who need help. But we've given them an opportunity to panhandle right in downtown Reno in a community that's trying to grow. If you go down there this winter, you'll see it. They're camped all over the streets in tents.

Couldn't we have found another place that we could have opened up for that? Maybe it could have been Parr Boulevard. Maybe it could have been a little bit more remotely out of Reno, where they're welcome to set up a tent city. All you get now is complaints.

The city is even complaining about it. The city complains about it; all the commercial owners complain about it; all the property owners complain about it. It's impacted the middle of the town. So can't you move them out a little way? I don't want to neglect them. I asked them why they didn't put it up at Parr where they had the room to do it, and they said the homeless couldn't ride their bicycles uphill.

I said, "Well, set up a bus system." But the one thing that's happened with them putting the homeless closer to downtown Reno, is that it has really cleaned up East Fourth because they don't come down here panhandling.

Barber: Have you seen a big impact in that way?

Hobson: Oh, huge, because there's nothing for them to come down here and panhandle for. The railroad right-of-way with the fence going all the way around here has discouraged a lot of people.

Now, if you go to one of the prettiest places in Reno—the area of the river that's between Wells Avenue and the museum—and you walk down there in the summertime, it's impacted with tons of homeless. I believe it should be enjoyed by the people of Reno who are paying for it, though.

Barber: For a time, a lot of people really associated East Fourth Street with prostitution too. Did you ever see that as a constant presence along here and has that changed?

Hobson: Well, they were here. I've been working in the big building since I was a kid when we didn't have it rented. I'd go in there and build hot rods. I'd have all the doors open and I never yet had a prostitute hold me up or trip me to the ground. It takes two to tango with the prostitution. Whatever it is, it's in downtown Reno and it's allowed to happen. It's in Vegas. It's everywhere that's here. We've discouraged quite a bit of it here along Fourth Street.

If you notice now in the news, 90 percent of anything that happens on Fourth Street always happens on East Fourth Street. How come it's always East Fourth Street at Evans or East Fourth Street real close to downtown Reno? Prostitution is not down here anymore, and the only reason that it's happening up there is because you've still got the homeless impact there. A lot of them are homeless, so how do you generate any money? So it's in downtown Reno. Why don't they just say "downtown Reno?" The casinos don't want to have that on the news, so East Fourth Street is a real easy one to blame it on.

How do we clean it up? We light this place better, clean it up, and make the sidewalks better. We have the bus system now running for us about every five minutes here. If you generate people and you generate walking traffic, that will eliminate a lot of it. A lot of the homeless-homeless, who aren't beggars, do not like people.

Barber: So you see the bus lines having a positive impact through here?

Hobson: Oh, I think the bus lines are fantastic. I'm real happy about it. One of the things that gets me is I'm finding out that the freeway being redone is one of the greatest things that happened to us, because people now are using Fourth Street more. That's why I say, "Why aren't we doing something so people are talking about what's going on on Fourth Street?" When the freeway opens again, they're going to go back to driving that route. If people saw things happening here now, it would really start creating something in here. I laugh at myself, though, because I leave work here and go down to the street and, at four or five o'clock, I'm waiting for what seems a lifetime because there's traffic on Fourth Street. I have to start laughing at myself, and think, "Isn't this what you wanted? Be patient. It's here. It's happening. You got movement here."

Let's do something here and show that there are things going on. The city, the news, and TOD [Transient-Oriented Development] should be promoting this right now—"Look at Fourth Street!" Whatever the blurb is—"Hey, there's more traffic on Fourth Street. Hey, there's something going on Fourth Street!" We have the traffic and people

start paying attention. When the freeway opens, it's going to go like this [snaps] again.

Barber: Isn't that ironic that it was the interstate that took the traffic away from Fourth Street in the first place?

Hobson: Right. Let's promote it as the old Lincoln Highway. Can't the *RGJ* or *Reno News & Review* do a piece in the paper and create an interest? We got news generated because of the temple here, but the only other news that we ever get is the bad news.

Barber: So maybe it could be a deliberate attempt to try to focus on some optimism and some positive use. Do you think it would make a big impact?

Hobson: I think it'd make a huge impact if people became aware of it. If you tell people or put a blurb in the paper just once a month and most of it's bad and a little bit's good, people just...Our media seems to like beat something up more than they like to promote it.

I've thought about doing a publication down here. I was going to call it *Just the Good News* and make a whole paper where that's all we focus on. What happens in Reno that's great? So many great things happen in this town that people don't know about and don't hear about. There are arts here, and plays, and how do we promote those? It'll probably take six months before people go see what's going on on Fourth Street.

Why doesn't somebody actually go to these little bars? All they want to do is tell you how bad they are. They're not. They're cleaner than most of the bars are around Reno. Most of them are owned by people who live here. They're good people and it's fun. We have that Thursday Night Crawl. You can ride the pedicabs up and down the street. That's fun.

I don't know. I hope Reno just doesn't let us die, because I'm losing. I get real excited about something and then I try and do something and I get shot down again. Fifty-six years of that gets a little tough.

Barber: I want to thank you so much for talking to me.

Hobson: Well, thank you for listening. That's what I see with Reno, and I know that you know some of those people on TOD. We need to wake them up and say, "We have a jewel here. We have something." It incorporates everything from I-80 to Kuenzli to downtown.

This river right now is as pretty a Reno as you'd ever want to walk through. People aren't even aware of the bike paths and a lot of people won't take the bike paths down here because they're afraid of them. So, let's put some cops on the path and do what we have to do to let them know that they can come down here and have a picnic. Dave Aiazzi is real good for that. He's really into the bike path.