

TAPE #7GEORGE BONNEFOY

I'm in the background of a lot of things around the county. Are you in with Garbarini?

(No, no.)

Well, he's all right. Babe's a good man.

(When were you born, George?)

1883. You know, my folks build 7 or 8 homes in there. I'm talking about Jackson Gate Road. Go past the cemetery and drop down, and the first house on left, and my folks put all those buildings in there. And the first house on the left is where I was born.

(That's the first place I lived when I came to Jackson.)

No kidding, you lived there... Well, I'm pretty much sold out. I went into that Pine Grove area---the banks would loan me all the money I want on my note. But they wouldn't loan me a nickel with that security up there. But I had the laugh. I came out over a quarter of a million ahead.

...Now we got Briggs over at Wells Fargo. I dealt with the old man--- before Briggs---for 68 years. Started out I had one dollar, and they gave you a little book and boy, was I proud of that book. Had one dollar in the bank.

...Course my group, that's that's ^{Card} Gar Chisolm and those fellas, they virtually control Wells Fargo. That ^{Card} Gar Chisolm, he's really something, ya know his home at the lake is next to us. Those people own half of Sutter Creek and half of Jackson. They put in the Safeway deal down here. They go a million and a half for it.

They put that in, Fuller and Chisolm and that group. And they sold that to John D, I understand he controls Safeway stores from coast to coast. Like he does Standard.

What can we do for the youth of our county? I've been thinking of some organization...of course, I had the two skating rinks at one time. They both burned down about the same time. My son, he skates. He's over 70. He came up here one time and he said, Dad, Amador County should have a skating rink. And before he left he talked me into it. He said get a location, I've got the connections and we'll come in. I rented a place for 40 dollars a month and we got it lined up and publicity through the papers. We opened up and there were so many people there, well...

I had the Ione City Hall as one. I had a man by name of Montgomery, big tall fella, he was assistant there. I let him take the profits; he was doing most of the work. That night 40 people from Moke Hill were there. They had their babies there, and he was lookin after them. Anyway, he had to show me the stove---you'd throw on these big logs---and I said, Tom, don't you think you should be more careful? And that morning at 2 he called me and told me the place had burned down! He saved 185 pair of skates---the rest went up in smoke. He had no insurance, can you imagine.

Then we had Sutter Hill. Same thing happened there. They wanted me back but it was too much. What do I wanta monkey with a skating rink for! There's lots of ways of making money without real hard work. Course I still cut my winter wood here; it's my exercise.

Spend spare time at the Lake---we have a summer home at Twin Lakes but the grand children have just about taken over. Last time I stayed there I said no more! I think there were 32 of em there that night.

It's a great world---now what can we do for the youngsters? Could we build something here for the kids? A place where they could congregate. What about a bowling alley? I held onto a lot of frontage on 88. Someone wanted me to put in a building for recreation. Could that be accomplished here?

(The Country is developing a full-purpose recreation center out on the Allen property.)

Is that up by Sutter Hill?

(Up by the academy.)

That's better than this because it's more central. Takes care of the Plymouth area, Ione...

(The gym at the old Mother Lode Academy is what's being used.)

That's very good.

(Did you have anything to do with Golden Chain---what is now 49?)

To a certain extent. My work has always been in the background. Take, for instance, Chamber of Commerce. We got 88 through. Got 25 million dollars from the federal government. But we had lots of opposition, and Placerville with their highway 50. They didn't want 88; it was in opposition to 50. And our senator, Barry was from there, you can imagine what we had against us. Well, with me, I always go to headquarters. First, I figure I'm gonna deal with the state, I'm gonna deal with the federal government, anyway, George Sosman, he did a lot a good work. He was a promoter for ADA.

They had their faults too; there was a certain amount of jealousy between Spinetti and Sosman. With me jealousy don't enter into it. And Spinetti was on Main Street and I knew what was coming even though we had only a few cars on Main Street then.

...I've always had credit, unlimited,...Once I owed the bank 250,000 dollars. So I think I know something about big business. ...I also had the Grant property in Ione, the business district. And we were shipping several carloads a day out of the valley. We had the coal mines, lignite, and all that stuff I made one sale. It was a good sale too. In the meantime, there were a lot of boulders in there. I got a lease on 33,000 acres. It covered everything; the coal, the boulders. Well, I was down there one day and I asked my brother what those boulders were doing out there in the field. I said I was going to find out if there was a customer for them. So I checked in Sacramento, and came up with the Southern Pacific...

...School bus system was mine. Turned that over to the County. But I promoted it and put the busses in and everything. Finally sold out here to the district.

And I'm still going, still looking around ...over at Tahoe, pulling the levers, and I'm winding up in fine shape. But I only play the nickel machine, they don't get me on the big one.

Sammy down here, his wife plays the dollar machine. I asked her how she was doing the other day, and she said she just hit 5000 over there.

I lose a bit. The last time I Lost I at least made expenses. Last time four women went with ~~me~~ me. They got no money and they started blowing off at me. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

My daughter Vivian, she's in a mobile home. Below the high school.

I bought it for them for less than 4000. The home, that is. I think she sold it for 65,000!

Now she's in a mobile home! Would you like to live in a mobile home? Vivian paid 16,000 for hers. Would you like to live in one, Fred?

(Well...)

Money don't seem like anything. My other daughter in Sacramento, she's gonna sell her home.

.....ramblings.....

What can we do for the kids?

(I really don't know.)

...What's his name came over the pass here. I think he left France previous to that time, so we go back quite a way. That was before the discovery of the Panama, he sailed around the horn. This info I got...my Grandfather got killed here, a tree fell on him. But my Grandmother lived here and never learned to speak English. Anyway, we go way back to France. Imagine it took Grandfather months to get from Paris to San Francisco. His mission was to look into the grape and wine business. His folks were in the wine business in France. He must have sailed back around the horn from San Francisco. He was in San Francisco in the spring of 48 when gold was discovered. Finally he wound up in Sacramento. First, he had a few acres there and he raised some stuff. How he got from Sacramento, I don't know, but talking with my Grandmother---he came back with the family---and they moved there. He was here before Kit Carson came over in 44. (Sacramento.)

I think we're considered the oldest family in the county. Anyway, here we are. We've used this spring for over a hundred years. And it's dry as a bone. Put these wells in cause I like to think ahead.

...My father drove the first pick that put the Argonaut shaft down. The Kennedy, it's all part of our work. I was with the old man at that time---when he developed all these mines. Got the Argonaut there with drifts under Jackson. Maybe that could cave in sometime. Then from the Zeile, that's where he had his office, that's where I spent a good deal of my time. It was a wonderful experience. He was telling me one day; George, I came into Jackson with holes in my pants, but I guess you know they're pretty well padded now! ~~XXXX~~ That was old man ^{Deiter} Deiter---had the park named for him. I put in a dam for swimming and a lot of things. Course Babe Garbarini took a lot of interest. And between us we worked the thing out. I put in a pool for adults and brought in white sand and everything.

I went into Pine Grove when both banks thought I was nuts, and I took in over a quarter of a million in profits.

(Did your people raise grapes up here?)

...He came up here and it was just what he was looking for. He made the first champagne in the state. And when he was killed there was noone who knew how to take care of those bottles. I think he had 4000 bottles of champagne. My Grandmother used to tell me about those bottles blowing up. Sounded like a shotgun.

He had a tunnel in the side of the hill. We never went in there. There may ~~still~~ still be some bottles of this Champagne there yet.

...That's the Pitwall family, my mother married a Bonnefoy. My father was from Georgetown. They came in here in the early days. They came across the plains.

(What was life like in the County?)

Well, I've always been an agitator. Lets go back, and take the city of Jackson at one time. ■ Spinetti was on Main Street. And previous to that time we only got a few cars through the county. Naturally, they went down Main. And, of course, Louie was a clever fella too. Anyway, I checked and figured we had to have a highway around the town. There was no question...Also, I helped get the bill for 88 through the legislature...and I told the people to get busy on the road. It was called the Alpine State Highway. I helped put 50 through too. Met in San Francisco with two of the big federal men. Took the whole highway office in Stockton out to dinner once---to push the highway.

...But way back, all I had in my head was thoughts of Lake Tahoe. That's before gambling. There's going to be 2000 cars every day on 88 for Tahoe and Yosemite. There's no limit.

I like it now; when I was a kid I had to go out and hassle with the horse. And I'd have to walk most of the times. You know, all the time we had slot machines here I never put a nickel in em. Now I'm a regular sucker at Tahoe.