Colorado River Water Users Association –NEVADA
TAPE #10
GEORGE CAAN (Tape #1)
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
December 14, 2007

gc – George Caan
ps - interviewer Pam Stevenson, Agave Productions, Inc
bs - videographer Bill Stevenson

ps let's start off by introducing….or, identifying on the tape that today is Friday, December the 14th, of 2007. And we're here in Las Vegas, Nevada, doing oral history interviews for the Colorado River Water Users Association. I'm Pam Stevenson doing the interview. And, Bill Stevenson is operating the camera. And, I'd like for you to give us your full name.

gc My full name? George Caan. And I'm the Executive Director of the Colorado River Commission of Nevada.

ps For the transcriber's sake, could you spell your last name?

gc Sure. Last name's spelled C-A-A-N.

ps Transcribers always want to be sure it's spelled right.

gc You got it. And it's spelled incorrectly quite a bit.

ps Yeah. So simple! To start, I like to get some personal background about you.

gc Sure.

ps Can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

gc Okay. I was born in 1958, in New York City.

ps Did you grow up there?

gc I grew up. I spent my first 18 years in New York, living on Long Island, before I went to Boston to go to college. I went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Graduated there in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering. Then went to work for the City of Boston as a project engineer. And, while working at the City of Boston, I received an MBA from Northeastern University.

ps Okay. Let's go back and talk a little bit more about your growing up there on, on Long Island. (gc – Sure.) Did you come from a large family?

gc No. Very small family. Mother, father, and a sister. It was a very small family.

ps And, what did your parents do?

gc Well, my mother was a stay-at-home mom. And, my father worked at a, at a….he was an executive with a…textile firm.

He passed away when I was 13 years old. So, we lived with my mother until, essentially, I turned 18, graduated from high school and went off to college.

ps That must have been pretty traumatic for you…

gc It sure was. Yes.

ps How did you get by those years without a dad?

gc You know, those years are somewhat of a fog. I just grew up, became fairly independent. Worked very hard at high school. Took a lot of college, lot of college placement courses. Just worked my way so I could attend a good university and get a degree and go on to work.

ps Did you have other family that helped your mom out?

gc We had friends. Friends, and some family that lived here. But, she was pretty independent on her own. Sort of taking care of the two kids. And then, eventually, she went back to work when we grew a bit older and teenager. She worked very hard to raise the, the two children.

ps You say you were planning to go to college. Was money an issue then?

gc Money was always an issue, but between loans and grants and work study, with respect to the college that I attended, MIT, if you could get into MIT, usually they would find a way to help you finance it.

So, between loans that…college loans…and some money that I got, uh, through grants and working at college, we managed to get by.

It was a comfortable, a comfortable college experience.

ps You must have been a pretty good student, to get into MIT.

gc That's what I thought until actually I got there. And, the funny thing about MIT is, once you got in there, feeling that you're in the top percent of your high school class, you quickly learn that you're in the lower percent of your college class. Because, there are a lot of smart people. Lot of people much more intelligent, smarter than I was. And, it was really a struggle to fit into that crowd.

I worked very hard. In fact, the first test I ever failed was my first test I took at MIT. And, I was totally devastated. I'd never failed a test…ever.

ps What subject?

gc It was math. It was math. And, even worse…I failed a math test.

And, so that…actually it was probably a good lesson for me in that, not to, not to dismiss how hard it was going to be. In high school things were hard, but they weren't that difficult. At MIT it was going to be extremely difficult. And, the first lesson of failing a test certainly got my attention.

And so, I was able…I went back and I studied…. I eventually passed the test after studying harder, but I certainly learned a valuable lesson.

And, I did graduate. So that was, (clears throat), you know, that was fairly…I felt good about that. Making it through the four years.

ps Well, when you made a decision that you wanted to go to MIT, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do as a career?

gc Not, not a clue. Not a clue. I, I went, uh….I thought maybe engineering, or maybe biomedical engineering. Something related to science and something related to physiology. But, I really didn't know.

After a few years I got interested in what was referred to back then, and maybe today as well, biomedical engineering. And worked for a project that was developing computer-controlled (can't understand word) prosthetic devices. And that was, you have to remember, that was in 19, late 1970s.

Today they have prosthetic devises that are much more up-to-date, like all the different computers. Back then it was really crude. It was called the MIT Knee Project.

And, they, what they did was, they monitored people, as they walked, and then they took computers which in those days were really big and bulky, and they would program the computers to identify specific gaits.

And, my job was not as, quite as fantastic as you might think. It was plugging feedback sensors and other things. It wasn't quite as…it was…you'd call it an, an introductory intern kind of position there.

But, that's what I got involved in. And, that's what I thought I would eventually be doing. Working on those types of projects. And that type of engineering.

ps Well, that's been a growing field over the years. But, you never went into it?

gc I got a bit distracted. What, what, what….I was interested in that field, but one of the areas that I got interested in was public policy. And, one of the areas that I got a chance…

At MIT, every undergraduate has to do a thesis. And so, you have to find a thesis supervisor and a thesis project. And so, my thesis supervisor was the person who was overseeing the biomedical engineering, the prosthetic device.

One of the jobs….and I actually forget how I got referred to this project, but, the Boston school system was doing a project to survey the schools for accessibility issues.

Back then, in the 70s, they didn't have Americans with Disabilities Act. They had another law. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Which I still do remember. That provided that all programs and public facilities, re, receiving public funds, be accessible to disabled individuals.

Disabled being, being either immobile, wheelchair-bound, blind, deaf or any other kind of disability.

It was very….uh…it was one of the first of its kind, laws being passed. It was the beginning of the, the Civil Rights Movement for those with disabilities.

And, part of the work that I did…and, my team and I looked at the, the projects for building the prosthetic device was that…

At that point of time, even if you had a prosthetic device, if you didn't have a building that was accessible, it didn't help. You still couldn't get in there, no matter how the technology developed.

And so, I got involved with the project that they had, looking at how to make the facilities…and so it was part engineering and part public policy...more accessible.

And so, I got involved in the Boston public school system, working for a group that was looking at these facilities. And eventually did a thesis…and I think I was the only thesis at MIT to ever have an appendix filled with pictures of bathrooms and toilets. Because, part of what I had to do was to take a look at how those were configured. How the Braille (could be rail) could be put in. How different accessibility devices could be installed in these old facilities.

This is Boston, so a lot of these schools were there since the 18th and 19th centuries.

And so that, that's sort of how I got involved in public policy issues between the physical engineering environment of the Boston public school system, and the public policy considerations that went into trying to find ways to make these programs and buildings accessible.

ps Sounds like it was interesting work for a thesis.

gc It was interesting work for a thesis, and, at the time, a young person who really didn't have any exposure to anything outside, you know, the school work and what we were doing.

There was an exposure to not just public policy issues, but the City of Boston. The politics in the City of Boston, which is a…a…how would you say it? Say, a contact sport. (laughter) In Boston at that time. So, a lot of exposure to a lot of things which actually prompted my interest in public policy and how to sort of bring engineering and the skill set that you have as an engineer to some of the problems that were facing policy makers.

ps So many thesis are just from theoretical…something. This sounds like it had some practical application. Plus you got to learn…

gc Well, I would suggest…most of the thesis have some practical application. Mine just veered off into a quasi-engineering path. And my…

And, I have to say that the…my thesis supervisor…a professor who's since passed away, named Robert Mann, was extremely supportive. Even though it wasn't pure engineering, he was extremely supportive of, of someone at MIT going into a public policy arena and trying to take what we learned in school as engineering and apply it to something that was going to make a significant difference in the population, the kids who were coming to school in Boston.

ps So you graduated then from MIT. And, did you know what you wanted to do by then?

gc Well, in 1980…no, I still didn't know. But, I knew that I wanted a job and I wanted to earn some money. That was pretty clear to me.

And, this job morphed into another job with the City of Boston. The school system is a distinct, separate organiza…or, entity within the Boston governing structure.

The City of Boston had a similar process going on, looking at city facilities. Police stations, fire stations, and other types…city halls, municipal buildings. Looking at accessibility.

They also had a need for someone to begin their energy program. Cause, this was in the late 70s when Jimmy Carter…uh…administration, had started all the initiatives for what was referred to as MEOW.

What does MEOW stand for? Energy, Oil….I'm trying to think what… Now that I said the acronym, I can't remember what it means. Moral Equivalent of War.

As you may remember, that the oil crisis and the oil embargos were the moral equivalent of war. So, they started a program where they would begin doing energy audits on public facilities.

And, was also very crude. It was punch charts and tabs. But, they needed someone to go out and do facility surveys, and do energy audits. And so, they had both the accessibility program that they needed, and they also needed the, the…someone to, to go ahead and do the, the site visits.

And since site visits for accessibility, and site visits for energy audits can be done at the same time, they had a, a job waiting for me.

So, I managed to move into that position. And, and that's where I got interested in the energy field.

ps Tell us, for the record, for the archive…(gc – Sure.) a little bit about the energy issues at, at that time.

gc Well, at that time there was the oil embargo. There was the issue of how do we reduce costs. What could we do? We were running…we were running buildings, frankly, as if energy were not really a consideration, with respect to the cost.

You got your bill, you paid it. You really didn't know how much you were using. And there was a…as budgets became tighter at that time, there was a need to understand what, what you were paying for utilities. And, even more so, how much could you reduce those? What could you do? What kind of capital investments could you make? How could you operate these facilities more efficiently?

And, there were a lot of opportunities for folks who were not doing anything to basically control utility costs. To look at that.

It was a very fundamentally budget-oriented… How much are we spending and how much can we save? By doing these audits. And, it was the beginning, so we learned a lot. Not just of how you conduct an energy audit, but what works, and what doesn't work? What's acceptable, what's not acceptable.

You had individual operators in each building. Who would…they were responsible for the building. There were some things that they were happy to do, and there were some things that they were not happy to do.

I remember, as an example, in, in City Hall.

There were opportunities to reduce the lighting. How much lighting they had to reduce. And, the mayor and city council said, we're not going to cut the light out here at all. And, that was the end of that.

And, and part of it was information….that you could actually reduce your, your expenditures for lighting without compromising the quality.

But, back then…this was the early 80s…the technology, like compact fluorescents which we have today? Those didn't exist back then. So, the technology has changed to the, to the state where it is now that, that these kind of energy-saving technologies are more commonplace.

They're not as used as they should be, but they're much more commonplace, and much more reliable. And, people don't have as much opposition to that kind of change.

ps Back then, I think, they were talking like…turn off every other light or something.

gc Oh, people don't like to be told what to do. So, the message of Jimmy Carter sitting there with a sweater on, saying, you need to be colder and wear a sweater…uh. The populations usually resist that. And, what, what you can find is you don't need a sweater to make your life more comfortable.

But, I…personally, I have to give a lot of credit to that administration because they had the foresight to say, this is important and we needed to start this.

And, a lot of us…I'm sure you might well find, that a lot of folks in the energy field got their start back in the late 70s when both…not just energy efficiency, but also renewable energy. Things such as passive solar design, where you construct buildings and homes that, that can retain solar heat without having to do anything differently, were all being considered.

They weren't readily accepted, but a lot of us looking at today's focus on renewables, finally looked back on the mission we had back when we first started to do this, and, and….it just took some more time for it to come to fruition.

ps A lot of time, actually. (laughs)

gc The renewable energy industry, just as an aside, goes through cycles. And, we've seen this before. And we hope that it's much more sustainable today than it has been.

ps I did a lot of news stories (can't hear) on solar (gc – Hm, hmm.) and all those homes. And photovoltaics. They said, we just need 20 years or so to develop this technology. (gc – Right.) Now I hear them saying the same thing.

gc Right. And it's, and it's because it's a, it's a, it's a technology that, if it doesn't have stable investment, it can cycle in terms of how it's improved. So there needs to be stable investments in that to make it better. And, if we don't have those stable investments, then those that are interested in making the technology better, aren't going to stay around if they don't think there's going to be a return.

ps Well…. (someone off camera says something)

gc Okay. Thank you.

ps So, that was your first job out of college…

gc That was my first job out of college.

ps How long did you do stay doing that?

gc I did that for five years. Until 1985.

In 1985 there was an election, a new election, in Boston. The mayor who had been there for 16 years decided not to run, so a new mayor took over. And, it was a good opportunity for a change. For me personally.

There were, there were changes in the administration, and, there were changes in the programs that I was operating. And so, for me, there was a, an opportunity for seeking a new job somewhere else.

ps How did you go about doing that? Or what did you want to do by then?

gc Oh, what I wanted to do by then, was, was unclear. I, I was pretty young. And, I had more of a…where do I want to go versus what do I want to do? Wherever I wanted to go, I certainly wanted to have the means to support myself where I went. So I looked at…this is the way an engineer use…does their future.

I had visited the Northwest quite a bit. I had friends from school who went to work for Boeing. And so, I'd been out there quite a bit, and, and like it. I said, I think I want to move out to the Northwest, to Washington State. So, I began looking for jobs that would, would fit with my background in Washington State.

And then, secured a job with the Washington State Energy Office in Olympia, Washington. And then, gave my notice, drove out there, moved to Olympia, and began a new career. I worked in Olympia, Washington. With the State Energy Office there.

ps About as far as you could get from Boston and still stay on the same… country!

gc It was, it was I-90 for about 3100 miles. And, along the way I got to stop and pick up friends and meet friends, and look at other locations. So, it was fun to go out there.

But, it's really beautiful out there. In the Northwest. And, I'd been out there, like I said, uh, with friends, and I toured the area. And I said, this, this would be a nice area to go to.

ps And so, what was your new job in, in Washington State?

gc Well, in the Northwest, which is…was…far more sensitive than a lot of regions, in terms of energy efficiency…primarily because they rely on hydroelectric power, and so, they want to preserve every single drop. Not…not dissimilar to what we do in the Southwest.

And so, they were starting a program to look at energy efficiency in commercial buildings. They had already pretty much exhausted opportunities in homes.

They knew insulation. They knew heat exchangers. Things that they could do with homes to make them more efficient, but they hadn't approached…how do we make commercial buildings, with lighting and insulation, and control systems, more efficient.

And, they'd just started a program funded by the Bonneville Power Administration called the Energy Edge. That was the program name. And, they were looking for a Project

Engineer in the state of Washington to manage the Energy Edge Program on behalf of the state, who got funding from Bonneville Power Administration.

And so, I fit into the model of what they were looking for, and so, they offered a position for me to start as a project engineer on their commercial programs.

There were three of us, three of us that started. All recruited from different areas of the country to begin, basically, to put together a project team to run this program.

ps Bet it was interesting to start in a new program…and all new people with different perspectives.

gc A new program. A new location. A new organization. A hundred and fifty people. A…where politics was not a contact sport. It was much, much different. It was a much more agreeing environment to work in. And, it was great.

A hundred-fifty people worked there. It was, it was a wonderful opportunity. I got to be at the very beginning of a program, which was essentially a competition, where we would advertise for people to submit projects, and then, we would review them.

And I had the engineering responsibility for reviewing the proposed designs that they had. And then recommending a set of winners. And then, we'd have big ceremonies. And, it was great.

And, I worked with a bunch of wonderful people, who ran the organization.

The, the leader of the organization at that time…he was an engineer. The person who hired me wasn't, and he had to convince her it was okay to hire an engineer. Cause she had her own issues with engineers. But, she needed me. So….it worked out. We both needed each other there.

So that was, that was wonderful.

ps So, how long did you stay doing that?

gc That job lasted 10 years. That job, I…when I started at the Energy Office, there were probably 80 people there. When I finished at the Energy Office, it had about 150 people who were there. And, the highest point were 180 people. It was one of the largest energy offices in, in the country.

It was very innovative, it was very creative. It, it existed on grants.

So, the history of my Energy Office employment was…I started out as a project engineer for a number of years. Then they, they decided they wanted to create a separate unit within the office with just the engineers. Cause engineers had been assigned to various programs.

And so, we had engineers with 30 years of experience counting light bulbs, and engineers like me with not 30 years of experience, looking at large commercial buildings. And, it was thought that, perhaps we ought to take all of the engineers and, and intermingle them, integrate them, and then attempt to try to put the right people in the right spots. The person with the 30 years of experience maybe…they ought to be mentoring the ones with two years of experience.

It sounds like a reasonable proposal. And so, they as me to, to put that unit together and run that unit.

And so, for a number of years I ran what we called the Technical Unit. And, we got our own building. We…our own office. And we expanded and, and…it created quite an, an engine…quite a multi-discipline engineering group that were…essentially deployed the programs based on their experience.

So, that was interesting, organizationally, to move it together. But, also, a lot of the programs lost their engineers.

The light bulb-counting engineer didn't feel comfortable counting light bulbs, but, the Program Manager didn't like losing this one. So, we had to make sure that they didn't, they didn't lose them. So, they continued to work with them.

ps Was most of the focus on being more energy efficient? Saving energy.

gc The focus of the office and what these engineers did, was focused on energy efficiency and what you could do for commercial, institutionals like schools, industrial facilities. What you could do to make them more energy efficient. How you educate and train them. Do all sorts of things.

My role was a bit different. My role was an organizational one. Which was to make sure that the engineers were properly trained. They got to attend seminars. That they were, that they were assigned to the right programs. That their Program Managers were happy.

I still did engineering. I still had a role as a project engineer on a variety of, of programs. We…that was before the internet.

We had what's, what was known and an Electronic Bulletin Board. You may not even know what that is, cause it was old technology, but we were in the first of those for the Northwest.

And it actually, today, 20, 20 years later, they actually still operate it. It's called the Electric Ideas Clearing House. And, it's an internet base. But, we started that on a grant we received. That was something I put together as the Unit Manager, to get this huge program for this office.

So that was a major accomplishment that I, I had there. And, it's great. And, it still works today. In fact, the same people that worked at the Energy Office back then, a lot of them are still working on that. So, I still keep in touch with them.

ps So you stayed there for 10 years. What made you decide to leave?

gc Well, the progress, the, the Energy Office was one of those career stepping ladders.

After the Technical Unit Manager, I became an Assistant Director for the entire unit. And, I guess they kept not liking me in my current…positions that I had. And so, eventually, I, I was the...the last position I had with the Energy Office was Deputy Director. And so, I was second in command. And that was in 1993.

In 1994, the legislature in the State of Washington….the governor signed a bill that closed the Energy Office in two years.

So, in 1994 I got my pink slip, so to speak. Cause you don't need a Deputy Director or a Director for an office that's no longer going to exist.

ps Why did they want to close it?

gc Oh, there were a variety of reasons. They were looking at reducing the number of state employees. Many energy offices across the country had evolved during the Carter administration, and then slowly declined to a point where…if you looked for, for independent energy offices today, you won't find, you won't find them. They're all…

And we were big. We were 150 people. We relied on funding from utilities. Utilities were generally unhappy with giving the state money to do a program. At that point, they'd evolved. They wanted to do it themselves. They wanted to retain that money.

So, there were a variety of reasons…that they closed the office. Not so much funding-wise, but a variety of other reasons. Reducing state employees. Utility opposition to a state agency. Running programs that they wanted to run locally. So, a lot of reasons that…from an outside observer, made sense.

So they, they had…they closed the office. Or, proposed legislation closed the office. And basically we had, from the end of 94, the beginning of 95, till the end of June of 96 to close things off.

So, we had 150 people…all of whom were going to be out of a job. In, in a year-and-a-half.

My job, at that point….I, I was given two jobs to do. My director was dealing with the politics of….what she needed to deal with. Doing just a wonderful job.

My job was twofold. We still had projects we needed to complete. We had bids, we had contracts. We still had to complete them. And, we had to complete them even as people were leaving to get a job…another job. So, a year-and-a-half to complete these projects.

And, the other job that I had, which was a little out of my, my field of training, was the Human Resource issues. The management of….how do we get a hundred…150

people…to, number one, understand that, if they didn't put their resumes together and look for a job, that July One of 2000…of 1996…they were really going to be out of a job. One day they would walk out and the door would be closed. (laughs)

And, some people didn't believe it. They were there because they loved the work. They weren't there to collect a paycheck. These people were committed to the environment. Committed to making us a greener community. I mean, they were there because they believed in what they were doing. And, 150 people like that. So, how could anyone terminate their jobs?

And so, we had to deal with not only getting people to do their resumes, put them in a book, sending them out to utilities. These are great people. Can you hire them?

We also had…there were a number of cases where I had to sit down and say, look, you're really going to be out of a job. We're not kidding.

Unions would come in. A union came in and told people that they could fix this for them. They could make it…and the unions would sit down with us and say, that's not true. The governor and the legislature and the utilities all agreed to close us. We don't have anyone.

In fact…I'll relay one story.

I was at a, at a hearing where they were doing this bill. And, this was another evolution of my understanding of the world of politics. Is, we had two days of hearings on this bill, to close the Energy Office. And, we had two days of hearings where everyone who went up there said why keeping it open was a good idea.

We don't receive state funds. We do good work. All…

So, two days worth of hearings. One after the other, people would come up.

And then, at the end of the, the hearing, they stopped and they discussed the bill. So, I remember they, one of the committeemen saying, Madam Chairman, we've been here for two days. We have heard from numbers of people representing all these different industries about how important it is to keep the Energy Office here. To keep them open.

We haven't had one person come up and testify why they think it ought to be closed. And, the Chairman turned and said, if we needed someone, we would have gotten them. I remember that. I'll never forget that comment. And, they voted to close us.

ps And, they…it was funded with…outside of state funds, so it didn't save them any money.

gc It did not. That was what was very hard for the staff to understand, is, look, we have these funds. But, it was funded with utility money. So, there was another group.

So, from a perspective of saving taxpayer dollars, it wasn't going to make….or general fund dollars…it wasn't going to make a dent in the budget.

From the perspective of utilities, from…it, it would make somewhat of a dent. Not a huge dent. It wasn't a huge….there wasn't a huge financial savings.

It was just a tendency for the governors to talk to each other and… having a state Energy Office just didn't fit.

Now, today…with issues going on in energy, that may have been a decision that could be looked at.

But, I will tell you that…I know most of the people who, who left…the 150 people who left, 80 people got jobs somewhere else. Sixty or 70 of them got jobs in other agencies, continuing the programs. We had a whole process of taking the mot important programs that we had and finding a home.

So, part of my job was going out to other agencies and marketing the wonderful talents of the people that we have. So, those programs went to our university. A very good home for them.

And, we had 10 people who didn't have jobs, and they were…they didn't want jobs. So we had no grievances filed. We had no appeals filed. We have people who are much better off today where they are than they were.

So, we were pretty successful in doing that.

But, I took myself out of any potential job in Olympia, at this office or this future. Because, one, I didn't want to be dealing with the, the shadows in the closet. I'd been there for a long enough time.

And two, I thought I could do, frankly, a better job of managing the closure, if I didn't really have a stake in it.

Since I didn't want a stake in it, and I, I didn't have to have a stake in it.

ps Well, what did you want to do?

gc Well, once again, I wanted to have a job. Which seems to have sort of been…is coming out, sort of the driving force in this.

I needed, I needed another job. I had experience in human resource management, engineering, energy efficiency. But, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Which is pretty consistent with, with me.

And so, I decided, more, more based on location…where do I want to go, and what kind of…and I'll see what kind of jobs might be there.

And so, there were really two, two locations I looked at. One was continuing in the State of Washington. Somewhere. And so, I applied for jobs there. And also, I looked at Las Vegas.

And, the reason I looked at Las Vegas is because, for some strange reason, my entire family was living here. Uh. My mother and sister had moved out from New York. Back here. My sister went to school in New York. And they moved out here 25 years ago. I don't know how long. And so, they all settled in Las Vegas.

And then, my grandmother who had lived in New York City for 50 years, in a, in a midtown Manhattan apartment, with seven bedrooms, under rent control since 1930s, (laughs) had decided, she couldn't really take care of herself. She was in her 80s. And so, she moved out there, too.

So, essentially, all of my family moved out to Las Vegas, so I decided I would explore opportunities….

ps What made your family all move to Las Vegas?

gc Wish I had an answer to that. I, I don't. I don't.

My grandmother moved there because the rest of my family was there and they needed people to take care. My mother had visited Las Vegas a number of times. I guess she liked it. There was a large New York community in Las Vegas. So, she felt comfortable. I never really knew…She passed away a number of years ago. They just decided to settle there.

And my sister just sort of followed her. And she's been living here for 20 years. She's got two kids, so they've got a family (can't understand word) here, too.

So, I decided, too, well, I'll look in Las Vegas, too, for a job. So, I looked around…

ps How do you, how do you do that? When you decided to come to Las Vegas. Where did you start looking?

gc Well, I was still in Washington. Since I knew…the one benefit of having legislation close your offices, you've got sufficient time to know when you're going to be…you're going to get your pink slip.

So, I had been looking around for a number of months. And I had found a job, a job descriptions, for a Director of Colorado River Commission. I didn't know very much about it, but, reading the description, I thought, well, it's got human resource issues. It's got power issues, related to the hydroelectric projects. It's got water issues.

Well, I don't have that much background in water. But, I'd been involved in the Columbia River system, and the Bonneville Power Administration, and hydroelectric facilities, and salmon recovery. And, the issues on water down here aren't that much different than they are up here. So, you know, I'll, I'll, I'll try for that.

And so, I applied for that job. Came down for an interview. Actually came down for two interviews. And, eventually got the job back in May of, in April of, of 96.

ps What kind of a change was it moving from Washington State to Nevada?

gc Well, there were a couple of, couple of changes.

The first, the first was…when I left… When I left Washington, they had a big party for me…they had a…when I left. And, they had a, they had a map of, of Washington and Nevada, and a plug going into Nevada. Sort of cute. (laughs) We were a very creative office up, up there, too. So.

One of the changes was leaving 150 people and coming down to a smaller office.

But, I think the first change was when I drove down. I had a Subaru wagon, with four-wheel drive, that I used in Washington for a lot of purposes. Like getting over the mountain passes. And so, I drove this car down. And I…I drove the…I drove on I-15 to get here, cause I didn't trust the Subaru in the middle of the Great Basin. Or any other way.

So, I drove down there, and I passed…you have to drive across Oregon and then through Idaho and then into Utah, and then come down to Las Vegas. And, as…

When I made it to Salt Lake, I stayed in, in Idaho…and I made it to Salt Lake. And I started driving further south. It started getting really hot. (laughs)

ps What time of year was this?

gc This was early May. This was early May. And…and… This early May this year was real cold.

It was 105. And, I could just hear my Subaru talking to me, and saying, you…. You know, it was not happy with what I was doing to it.

And so, I showed up. And, finally…I remember getting over the pass, coming through from St. George down, and getting over the apex summit, and then seeing Las Vegas there. And driving…pulling up…cause I stayed at my mother house when I was here. Opening the door and going, oh, my…. You know. It's 107 degrees here!

Well, the rust stopped on my car, and there was no more rust. Cause in 107, that was a benefit for the car. But, all the, all the…the tubes all melted and burnt up.

So, I mean…from a temperature perspective, that was different. From a rainfall perspective…

Sometimes I say that the reason they hired me…cause I didn't have any background in Colorado River issues. The reason they hired me is, Olympia has 55 inches of rain a

year. And they thought I had some water right. You know, I brought some…you know, just bring five inches with you, it'll be great.

So, that, that, that was a change.

I'd been to Las Vegas quite a bit to visit. I don't think I ever visited in the summer. And, I remember, I remember the cards that they gave me when I left, cause I look at them every once in a while.

And one of, one of the….the Finance Officer, what he wrote down was…get a pool. You know. He didn't write anything else. It was…get a pool. And, don't bet on this.

So, it was a bit of, of…it wasn't much of a, of a shock…cause I don't get shocked very easily.

It was a, you know, a little bit of a lifestyle change. I had to go back and live with my mother which I hadn't done for quite some time. Who was nice enough to loan me a room, so I had my own room. You know. I was like a little kid. And I had a….sort of say, no, I, I really can do my own laundry and I really can cook my own meals.

I, I do remember one thing about moving down. Which is that…my mother and, and her friend took a trip to California, and left me in charge of the house. And, the air conditioner broke. And, (clears throat) I remember spending most of my evenings in the pool. That they had. And coming out of the pool and going back, going in the pool. And say, well, you know, this is a different kind of survival mentality you have to have down here than, than I had in Olympia which was more…

ps Air conditioners only break when it's 100….

gc And, I've learned over time, I don't have a pool, but I've learned over time that that can happen and you need to prepare yourself for that.

ps Go to the movies till they can repair it!

gc Well, just to…just as an aside.

One of the things I used to do in Boston when I lived there….I lived in a place called Dorchester. Which was…I lived there because I was working for the city and I wanted to be a townie.

And, Dorchester was a, a place where peop, real people lived. And, I lived in a three-story townhouse. And…on the very top floor with no air conditioning in the summer. And, I don't know if you've ever been to Boston, but in the summer, it gets to b in the mid-90s and the humidity's in the mid-90s.

And so, that's exactly what we would do. I would do. Is go to the movies to get air conditioning.

ps Air conditioners….we live in Phoenix. So. Air conditioners tend to break on Friday night.

gc Right. Right.

ps When it's 110! So, the environment was different. Did you get a new car, too?

gc My…I did. I did. My, my, my Subaru's air conditioning broke in the first summer. It whined actually. I think it was very upset. It whined and it broke. And, I actually spent…it was the latter half of the summer without it. But I did get….

I did acclimate to that and I learned all sorts of things. I learned about the, uh….the tubing has to be checked more often. Your batteries die every two years. You know, we have…all sorts of things like that. Just getting accustomed. And now I share it with all the newcomers that come here. And, they say, what?!

ps Well, what about your job? What was the job like when you actually settled in? You, you came here as the Executive Director.

gc 38:11 That's correct.

ps So, you were in charge!

gc I started at the, at the very top.

A couple of things about the Colorado River Commission. It's a state agency. And when, when I showed up there, they hadn't had a director for two years.

They had just not hired one. And so, they had been without a director. And, you…in an organization that was looking at its roles and responsibilities, it didn't… it wasn't firmly grounded.

It had…we had had some legislation that changed the make-up of our Board. And this… of course, I looked from knowing what had happened previously.

And so, there was a lot of human resource issues. To deal with. Making, building up the morale of the office. Bringing on some resources to help us. Uh. Establishing personnel classifications that made sense. And really building up that…this is an important organization.

And, I remember my director from Olympia, who passed away a number of years ago of, of cancer. And, I remember when she started. I, I got a lot of lessons, a lot of mentoring from here. And I remember when she started.

She came into a brand-new organization. She didn't have an energy background up in Olympia. She was a human resource, Fish and Wildlife…but, mostly liberal, liberal background.

And, I remember she came in , and there was a lot of huffing and gruffing by the old energy people, about, well, she doesn't know anything about the topic. You know, she's not ready for this. How dare they….you know, that kind of, that kind of discussion, and dialogue.

And, she got up there, and she was a tough woman. She, she was a really tough, a tough woman. She reminds me a lot of Pat Mulroy. She had a real strong personality and says what she thinks. And manages that way.

And, she got up there in front of this group at the first staff meeting. All staff meeting. She got up there and she said, I know that I don't have an energy background. And, I know I need to learn. And, I want you to help me learn. Help me learn what I need to know. But, if you don't want to do that, step out of the way, and let those people who do move forward.

And, and…that's, that's sort of what I brought down with me. I didn't, I didn't say it, cause I could never say it as well as she did. But, the idea was…are there…I want…I'm a new director. And I think the focus was, hmm, he'll go, too. You know.

And, and I said, look, I want to learn from what you've got. Tell me what I need to know. Help me. And that's what they did.

I remember a number of people who came in like the first or second day with a booklet and said, here's what you need to know. And others who weren't as aggressive as that. And so I sought out their help.

And that was what needed to be done. People needed to, to share. And, since they hadn't had a director for so long, they never had an opportunity to do that. Here, this is what we need to do.

And so, there was a human resource issue. The organization had been viewed, uh, not very favorably by the community. There was a relationship among our community that needed to be developed. With the Colorado River Commission as a state agency responsible for the water and power. And the Southern Nevada Water Authority as responsible for insuring the delivery of that water. There needed to be an extremely strong relationship between the two organizations.

We have boards that have the same members on them.

And, that was what I took as my main responsibility. Was to upgrade and develop that relationship. To improve it, to make it work, and to have us seem as seamless to the community of Colorado River states that look at Nevada.

And, I can tell you today that, frankly, most people who work on Seven State issues, except for those of us who actually know each other, don't recognize there's a state and a local government. That we work together to have a unified voice that focuses not on the institutions, but on the state. That was sort of the general…

And then to build a, a core group of people who also could accept that reality and do that. And, and that's….you know, 10 years…

It's almost been 12 years now, and I would tell you that, that today, I think that the world views our organization exactly like that.

I wish I could say that that was a plan that had been developed and implemented in precise…in precision…each year with steps along the way. But, I would say that that is not the case. That we were extremely fortunate to be able to bring on individuals who actually had the ability to accept change, were flexible, and are just, uh, the greatest group that you could get together to have that kind of relationship. And, I think the Water Authority people that work with them would agree with that.

We, we have an extremely close working relationship, to the extent that we have one of our groups that are co-located with them. The group that…is on our organization, buys all the electricity for the Water Authority. That's part of our responsibility. Is actually co-located in a building with their customer.

And, I would say that 10, 12 years ago, that just would not have happened.

ps So, you came on board…it sounds like you were an engineer, but you weren't using engineering skills. (laughs)

gc I have…what…I don't use the applied engineer. I'm a licensed engineer, but I can't say I do engineering work. Drawings.

What, what I do use out of what I've learned at engineering is a, a way to address issues. Skill set that tries to put issues in a logic, in an order, in a hypothesis, scientific method, and tries to use that in more of a public policy human resource.

But, every once in awhile I have to let people know that I'm an engineer at a power plant. That I actually understand what they're doing. Not that I'm familiar with the details. Just in case they want to put something by me. Frankly, they don't.

So, I've had, I've had to pull those out of storage every once in awhile.

But, the applied engineering, the applied technical work…the Executive Director wasn't hired, really, to do engineering. Uh…I…if I had to do it, I prob, I probably could apply some skills.

The Executive Director was hired to essentially manage human resource issues. To manage…to work with the Board. To manage communications To deal with the political environment. That's…

And, I had a long time to learn how to be a non-engineer in order to do that. Cause sometimes engineers can come out, you know, in a public arena. And, I did this a number of times with…answering the question that, frankly, never was asked. You know, you'd say afterwards, well, that was a great answer, but that really wasn't the

question I asked you. Oh. So, I've managed to be able to identify…when I get into that role.

ps You'd worked in the political arena in Boston. And Washington State. How did Nevada's political situation compare to those two?

gc Well, nothing compares to Boston, where I said it was a contact sport.

Boston was growing like Las Vegas is growing today, and the community was much less receptive to the old ways of patronage. In Boston. So, that actually grew out.

I learned in Boston how the patronage system works.

I remember the first, (clears throat) the first…time that I was told where my precinct meeting was going to be after I was hired. And, went to my precinct captain's meeting, who walked down the block. And, my first activity was holding a bumper sticker for some candidate I didn't know at a supermarket.

And, that stopped quickly after he learned that a recent graduate from MIT, who didn't live in Boston, didn't have a lot of political constituencies to bring to the table. So, they weren't looking for me. But, it was a contact sport.

In Washington State, the politics were a little bit laid back. Uh. The politics of the utility world looked pretty, pretty un-organized

And then, when I came to Nevada….at the very beginning, I didn't have a lot of dealings with the political environment. Just learning the ropes.

I remember looking at the utilities. We serve…provide hydroelectric to rural utilities in Southern Nevada. And, I remember that they weren't any different really than the rural utilities that I dealt with in Washington State. So, they were the same. And, and…

What I learned was that, there had been, I believe, a history of mistrust the people that we provided electricity to, and the Colorado River Commission. They didn't, they didn't have a lot of faith in our capability. They didn't have a lot of trust in our organization. Decisions on how much we would spend, cause they pay our bills, were made in a vacuum. Were made to be somewhat hidden.

And, my experience in Washington State was, that doesn't work.

And so we began a process over the next few years after I started, to share with them work we do. Get their input. Listen to them. And, they responded. So, that, that was great. They responded to that. They appreciated being able to look at what we did. To have input. To suggest things that we should do or shouldn't do. And, we had tremendous support.

We went to the legislature for a…adoption of a new personnel system for the Colorado River Commission. We had…all of our positions had been civil service, through the

state. And the kind of projects that we were going to begin, building high voltage electrical systems, negotiating with the other states on water, didn't have positions within state government that fit the mold, or could pay the salaries, frankly, that the other states could, (swallows) excuse me…afford to pay.

And so, we needed, if we were going to do anything that our board wanted us to do, we needed to have a brand-new personnel system that made civil service put us in an unclassified, meaning we could do the hiring. And set the salaries at a level that could attract talent.

And, you would think that…our customers, those who paid our bills, would be somewhat concerned, because they were going to end up paying more money for these positions. Had exactly the opposite.

They went and said, you need to pay these people. And, frankly, they said, because we need good people working for you. And, they supported us in that. And that was great.

So, in Nevada, it's not a… It, it can be a contact sport. For, for the Colorado River Commission, at first I sort of ignored the politics. Just in denial. And then, after awhile the politics became important. But, more the politics of trying to create a better organization.

ps It does seem to be…

(someone gives him water)

gc Thank you. You probably saw me…

ps We can stop anytime…

(camera stops)

ps …so if you need a drink of water…

gc Just stop me if you, if you need to.

ps Several people mentioned to me that in Nevada, it doesn't seem to be an issue of…most other places, it's not an issue of how much is it going to cost, but how quick can you get it done? Did you find that difference in Nevada?

gc It depends on where you start. For instance, for, for my organization.

We, we didn't, we didn't have a large budget. In fact, we were under-budgeted. We were under-capitalized. Cause…and we couldn't do the work because of that. So, we needed to appropriately capitalize, but not be so affluent or try to create…

Frankly in a, in a state agency, you try to be fairly mundane. Your try to keep things cautious. And there was…

What I needed to do was build up capability and then improve efficiency.

And that's what we've done. We brought good people on, and then we reduced the number of people we needed to have to do the job, because they were better people. So, we tried to gain through efficiency.

Nevada, as a community that's growing, needed to spend more on infrastructure. We didn't have the infrastructure…either water or power…to support a growing community.

So…saying money's no object would be wrong. But, saying that money has to be the number one consideration, I think, is wrong, too. Because the people that are going to move here are going to be concerned about the fact that we haven't built the pumps and the pipes. Not that we spent less money not building them.

So, to, to, to be able to meet the demands that we have, we have to have the money to do that. And the public supports that.

They did that when they passed the quarter-cent sales tax here to help support the construction of the water system. Our customers agreed to do that when they supported…when we had to raise our administrative charge to do things. So, they want us to do a good job.

And, frankly, as a component of the expense, of the economic development, if you like, of the community…the portion of the expense that we spend on building infrastructures is minor compared to what it would be if we didn't build.

ps People want that air conditioner to work!

gc Absolutely. And they have, they have a right to move here. And we're not going to…they're not going to leave. They want to be here. And, you've got to have air conditioning. You've got to have water. And, you've got to have the ability to pump it from Lake Mead, which is a thousand feet lower than the Las Vegas Valley…up here.

ps You mentioned several times that the Colorado River Commission is a state agency. Talk a little bit about…and you're a state employee…

gc That's correct. I get my check from the state of Nevada.

ps You're Executive Director. And yet, the commissioners have a lot of the power, too. How does that work? Or, how is your relationship with the commissioners as a staff person with the commission?

gc We have an extraordinary unique commission. Our commission was changed back in the, the 1990…late 90s, early 2000s…to a seven member commission. Four of our members are appointed by the governor of the state of Nevada. Including the Chairman. Three of our members are elected officials, who are appointed by the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

So, we have a Board that consists of elected officials and appointed officials.

But, it is a wonderful Board. Because they have, this Board…and this has been for the 12 years that I've been here…are uniquely devoted to supporting the efforts of the Colorado River Commission in meeting the needs of Nevada. And, that's sort of a general statement. They work wonderfully together.

I could not ask for a Board who puts whatever issues they may have, to the side for the common good. Their relationship with staff is great. They support us, we keep them informed. If they have a concern, they make it known.

My job is to make sure that whatever issues that they have are taken care of. And that, they're ignored. (sic)

I remember one meeting I had with our power customers, early on. And, I told them what I think my job is. I said, my job is, I serve you in providing you with electricity. And then, I also serve the Board. And, I remember one of them saying, well, they don't get any electricity. And, I said, that's true. But, my job is that I serve them. You need to recognize that. And it's worked out fabulously.

Our customers are very supportive of our Board, and our Board is supportive of them. So, it is not, it is not a difficult job working for the kind of people that work on my Board.

I've been fortunate enough to be mentored by a number of them, that I very much look up to what they have to offer this community, and how much time and effort they spend on dealing with these issues. And these elected officials in Southern Nevada…they're everywhere. They're on every….they are on every different commission. They put their heart into it. And, they're wonderful people to work with.

ps Now, they are…not really paid to…their commission…is some nominal…

gc They're paid 80-bucks a meeting, I think. I mean, they get a per diem.

They all have other jobs. They're all volunteers in service. They all have other jobs that, that pay their salary. But, they all make the time out to be there and to be interested, and be part of the process.

ps But, there really is a big job to be informed, too. I mean, educated about these Compact issues.

gc Right. I'm paid to know these issues. I'm paid a salary to do them. They do it a, ass a volunteer. And I, I respect them for doing it. They're…our Board is composed…I could talk for an hour on each one of our Board members.

They're wonderful people. I…they have a public service ethic, to the community. And, and, they do a wonderful job. I'm just proud to be associated with them.

ps Did you have a real learning curve when you came here to…you said that you knew about the Columbia River…but to learn about the Colorado River and the whole system?

gc I'm still on a learning curve. I will never get off the learning curve.

I had a lot to learn about what's important, and what's not important. I had a lot to learn about who the other players were. I had a lot to learn that….the politics involved in the Seven States process. And, I was lucky enough to be invited to participate and have a lot of people who have been here for a lot longer than I have, who would tutor me on what needs to be done.

I will never be off a learning curve on this river system.

Just this week… Yesterday, when we signed the agreements, there was a whole new learning curve of how we work together, and put together accords that, frankly, no one else in the world could think was possible.

So, it was a steep learning curve. And, like I said, I tried to get information, perspective, from people. And tried to take that perspective and make it my own.

ps And you came…not too long after the, the Southern Nevada Water Authority was created. That's kind of a unique organization. Want to talk a little bit (gc – Sure.) about that? And the relationship they have to the commission.

gc They were formed in 1991. And, I, I would compare what Southern Nevada did to what Arizona did and what California did.

Metropolitan Water District, the Colorado River Board. Central Arizona Project, Arizona Department of Water Resources. Local purveyor, deliverer of water, state agency with the state trust.

The different in Nevada was, Nevada didn't grow up until much later.

As our community began to grow in the 90s, there was a need to collect the individual purveyors and create a Water Authority. Someone to manage on a wholesale regional basis, the water supplies. Very similar to what the other states have done.

And so, there was a need to do that. And, Pat Mulroy and her leadership created this type of organization. And without someone like Pat Mulroy, I'm not sure you could do that. She brought that kind of leadership, to bring the individual entities, who all wanted to retain their own share, together for, for a common vision of sharing this resource in the community.

The Colorado River Commission changed as a state agency, from someone who, during low growth period, could manage the water delivery, to an agency that had to be much more, on a policy level, to work with them on natural resource and protection issues with the federal government.

So that evolution… We used to be in the pipes and pumps business. To being in the natural resource management business, as another organization took over, required, required the effort to build that relationship in a new way. And that's what I referred to earlier.

And so, I look at it as a fresh perspective. Someone who had no involvement in, uh, the changes that occurred. And coming down to it and looking at it from an objective point of view, recognize…this is a good thing, and we need to make it work. And we have.

I think, by all objective measurements, that the relationship between the state agency who has a new role in the Water Authority, which is a fairly young agency, has worked magnificently. And, I think the, the ability for us to negotiate these agreements, and work in partnership in Nevada, has been our strength.

ps Do you think in some ways it's been an advantage that you are new? So that you're not saying, well, that's not the way we used to do it!

gc I, I think…I think having a new perspective. I mean, institutional memory is important. Having a new perspective is also important.

Having a new perspective in an organization that is undergoing significant change. Like I said earlier, the, the reason I didn't stay at the State Energy Office, or the provisions, was cause I had been there so long and there were shadows in the closet. And, I could not have an objective perspective. I'd still be dwelling in the problems that created the closure.

In this respect, a new person coming in, I think, was helpful. Didn't have to be me, but I think a new person bringing in a fresh perspective, looking at everything, and saying what looks good, regardless of what happened before. And saying, well, we ought to, we ought to enhance this and embrace it?

ps Okay. Why don't we change our tape here….