ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

IRENE LEWIS

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STATUS OF INTERVIEWS:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

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Interviews Conducted and Edited by:
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IRENE LEWIS

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INTERVIEWER: Brit Allen Storey
Brit Allen Storey

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A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for

International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

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For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:
www.usbr.gov/history

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Oral History Interview
Irene Lewis

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Irene Lewis, [Hoover Dam Tour Guide], of the Bureau of Reclamation, at her [home] in [Las Vegas, Nevada], on May 5, 1994, at about ____ o'clock in the _____. This is Tape 1. [Intro missing from tape (Tr.)]

Storey: . . . educated, and how you came to be working at the Bureau of Reclamation, until when was it, last Friday?

Lewis: Last Friday.

Storey: That would have been April 29, you retired.

Early Life

Lewis: Right, retired–until I go back. I was born in Redondo Beach, California, but we moved to Las Vegas in 1960. I was out at the dam in 1961 when they put the last generator in. I happened to have a friend who worked for California Edison, and so I saw quite a bit of the dam at that point.

I've taken classes in–when I was in California I worked in electronics, so I have a slight electronic background, I was a technician. Moved here, raised my family, started doing things. I always decided I'd quit work when my kids were in high school. So I was able to quit work when they were in high school, started pursuing more and more volunteer work. [I]

worked with the state parks as a docent, set up the docent program, working with Junior League, for Nevada Division of State Parks. In doing that, we trained people on history, plants, animals, and geology of the area. So we would teach that, and I took more classes in that area, and I've always been interested in water:

I raft, I canoe, I backpack through the Southwest. It's been a very interesting place, a *very* good place to raise our family. And when you live out here that much, you have people come, want to go to the dam, want to go to the dam. Well, I wanted to take people into other parts of the dam, and you get rather involved in the history of the dam and running into people.

So what happened, my volunteer work turned into paid work, people asked me if I would do tours, so I worked with convention authorities and did tours in Nevada, Grand Canyon, Valley of Fire, most all the Southwest. I worked with Linblad Travel for a short time, did the Amazon, and did a few things back there. In the tour business in Nevada, summer months get slow. And so if you're just working for yourself as an independent tour guide, it's nice to have something else to pick up.

Began Working at Hoover Dam

So the opportunity came along to fill this in with working at Hoover Dam. So I went as an intermittent, working at Hoover Dam, in about February–actually, it was–of '88. And of course when you come as an intermittent, then you work

the whole summer. By the end of the summer, I was asked if I wanted to go on full time. Well of course the government has some very special benefits, and I thought it'd be time to work and achieve some of those benefits, so when I decided to retire I would have a little bit of status there. So I went to work out there, and come to find out, it was a very, very neat place to work.

Diversity of Tour Groups

It was surprising to me, after being in Las Vegas so long, how many foreigners came to the dam. You would have, in '88 and '89, nothing unusual to have, oh, out of your five tours you do a day with about sixty-nine people on a tour, you'd probably have one tour that nobody spoke any English, or very few people spoke English, but they understood. And I'm not talking from one country–they came from *all* over the world to see the dam, because it's an engineering wonder. It's in all their engineering books, and so you would take special tours of engineers from China. Oh, China! They've really built a lot of dams, and this is the granddad of them all.

Storey: Can we pause just one moment?

Lewis: Sure. (tape turned off and on)

Storey: We were talking about touring the Chinese through the dam.

Lewis: Well, they came from all over, and the Chinese, of course we were a very inexpensive place for

them to come on a tour, so we had Chinese and Japanese and German and from all over the world. And now that our economy has changed, now that it's '93, it's surprising to see we have less foreigners touring right now, because I'm sure the interchange of the dollar, but we still have over 700,000 visitors a year. It has not slacked down tours at all, but that's how I got there.

Storey: And what did you like about it?

Enjoyed Talking about the Dam

Lewis: Oh! I've always enjoyed dealing with people. It's always nice to see something through other people's eyes. It's nice to show them something. I don't care if it's how the Southwest operates, or how the dam was built. And it's something else to be able to work at one of the truly wonderful engineering wonders of the United States. I mean, it's a marvel, to think that those men built that dam in four years, and over a thousand new inventions that went into it, and how they acquired the money. It is a marvel, and it's really something special to show it to other people.

And you get individuals. You can pick on the terrazzo tile floors, and Allen True[1] and his background. Or you can pick on [Frank] Crowe[2] and his expertise in cableways, and why he was

1. The Bureau of Reclamation contracted Allen Tupper True as consultant on decoration and color scheme for the Hoover Dam powerplant.
2. Frank Crowe was the lead engineer in charge of construction of Hoover Dam for Six Companies.

able to underbid the concrete. And just where the power goes, and the overall first thing is the water conservation.

And I love it when a person will ask, "What was the most destructive thing they did as far as the environment?" And they're thinking right away, "They ruined the desert." That's not what we did. L-A [Los Angeles] was only a million people when that dam was built. San Diego wasn't even hardly there. If it wasn't for the dam, and the dams along the Colorado River, California, a lot of it, wouldn't be there. And most of these environmentalists are from Southern California and thinking, "Gee, you ruined the desert," but they don't see that we enhanced a place for them to live. Pretty tricky.

Storey: You mentioned a thousand new inventions. Tell me about this.

Construction Innovations at Hoover Dam

Lewis: (chuckles) Well, of course the cooling the concrete down, and John Savage running the pipes in. There'd only been fifty dams built before this in the United States. In those fifty dams you'd used five million barrels of cement.

Storey: Fifty large dams.

Lewis: Uh-huh. And this dam has 5,500,000 barrels of cement in it. John Savage, the [Bureau of Reclamation's] head designer for the dam, he'd actually written his thesis in concrete stress prior to designing the dam. And all you have to do is

start looking at his track record. He also went on to do the arch gravity dam. He went into China in 1941 and designed the dam on the Yangtze River, the Three Gorges Dam. And that was written up about nine months ago in *Newsweek*. The man was a genius in his own rights. So that's just one of them. The flooring alone, the terrazzo tile flooring–there'd never been anything like that quite in the United States.

So just the cables, the way they lived, 120 degree temperatures. They didn't know about heat exhaustion. They threw a bucket of ice on a man when he fell down. They had to bring in people from the university to come out and see why these guys were dropping on the job. You could pick any little one and just embellish on it for hours. You don't have *time* when you're on a tour, you have to cover so much information in such a short time, and it's pretty tricky.

Storey: What other inventions . . .?

Lewis: Well of course it was the first project they used all heavy equipment on–no horses and mules. I had a lady come out one day, she was so proud because her husband had worked on the dam, because he had brought the powerlines from San Bernardino County with horses and mules so they would have electricity at the dam. And she really thought that was a very special achievement.

I also had the pleasure of having a lady on tour, one day her family came out–the Big Six had built the dam of course, was Bechtel, Kaiser,

Morris-Knutson, J.A. Sheen, National Bridge, Utah Construction, MacDonald and Kahn. Miss Kahn came out with four generations and toured the dam, and she was the only lady that was ever allowed on the dam site as a young girl. And she said how they got the name of the Big Six. I don't know if you read this anyplace or not, but she told me that day that the way they got the name for the Big Six, these guys were sitting in a conference room, and it was time for food for lunchtime, and so they were deciding what to have and what to name, and tossing things around. So they decided to send out for Chinese food down the road, and the name of the Chinese restaurant was the Big Six, and had been a very successful restaurant, and that's where they got their name, the Big Six, according to her. (chuckles)

Storey: That's interesting. You mentioned somebody else. Oh, the woman who's dad brought in the electricity. Do you happen to remember her name?

Recognizing Former Dam Workers

Lewis: I don't have her name, and I don't know if they wrote it in the book out there. We're very poor right now, there used to be really good registers–anybody of any prominence, you had them sign a book. And we try as guides, if you know somebody who is there who has worked there, I tried to at least send over and say, "Give this person a gray book and say, 'with all of our appreciation from all the workers at Hoover Dam.'" But right now, there is not a set routine.

There used to be, but right now it's kind of slack. So you kind of pick these things up as they're on tour.

Storey: Did you tour anybody else who worked at the dam, or was personally associated?

Lewis: I didn't particularly tour this one, but they have the Thirty-oners every year, and last year I guess the last living engineer–and I don't know his name–Gene Schultz may have known it–was out there, and he was in a wheelchair and was ninety-three years of age. But he was one of the Thirty-oners. He is *the* last living engineer that worked on the dam.

Storey: What's a Thirty-oner?

Lewis: A Thirty-oner is the people that worked out there, used to live in Boulder City. There's about thirteen or fourteen left–men who worked on the dam. And they have meetings once a year, and they may have 250-300 in attendance. And then they've got some of the new guys, like Gene Schultz belongs to the Thirty-oners, so they've got in some of these new people, that they are still living history.

Storey: Did you ever tour any celebrities through the dam?

Celebrities Visiting the Dam

Lewis: I have a lot of respect for celebrities, okay? I was born in Southern California and I believe they have a right to their privacy. So the one I

remember the most, of course, I had the pleasure of coordinating. They had a party on top of the dam in '90. It was the Academically Achieved Young Americans, hosted by their counterparts. Four hundred fifty students came. Steve Wynn at the Mirage Hotel was instrumental in using the roof on the dam for this party. Second time it's ever been used in the history of the dam. If you use the roof on the dam, it took nine hours of crane work to get the tables and chairs up on top. Everything had to be brought down through the elevators and set up. And Dolly Parton, of course, was there. Kevin Cosnick was there. (Storey: Costner?) Costner. I only turned around and bumped him and said, "A good nice speech." They were addressing speakers. Powell was there.

Storey: Powell?

Lewis: Powell, and Schwarzkopf was there, Norman Schwarzkopf.

Storey: Who's Powell?

Lewis: Major [Colin] Powell.

Storey: I see.

Lewis: There's articles of that in the paper. I've probably got them around here someplace. They have them at the dam. But it was a really very, very special party. Pulitzer Prize winners were there, and I don't pretend to know them all, but I coordinated, so here again, I have a respect for people who are stars, but I don't go up and say

"blah, blah, blah." The U.S. Army Chorus came. It was a very, very special event.

Storey: When you say "on top of the dam," you mean on top of the office building roof?

Lewis: The powerhouse roof, right.

Storey: Up against the dam.

Lewis: We had C-I-A, F-B-I. We had limousines, it was really special.

Storey: Who did you work with to coordinate that?

Lewis: I worked with the lady from the Academically Achieved, and I'd have to look her name up. So I worked as a dam representative to make sure the power was there, and the elevators were working, and how we were going to bring the people in and how we were going to take the students in and the coordinating on time and making sure how the food was brought in. They set a *huge* tent up, up there. This is in June–very hot on that roof. They set a tent up, they set a misting system up, and the Mirage Hotel would come out when everybody else was ready to go home, they would come out and start, and on the face of the dam they put a huge flag, and they had all their equipment out there, backup. It was beautiful. It was neat.

One time I had two guys going to go out, C-I-A, one on both sides, and (swish!) get them out the elevator, because they had to be up on top, because after all, the person they were guarding

was coming out. Everybody had to wear hard hats. Now Dolly Parton wouldn't wear a hard hat, and she wouldn't wear flats, so we brought her in through the main elevator on the 705 level, and she had to walk up a series of stairs. As she was walking down that hall–Keith Barrett was in charge of the dam at that time–and *everybody* had to wear hard hats, because of things being thrown over the face of the dam, and because there was construction going on in the new Visitors Center, and everybody was told this is going in, the Academically Achieved said, "This is part of what you will have to do for safety matters." Well, she didn't and so Keith was walking her down that hall and she's singing *Amazing Grace* to Keith Barrett, walking down the hall. The acoustics in the 705 are *outstanding*, so it was fun. It was a neat trip.

Kenny Rogers has been out there. Oh, I know . . . What's her name? The talk show. She came with her body guard.

Storey: Joan Rivers?

Lewis: Joan Rivers, yeah. She came out with her body guard, nobody knew she was coming. She pulled her limousine right to the front, where you go down inside the dam, and it's a no parking area, and we get very protective of people unloading there, because it's a major highway. So my immediate supervisor went out and chewed butt, because after all, you shouldn't be parked there. Well, she got out anyway, and so she did go down on a special tour. But there was no prearrangements that she was coming.

Kenny Rogers came with just his ownself and his own body guards, and if you wouldn't have known who he was, you would never have known. But he has a home in town now too. I mean, we have a lot of movie stars in Las Vegas. We have probably more movie stars per capita–or we used to, before I went to work out there, I used to check this out–than Hollywood does. When they live here, you don't know them unless they say, "I am So-and-So."

Storey: I guess it's a fairly major entertainment center also.

Lewis: Oh yes.

Storey: Talk about the visitors. You talked briefly about a lot of them being foreigners. What's your impression of the makeup of the audience at Hoover Dam?

Visitors "Come to See the Dam"

Lewis: They really come to see the dam. The word has spread throughout the world about the dam. We know it's an engineering wonder, but they'll stand up there on top of that dam in the summer months, 110-degree temperatures, over an hour in line, to come down inside the dam. And as the tour guide, that's where you meet them and greet them. You hardly ever have anybody complain or upset that they've been up there an hour. They want to see the dam, they look at it as something . . . It's marvelous! It's an engineering wonder!

And they come down with such an awe and

such a respect, "Why can't America do this today? How did these men know how to build this dam?" They're just not grumpy. And when I get a group of kids, like the schoolkids, sometimes seventh and eighth graders can be real disturbing. But if you take them down and kind of say, "At the end of this, if you're really good . . ."

And I've had a group down there, one day I had sixty students and forty adults. That's a *very* hard group to project to, and make sure they all get the information they want, because some want to know just about the power, "How much power is going out of here, and how much do you generate?" Others want to know about the water and "Why did you build this dam?" And then others want to know about the men who worked on it. And kids always love to hear about the dog that worked out there. So you have to cover a wide variety of subjects in a very short time, about thirty minutes.

So I had all these kids down there, plus the adults, so you kind of break it up into, "Okay, this is where you get power for your house," and you have to switch around and tell the adults how much power they're getting. You get them down to the room where the big pipe is, the adit pipe, thirty-foot penstock pipe. It always works best to set the young adults down and have the kids back behind. I was very apprehensive when I took that tour down, but you know what you're dealing with, and luckily the adults seemed very satisfied, and I got a very nice thank you letter from the kids.

But you never know, when they come down that elevator, you never know what you're going to get. You don't know if they're going to speak English, you don't know if they're going to be kids, you have no idea what your group is going to be. And the people are always very receptive, they're just . . . They leave there thanking you. It's a very rewarding job. They leave there saying, "We really enjoyed, we're glad to see America could do, why can't we do more of this nowadays?" They're very interested in the engineers and the flooring and whatever happened. People are great. It's unreal! They stand up there in that heat, because we do 2,500 visitors a day, 3,000 visitors a day, and they like the history.

"They Like the History of the Dam"

Most places you can't get history across. Most people say, "Oh, history, yick!" But they like the American history of the dam. It's my own personal estimation, it's too bad that we're going to let a lot of that go by the wayside with the new Visitors Center. They'll go back there, look at that movie on the construction of the dam in the blue dome, and they're in awe, to see a man driving a truck, steering it with his foot.

Storey: That particular scene raised a lot of exclamation!

Lewis: Well, it's my favorite scene out there, and I hate to see it . . . I understand it's not going to be used. To me it ought to be a huge poster with a man standing up there steering. And underneath it, no power steering, no backup mirrors. Why would

they even do this? No transmission. That was the only thing they could do. Probably was the backup mirrors. They don't put in perspective as *when* that dam was built, and how many things we've achieved since then. It's one of the *best* historical spots there is.

Storey: You mentioned dogs at the dam.

Hoover Dam Mascot

Lewis: Oh, Nig!

Storey: Tell me about this.

Lewis: (chuckles) Everybody knows about Nig, the mascot of the dam. I can't use his name anymore, so you'd better watch that. We have to call him Little Black Dog.

Storey: What was his real name?

Lewis: Nig, N-I-G. And he came to work out there every day at the dam. He rode to work with the workers, and he walked the catwalks, and he rode in the outside elevators. He was never known to go home with anybody except somebody who was a dam worker. There was a lot of people out there watching the dam being built. He wouldn't go home with them. His job was chasing the ring-tailed cats [coatimundis] out of the canyon walls. They say it was the only time they saw the ring-tailed cats out in the daylight. The ring-tailed cats still live inside the dam. I'm hoping in the new Visitors Center they take and stuff a ring-tailed cat and put it out there,

because it's a very interesting little animal.

Storey: What do you mean they live "inside" the dam?

Lewis: There's about a hundred of them, and you can see pictures of them. Ring-tailed cats have bodies about twelve, fourteen inches long, short brown fur on them, their tails are about twenty-four inches long, maybe even longer than that, and they're black-and-white stripes, somewhat like a raccoons tail. Sort of a ferret-[like] face, and they have large eyes because they are nocturnal. So they don't bother the tourists in the daytime, but they'll come in the dam in the middle of the night, and they'll go in the boss' office and screw with the trash. They'll go to the nurse's office and pee on the pillows. And so we set traps, and we catch them. I have pictures of them in the trap. They're very, very wild, nobody can make any friends with them, they're just not very friendly to humans at all.

Storey: These are live traps?

Lewis: They're a square box, yeah, a live trap, so they're live, yes. We mark them, turn them loose in our neighboring town of Henderson, and they seem to be back inside the dam in a very short time.

Storey: The same cats?

Lewis: Same cats. About a hundred live in there, but they're native to the area, they were in the canyon walls. There's a stuffed ring-tailed cat in Zion National Park. If you read anything about the Grand Canyon and they talk about the animals,

the ring-tailed cat's there.

But Nig's job was to chase those ring-tailed cats in the daytime, when the miners went in. That's what they say. When the dam got finished, he got a new job, and the new job was keeping the dogs off the top of the dam. He'd ride down to work in those buses, double-decker buses. Some guides will say he had his own seat to ride in, but whatever, he always came to work. At lunchtime, they all wanted to feed him. Well, he was getting so fat the workers decided it wasn't really good for him. So they did talk to the cafeteria at Boulder City, making 3,000-5,000 brown paper sack lunches a day, think they might make this dog his own lunch. Morning time would come, dog would hop up on the counter, get his lunch, ride to work, sit at his lunch with the workers. Noontime would come, some worker would open his lunch up–so goes the story.

But they did collect enough money, nickels and dimes, they actually opened a bank account up for him, and Gene Schultz can verify this, you can go back in the Boulder City papers in the 40s, and in the paper it says, "Don't buy me candy, it gives me worms. Love you all, Nig." But he'd beg ice cream up in town, he was always around. He passed away one day out at the dam. Unfortunately, a truck ran over him, and they did bury him on the dam, and his grave site is there. He was the only dog ever allowed on the dam. It was *his* dam. But the guides actually convinced the tourists that Nig owned the dam.

Storey: At that time, huh?

Lewis: Uh-huh. Well, you know, that little dog going on tours and going everywhere nobody else's did. There's some very well-written stories about him. You can pull them out anywhere.

Storey: The ring-tailed cats are in the dam itself? They're in the tunnels and so on?

Ring-Tailed Cats Living in the Dam

Lewis: They're in the tunnels, the stairways that go to the top. There's, I don't know, 744 stairs on the one side and more on the other. And they like that dark, it's just like being in their . . . And what they probably live on, all the time I was out there, I never saw a rat or a rodent or anything like that. So they probably keep that population very well in tell, and they probably help–you know, there's two miles of tunnel in the dam, and they can sneak through anything. I have seen them when they trapped them, I have seen them get up on top of the dam and get in the garbage bins. I went out there and put a ladder so they could get out. So I've seen a couple of them out there.

Storey: And they think there are around a *hundred* of them in the dam itself?

Lewis: Uh-huh.

Storey: That's interesting.

Lewis: Don't go out and trap them all now, they're neat

critters! (laughter)

Storey: I'm not interested in trapping wild animals.

Lewis: Good!

Storey: You know, there are a lot of things about dams, but you never think of them becoming residences! (laughter) For instance, I was very shocked to learn that dams leak.

Dams Never Leak, They "Seep"

Lewis: Oh, no, no, they never leak–they *seep*.

Storey: They seep.

Lewis: Right, there is a difference, *big* difference. Sure the dam is not embedded in the canyon walls in any way. It's simply not anchored–it's embedded three to five feet, and depending on the head of the lake, the more it seeps. Did you go through the dam and see the water coming in, see the sump pumps?

Storey: I was in a couple of Augusts ago.

Lewis: Yeah, it's really neat. I love to show people the water.

Storey: What do the tourists say about that?

Lewis: Well, when you explain to them why, because of the way it's built with interlocking blocks, and that helps keep the concrete strong and green, it works to the benefit. That's the reason the

concrete is still cur*ing*. You know, when you pour a driveway, and the moisture comes out of it, maybe fifteen years or so, and then the moisture totally leaves it and cracks, and you have to replace the driveway. Same thing would happen to the dam if you didn't keep the moisture in it. That's the reason the dam is going to be getting stronger for, I don't know, the total life expectancy is 2,000 years. It's neat that it seeps.

Storey: What are the kinds of things that the tourists are most interested in?

"Dams Get in Your Blood"

Lewis: It depends upon the tourists. I mean, that sounds weird, but some of them come there with backgrounds in power, some of them come here with backgrounds in dams and how they're built. Some of them are there just for the history. You need to cover a little bit of everything. Now, myself, dams get in your blood. Because of this dam, I've been up on Grand Coulee, I've been in that forty-foot in diameter pipe in Grand Coulee. I've been up the thirty-foot in diameter pipe here at our dam. I've walked all the way up to the intake towers in that thirty-foot pipe, I've ridden on the elevators in the intake towers, and wrote my name down inside the Nevada One Tower.

So when you start reading about them, you think about the man who designed this dam, he also designed Grand Coulee, designed over seventy-five percent of the Bureau's dams, John Savage. I looked at Grand Coulee, and of course Grand Coulee has that neat laser light show. I

went on a tour of Grand Coulee from nine-thirty in the morning until about two in the afternoon. Now, we've limited our special tours to about forty-five minutes to an hour. This gentleman met me up there, he said, "I have 'til two in the afternoon." "Oh good!" Because I'd read enough about the dam, I knew what I wanted to see. Of course I've been in Davis and Parker [dams] and up at Lake Powell. So they sort of kind of . . . And this year I will get a special tour of Flaming Gorge. (laughs) In fact, now we're going to go back on the Tennessee River. So I'll compare the T-V-A [Tennessee Valley Authority] dams to the Colorado dams. I've read about them, but now I'll go back and check them out.

Storey: You know, when you're sitting in the break room with the other guides, what are the stories you tell them? What are your favorite stories you tell them about things tourists did or asked you?

Tourists

Lewis: It becomes so common after a while . . . Myself, personally, I don't believe in laughing at what a tourist says. When a tourist comes up in the elevator and says, "Where's the dam?" they missed it somewhere. They have been on a tour of the dam. We kid quite a bit about the ordinary, you know, "What did they do with the water when the lake wasn't here?" "When the built the dam, what did they do with the lake?" People don't associate it. There was always a little kid that comes up, the one time you ask, "Any questions?" A little boy says–this is

terrible–"Why did mom say we have to use condoms?" (laughter)

Storey: So you get completely disassociated things also.

Lewis: Oh yeah.

Storey: What are the common misconceptions that the tourists tend . . .

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Storey: I was asking you about the common misconceptions that the tourists tend to have.

Tourists Misconceptions

Lewis: Well, they all think it was there for power first, and not water. And so that's something you have to clear up right away, that power is a by-product–an *important* by-product, but it is the by-product. And they expect to have water coming *over* the dam, because most of them are from the East Coast, and they don't realize how vital the water is to us out West, and how it's enabled the West to grow, and that the farmers are the ones who were really instrumental in getting the dam built, in the Imperial [and] Coachella valleys. You get a lot of times, "Well, how come they're getting so much water?" And "Why don't you produce more power?" They don't comprehend that you could drain that lake, if you produced power constantly. It's very important they understand it's a very good marriage, because when they need more water

for the crops in Southern California in Imperial [and] Coachella valleys, they need more power. It's an outstanding marriage. But that's something, hopefully by the time they're done with the tour, they have realized these things.

No reinforcing rebar in the dam–totally blows their minds. "Why don't you have any rebar in the dam?" Of course, here again, that was the head designer, John Savage, and the arch gravity dam, you don't need it, it's called compression strength. Putting a footing on a house, you have to have rebar, pressure's going the other way, but that arch gets stronger the more pressure against it.

They get very concerned about the silting-up of the lake. And so once you explain to them that it's going to be silting-up–originally it was 212 years, when they finished Glen Canyon Dam, we had about 110 feet of silt. It's gone between eighty-five and ninety feet of silt, as best as they can tell. At this rate, the lake is going to silt-up in 400-600 years. That pipe, the thirty-foot penstock pipe, [with] proper maintenance it's going to last about 400 years. So to put them at ease, the flooring is 400 years. So myself, to put them at ease, I've set up a very special party that's going to be held at the dam, because I'm curious what's going to happen, and the date for my party is September 30, 2300, and that seems to relieve their anticipation the dam is going to fall in right away. Are you going to come? (laughter)

Storey: I think I may be a little too decrepit then.

Lewis: But it's hard for them to comprehend the longevity of the dam, and that the silting-up is not going to happen tomorrow. Some of them came directly off tours of the Grand Canyon. Of course silt is coming down from the Canyon–not as bad as it used to–and they get concerned with that, probably because they read about the High Aswan Dam and how it silted up. That's about the only one they really relate to. As soon as they ask you about the other high dams, if you say, "Any one in particular?" and seventy-five percent of them are curious about the High Aswan. And of course the only reason they know it, is because America wouldn't build it, and Russia did. And it's called the High Aswan because it's the High Aswan *Valley*, not because it's a high dam. And because they had the Low Aswan, they built the High Aswan about five miles above it. It's only 550 feet from bedrock. They always want to know what relationship are the dams to other dams in the world. Where are we height wise? What's bigger? What produces more?

Storey: Do they understand what the Bureau of Reclamation is?

Little Understanding of Reclamation's Role

Lewis: I think when you hit it with the water conservation, what the Bureau does, and the Bureau takes care of most of the things, they want to compare sometimes between civilian conservation . . . See, I don't know what it is east of the Mississippi.

Storey: Well, the Civilian Conservation Corps was all over the country.

Lewis: Right, but the Bureau takes care of most of the dams on the west of the Mississippi. And they oftentimes think we are Civilian Conservation Corps.

Storey: Oh, maybe we're thinking of the Corps of Engineers.

Lewis: Corps of Engineers, that's who it is, yes.

Storey: Not Civilian Conservation Corps.

Lewis: Yeah, Corps of Engineers. And of course they are over all the water, but we usually only call on them like in '83, from what I understand.

Storey: Well, we tend to have a split of responsibilities between flood control and navigation for them, and water reclamation for us too.

Did you ever have any medical problems on any of your tours with the visitors?

Medical Issues on Tours

Lewis: No nothing more than we always carry barf bags with us, because people throw up on you with the summer heat and pass out. That's just common. (laughs) It's just the way it is. You take them down the elevator, and they'll pass out on you. It's probably one of the easiest ways for a young lady to find out she's pregnant. She's been up in that heat, standing in line, go down inside, hit that

cool, and they'll drop on you.

Storey: Why?

Lewis: Their bodies are so screwed up anyway, being newly pregnant. But after a while, you can just sort of spot them. And it's hard on little kids. Little kids don't drink enough water. It's been really, really good since they're carrying their own water bottles now. The other thing too, I think they're surprised . . . Well, I had one come up the other day who came up the stairs and you could look at her and she was pregnant and she almost had the kid. I said, "Whoa, let's let's get this lady here and get her up to Boulder City."

There was one incident where a person did pass away on the stairs. But we have nurses on duty. When you have 2,000-3,000 people a day out there, you're bound to have things happen, seizures. We all have first aid training, but your best thing is to go ahead and just call the nurses. I mean, you deal with that many people, you're going to have a problem.

Storey: What kind of training did you have, besides first aid?

Lewis: C-P-R and first aid basically is it. But I've had C-P-R and first aid since, yeesh, I was a Girl Scout leader, I've been out in the wilderness, so you just kind of . . .

Storey: You mean the only training they gave you to become a tour guide at Hoover Dam was C-P-R and first aid?

Lewis: Uh-huh. What you do when you become a guide out there, if you're asking other things, we trail for three days, take the basic–timing is what they're after, because we put so many people in, you have to be right on time. We have a thirteen-minute interval from the time you hit what we call the adit area or the tunnel. And everything is so clicked-off on timing, and you have a certain amount of information you must cover. Anything else you embellish on yourself, but you have to stay within that time frame. You trail for three days, and you give a tour.

Storey: And that's the training?

Lewis: That's the training.

Storey: Did they give you things to read?

Lewis: The books are there in the blue room if you care to read them. The gray book you should read.

Storey: The gray book? Oh, *The Story of Hoover Dam*.

Lewis: Right.

Storey: By Denar [phonetic spelling], right. What's the blue room?

Lewis: That's where the guides go and sit. That's where we have our coffee and our lunch area and things like that. It's a rather unusual job, because we work an eight-hour shift. We do not have set breaks or set lunch, and you may not go to work

'til–maybe there's nine guides on duty, the first one goes out and the second one has the exhibit, and the next one comes in and if you're the ninth guide, you may not actually do a tour until ten-thirty or eleven. But once you start doing those tours, you may not get a break all day. You'll come up in an elevator, go back down, and so usually you'll eat your lunch by ten-thirty in the morning. And sometimes you're doing good if you get ten minutes between, fifteen minutes between a tour.

Storey: How many tours do you do a day?

Giving a Tour

Lewis: Usually do four to five. Four is nice. You should be able to do five. If you do that fifth tour, your voice knows you've done five tours.

Storey: How long is a tour?

Lewis: It's about thirty-five minutes, then you have your elevator time, because you bring people down, take people out, so it comes out to about a little [over] an hour. And by the time you come over–it sounds like just five hours, but by the time you walk across the dam, do this, do that, it's very time-consuming.

Storey: Was the basic route the same throughout the period you were at the dam?

Lewis: Yes, we have what you would call a reverse route, and to get more people in–we have two ticket booths. Usually we use the Nevada side of

the dam, put people down in Nevada (aside about chiming clock), put people down in Nevada, do the Nevada balcony, which overlooks the powerplant, and do the Arizona adit and come out Arizona. That gives you one circle going. If we have the adits open and stuff, then we'll go down the other way. We can put in twice as many people, if you have all the things you need available. If they're working on the ramp, if they're working on a transformer, or anything like that, then you may have to adjust. But every tour route is the same.

Storey: Okay. Could you walk me through the tour route with just an outline of what you say and what the times are?

Lewis: (chuckles) Want to see the movie on it? Okay, you take one elevator-load down, it'll be four minutes before your next elevator-load gets down, and four minutes more. So you've got about twelve minutes down there.

Storey: Three elevator-loads of people.

Lewis: Three elevator-loads. If you opt to talk to the people, which I do, you can cover a lot of very good information there, just rhetoric, just things I've told you. Maybe talk about the dog or the ring-tailed cats. I usually talk about water, make them comfortable, then tell them their safety measures on tour. So that's where you get your twelve-minute intervals of three loads. Then you go out on the balcony. At that point you'll point out the generators and the shaft and they rotate at 180 r-p-m, and give them the power thing, and

the overhead cranes and how much they'll lift, 300 tons. The in-house generator, which is generated by the Pelton wheel in comparison to the Francis turbine wheel that operates our big generators. That'll take you about four to five minutes. Then they have fifty-three stairs to go down. If they cannot go the stairs, then you do have a service elevator, and you take them down there.

Storey: Which is accessible with your security card.

Lewis: Security card. So you take them on out. It depends, right now, since we had that transformer blow up (sigh) we may not have the ramps available, we may have ramps available. The ramp, you want to go out to look up the face of the dam. Most of the people want to see the face of the dam. Some of them don't even realize they're not seeing the face of the dam if you can't go all the way out on what we call the Nevada Ramp or the Arizona Ramp. They don't really comprehend how high that dam is. So it's really neat, and most of the time I worked there, until the last three or four months, you could show them the face of the dam.

At that point you point out how high the dam is, how it was built in five-foot blocks, you point out the business office and how much power we put out. Here again, you [explain] step-up transformers and what they do and how it steps from 16,500 volts to 230,000 volts, travels seven miles to El Dorado Valley, stepped over 500,000 volts, high voltage less line loss. Point out the upper penstock needle valve house, what

they were used for was a way to bypass the water before we had all seventeen generators in. Very important that they understand that all these generators were not put in at one time. We only put three generators in in 1936, the last one was added in 1961. But yet it was designed the way it is. There's been no structural change in that dam in the design. People can't comprehend that. And now it comes through and goes to the tail bay. That takes you about another four to five minutes.

Has to be thirteen minutes when you hit that adit button. This is the adit tunnel. This was an old mucking tunnel where they took the dirt out when they built those two large fifty-nine-foot in diameter tunnels. And that's what you're walking back to. When you get inside the adit area, you do have a diagram, and at that point you show them how the dam was built and how the water was diverted, and go into the history of the dam. And then I usually bring it back to power and how much the dam has paid off, which is very unusual. But that doesn't mean that the power is getting cheaper and cheaper in California, because we've taken a loan out to upgrade the generators. Here again you hit them with the 82,500 kilowatts to 130,000 kilowatts to allot for the dam, 1,430 megawatt to about 2,080 meg, if we had the water to operate them all.

Storey: How do you translate that into something they'll understand?

Translating the Diverse Aspect of Hoover Dam History

Lewis: You say that, most of the people–one generator would take care of about 85,000 people. And I tell that to them on the balcony. Here again, you're hitting people who have a power interest.

Storey: Or . . .

Lewis: Or a different interest, right. And like the concrete in the dam, three-and-a-quarter million cubic yards don't mean a thing, but as a general rule, if I have young adults, I'll say, "Okay," and I always look right at them, because I always bring them down front, "this is the only thing you have to know to get out of this dam. I'm going to tell you how much concrete is in the dam." So they can relate to the thing, "there's enough concrete in the dam to build a highway across the United States from San Francisco to New York City." And then I will ask the kids as they leave, to make sure that they have had *something* at the dam.

It's amazing, I tell Nig's story quite a bit. It's amazing how many people come down and want to know about the dog. And usually I save it for the kids, because here again, you're talking to a wide variety of people. You just have to feel them out.

Storey: Well, I interrupted your tour at the adit.

Lewis: Well, then you come on out the adit. You have ten minutes in the adit . . .

Storey: To talk about?

Lewis: To talk about how it was built, how they diverted the water, and use the diagram, and also talk about the thirty-foot in diameter penstock pipe you're standing over. And you come back out, here again you've got to go back up the stairs or the elevator on the Arizona side, and here it's going to take you another three elevator-loads to get them out. And you stand there then, and you jockey out the next tour guide behind you.

Storey: What's the thing you dislike most about being a guide?

Lewis: (chuckles) I enjoy being a guide, I enjoy the dam. I enjoyed the people I worked with.

Storey: And for this area, I suppose you actually had quite a commute to get there.

Commuting to Work

Lewis: Oh yeah! (chuckles)

Storey: Tell me about your commute, if you would.

Lewis: I was very fortunate when I went to work, there was five of us that rode in. When I went to work out there, I used to kid I was the token female over fifty hired by the Bureau. I thought I was kidding, but I was the only female working out there as a full-time guide. And I probably stayed out there longer than any other female. Most of them use it as a stepping stone to get into the Bureau and down inside. At my age, that wasn't my particular point. I had a goal I wanted to achieve, so by riding out with the men who had

been out there–Cal Smith just retired last year, he was the oldest guide out there. Norm Homer just took the new buy-out. Bob de la Santos [phonetic spelling] took the buy-out. Now we're talking people who have been out there for eighteen years, men being guides. And the reason they stayed, it was a very good job for them, it's not a stressful job, it's nothing but a thankful job from people. The heat gets to you sometimes, but the ride was very nice because we would either discuss things that happened at the dam, people you had on tour, or when you'd ride with five men constantly, you just kind of know their families and know what's happening. And if I rode by myself, I played book tapes and loved that too. I don't mind driving, the ride does not bother me.

Storey: So there were six of you who commuted?

Lewis: Off and on.

Storey: From Las Vegas to there?

Lewis: Uh-huh.

Storey: What route did you use?

Lewis: Well, I'd pick up right here at Mervyn's on Decatur, we would pick up, and there would be two or three of us that met there, depending upon who was working, and take Interstate 95. We made another pickup down at Pollo Loco, which is on Charleston Boulevard. Then we'd either pick up one or two more, depending upon who was working, because it's a seven-day-a-week

job. You don't have weekends off. I guess the thing I dislike the most, working Thanksgiving. I *hate* to work Thanksgiving Day. When I went to work out there, you didn't have Christmas off either. We finally got Christmas off. But to go out there and have to work Thanksgiving Day, when you have a variety of people who don't celebrate that day. So anyway, we go on out to the dam and it was good.

Storey: What route did you take?

Lewis: We'd just stay on 95, same as you did, went to the end of it in Henderson, on Lake Mead Boulevard, then we turned to our left, went to Boulder Highway, turned right, went up through Boulder City. Because the parking was so bad, the last three years, I think, about, we would actually meet a van in Boulder City where all the guides . . . (Storey: Where?) It's by . . . Right behind the Bureau up there on the hill in Boulder City, and I can't tell you the name of the street. And then we took the van down, and that was always a lot of good camaraderie.

Storey: Then you would meet the van at what time?

Lewis: I had to be out there . . . It depends what shift you were working. If I was working nine to six, I had to be out there by eight-thirty in the morning. I left my house at seven-thirty. Actually, I left here at seven-twenty-five. Made a ten-and-a-half-hour day.

Storey: Did your time start when you arrived at the van, or when you got down . . .

Lewis: No, no, when you got to the dam.

Storey: And that would have been when?

Lewis: Nine.

Storey: At nine?

Lewis: Nine to five.

Storey: And you'd work 'til five. Do four or five tours a day. (Lewis: Uh-huh.) Did you do anything else?

Lead Guide

Lewis: In the summer months I would work the desk and play Lead Guide, putting the tours in, would work as cashier. That was one of the biggest problems, there really was not a lot of variety to the job. You have to really get up to give a tour–or *I* do–it's almost acting, and you have to really put yourself into it to give a good tour. To me it's do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. I hate to go someplace and have a lousy tour guide, one that mumbles. And so there was not a lot of variety to the job.

Storey: When you say "working the desk," what does that mean?

Lewis: That means you're the one tearing the tickets, putting the people in, and counting twenty-three people on an elevator. Anything that would happen, any problem in the tour route, that's where the control room would call you, and you

would have to readjust. If you wanted to drop what we call a double, taking tours going both ways, that was your decision. Turning in the time sheets with the people, things like that, setting up special tours.

Storey: And then you mentioned Tour Leader. That was a different job?

Lewis: It's the same thing. It's called Lead Guide.

Storey: So how many guides would you then be directing?

Lewis: In the summer months you would have as many as twelve to fourteen guides on duty. In the winter months we usually have ten guides. We extend our hours in the summer months, so we actually work three shifts.

Storey: Talk about the shifts.

Shift Work

Lewis: The shifts in the summer months in the previous years have been from eight in the morning until four, and that would be four people or five people on that shift–four people usually. And you'd bring another one at ten, and then one at eleven-thirty, because our hours were from eight to seven-thirty. The dam was open eight in the morning until seven-thirty at night.

Storey: So the first shift would be eight to four, second shift ten to . . .

Lewis: Six. And then it'd be eleven-thirty to seven-thirty.

Storey: Okay, about four or five people on each one. (Lewis: Uh-huh.) Which is the heaviest visitation day?

Lewis: Hm, it would surprise you–Tuesday.

Storey: Really?

Lewis: Tuesdays and Saturdays. Because people come into Las Vegas, a lot of them come on flights. So this is their day they're not flying. They fly in on Monday, they fly out on Wednesday. And Tuesday is one of your busiest days in this town, and Saturday. If you look at the books, though, if you looked at the numbers going in, it looks like every day is almost the same. We can only put about 2,000 people a day in. I mean, you know twenty-three people in an elevator, every four minutes. Usually the first tour is not full, the second tour is not full, but by the time they've woke up in this town, caught their buses, been brought to the dam by buses, forty-five people on the bus, by ten o'clock, you're putting twenty-three people on the elevator every four minutes, and it's nothing unusual, *nothing* unusual to turn away . . .

People look at the line, it goes from the elevator on the Nevada side to the elevator on the Arizona side. They look at that line and think, "Oh, like Disneyland, it's an hour, hour-and-a-half wait." That usually is about a thirty-five minute wait, but you can't explain this to all

those people. They'll look at the line, a lot of them, and do other things. A few weeks ago we had lines all the way back to the men's restroom. They're still not upset when they come down on tour. Luckily, it was not a 120 degree temperature. But you can only put so many people in. And the most I've seen us put in–and it's really a shame we can't do it all the time, because we don't have the personnel–Steve Wynn opened up the Mirage Hotel Thanksgiving weekend three years ago, in '90, I believe. The Mormon Temple opened up here in Las Vegas the same weekend. The day after Thanksgiving, we did 3,769 people took a tour of that dam. We had two elevators working, we had two tour routes, and we had enough guides. Nobody waited more than twenty minutes to be on a tour. It can be worked. It's unreal the way they can work the tours out there.

Storey: How many guides would that take?

Guides

Lewis: That would take fourteen guides in an eight-hour day. And that would give the guide time to sit down and have a little bit of lunch. But right now we can't have any more F-T-E's [full-time equivalents], we can't . . . If they ran that like you would run a business, you would never turn people away. If you're running a business, sure you have hours, but you would do everything you could to accommodate all the people, and all you need is two or three more full-time guides and both tour routes open, and you could do it. It's been done.

But we're tied, just like tied with F-T-E's and we can't hire more F-T-E's. We're going to put this multi-million-dollar Visitors Center out there, we can charge anything we want to charge, because it's a new facility, but yet we can't have any more full-time employees. So they looked really strong at putting volunteers in, like the Park Service does. I was on the committee that researched it, and I have a volunteer background, I *love* volunteer work. But for six full-time positions out there, working like we do, seven days a week, it'd take 169 volunteers to cover six full-time positions.

Storey: So then you spend all your time making sure they're there, and filling in when they aren't.

Lewis: It came out to almost–I wrote out the time–you'd have to have a full-time volunteer person, on and on and on. I wrote out the travel and their uniforms and everything. It came out to about $55,000 to take care of the volunteers. When you can charge . . . But that's another soap box, and I just . . .

Storey: What happens when you have an elevator problem?

Lewis: We use one. We put them in one elevator and bring them back out. That extends it. Instead of going every four minutes, we go every five minutes.

Storey: Takes an extra minute.

Lewis: Uh-huh.

Storey: Which reduces you a little bit in your capability to deal with it. Did you ever conduct special tours?

Special Tours

Lewis: Oh yeah, a lot of special tours.

Storey: What kinds of special tours?

Lewis: Usually if people come out for special tours (sigh) they're into power, into powerplants. So at this point you do more with the electricity, which I had to learn–what those generators do, and Delta and "Y" and what makes sixty cycle three-phase power. And luckily there were very, very nice engineers out there, Fred Johnson was really good. Anytime I'd get asked a question, I'd go up and talk to the engineers, or I research it or find it. And most of the men, don't try and outfox them, this is their specialty. If you give them a few key words, and you're just a tour guide, they respect you for that, you're not trying to teach them anything, they know it all.

But you do get to go to the control room, you get to learn a lot. And here again, when it comes down to it all, they're interested in the history. They really are interested in the history. They're glad to see how the generators operate, they've seen generators before. They love to see the control room. Our control room is beautiful compared to some of the control rooms I've been in. And the Chinese are here for water. Chinese are really funny. I had one group come over and they wanted to know about the gauges in the dam.

"What safety gauges? What gauges do you have?" Inspection of the dam. You show them the inspection tunnels, and we *had* gauges in there. They used to measure how much the concrete, temperatures on it. And so I could show them where those things *used* to be.

We had plumb bobs when the dam was built. There's plumb bobs, but there's no gauges in that dam. I thought, "Well, maybe I'm crazy," because I'm dancing around these guys and they really want to see gauges. So in the back of my head, "no gauges." I show them the inspection tunnels and whatever else I could think about. So I went up and I said, "The dam hasn't been inspected in seven years, really. It's structurally sound, it's settled, it's . . ." So maybe I was crazy, so I talked to the second man at the dam right then. I said, "Was I crazy? I just had these guys here and they wanted to know about gauges, so I showed them . . . We don't have any gauges in here, do we?" In fact, I even called him, he said, "Nope, there's no gauges, Irene, you're right." But people from other countries won't believe that there's no gauges. And women [tour guides] still have a little bit of a tough time with some of the foreigners coming in. Women don't know a whole lot, and you have to be very, very careful. Chinese are funny, they always give you gifts–little sewing kits or whatever. That's their way of (Storey: Saying thank you, uh-huh.) kind of a nice collection.

And of course you have the ones, the water district–Ungerman [phonetic spelling]–he comes up all the time, and he flies people. He's with the

Bureau, and he flies them all the way down and shows them the rivers and shows them dams and has a special tour of the dam. Just always specials.

Storey: How did they arrange special tours, do you know?

Lewis: Well, they call and they talk to Jack McDaniels or Jim Welch or whoever's the head of the Visitors Service at the time, and they . . .

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Storey: Anybody can arrange a special tour?

Arranging Special Tours

Lewis: Sometimes, when I've had a person on tour, and they start asking you real technical questions, and I'll say "Where do you work?" And they're an engineer, or they work for a dam or they've asked me some things that just click. The Control Room is very, very nice, as long as you don't take advantage of them and do it every day. But you'll find one every now and then and think, "This man has a special interest." And so I don't hesitate to either give them the Control Room and I'll talk to the controllers and I'll tell them, "If it's convenient, talk to this gentleman, and if you think it's convenient, I think he probably would like to see is the Control Room," and that's what mostly they want to see is the Control Room. If the controllers are not busy, they're more than glad to come down and get somebody and take

them up there for fifteen or twenty minutes.

Schools call in and you know you've got so many schools coming, so you try and if you have the routes available–if you don't have the two adits, if you don't have the routes, you can't do anything for specials. You really are tied-in.

Storey: When you say "they aren't available," that's because some sort of work is being done?

Conducting Tours during Construction

Lewis: Right now with the new Visitors Center, they've been working on putting two adits side-by-side, so when they're working on the new one, the noise is so devastating that you can't use the other one. So you'd have to regulate something there. In fact, I was on a committee to do that for a while. Sometimes, too, if they take out a rotor, they'll sit it right in your entranceway, going in the adit area.

Storey: Yeah, when I was here, there was one sitting there.

Lewis: And yet when I first came to work out here was very simple. The rotor was there, but we took and they put a walkway. You went out where the in-house generator is at, the powerhouse, and you could walk down through a walkway and still in there. So you *still* could use that area. And now the elevators are done–when they were working [on] the elevators, you had no choice, and for the whole year that they were drilling the elevator shaft, there was no *way* you could have had two

tour routes. So it's just a matter of better servicing the people.

Storey: What was the largest special group you ever took?

Special Groups

Lewis: Usually special groups are small. Usually special groups, you don't want them too big. You want to put hard hats on them and get them other places. And if you get more than about fifteen or twenty, you can't talk to them. You can't get them where you want to have them in a hard hat area. Fort Huachuca comes up all the time. I don't know why they get a special tour, but they come up all the time. Visitors from other dams, dignitaries from all over the world, of course come. Bureau of Reclamation people. I was standing one time up on top of the dam and it had closed, and of course people would always want to pay to go down. This gentleman didn't ask for a special tour, but he was very interested in the Victors Center, so I stood there and talked to him for a while, and come to find out, he was the Assistant to the Secretary of State. (laughter)

Storey: Did you ever have a commissioner come?

Lewis: They came out one time, and I wasn't there that day. But yeah. Senators come.

Storey: What do you think the new Visitors Center is going to do for the visitors?

Lewis: I hope it enhances their overall visitor's experience, I really do. (big sigh) Of course with the two new elevators, you can put more people in, if you have the guides to do it. We haven't seen all the displays and what they're going to do. We haven't seen the overall . . . the screening of the rotating theater. I've read the script, I'm a little bit apprehensive about–I always mention the Bureau, I always sell the Bureau. In my tour that's something I do and you can get away with it. I think they may be hitting too hard. You know, sometimes you get more attention if you're not hit really over your head, and do more history. It's going to be interesting, it's going to be very interesting.

Storey: Are there any problems or issues that it's going to help resolve?

Lewis: Well, of course the thing about it was to get more people inside the dam, but then Promontory came along and their main thrust is the theater, and the theater is remarkable. I mean, it's the only rotating theater in the United States where the people move. Anything that is new and is inventive, and that mechanical, it's going to be interesting to find people who have the experience to man it and take care of it. We definitely need to go in there in the computer age, not doing it the way we're doing it now. It's very efficient the way we do it now, but we do need, in my estimation–and that's just *my* thought, we need to be able to pre-sell and pre-time those tours and not have those people standing in line.

It could be worked out.

Storey: So they could sort of hang out in the Visitors Center until it was time for their tour, you mean?

Lewis: There's three levels, okay? Up on top they've got all your . . . Like we have an Exhibit Building now. Okay? They also have the face of the dam they can go over and look at. And they have an observation deck. So they have three areas they could go to, until it was time for them to gather for their forty-five or fifty people to go in an elevator on tour. You have 120 people can go in each of these three theaters, where they come out, that 125 people is about thirty-by-thirty, and that's also where the entrance to the elevators are. So you have to make them move, but not make them feel like they're moved. And I'm sure there's people out there that'll work it out. I'm sure there's some ideas behind it. Once they get the bugs worked out, I think it's going to be spectacular. The parking was sorely needed.

Storey: What do you think the new Visitors Center is going to do for the tour guides?

Lewis: I hadn't even considered it. I imagine they will . . . Well, if they *could* give more tours, but I don't think the tour guide's voice would hold up. They *could* work more variety into their job, if they opted to do that. I mean, there's other things you could do besides giving tours. There's other stations, and other things you could do and be able to enhance and give them more variety with their job.

Storey: You mentioned earlier when you were talking about being a guide leader, I believe it was (Lewis: Lead Guide, yeah.), a Lead Guide. That means you're out in the sort of little turrets on the dam, taking tickets, selling tickets, and so on. What does that get like in the summer when it's hot up there?

Dealing with the Heat

Lewis: (chuckles) Well, I guess because you're in the desert, you're aware, and it does get hot. But you do have an air conditioner in there.

Storey: But a door that's wide open.

Lewis: Oh yeah, it's hot. The heat is not bad–what's bad is the noise on the road. When they get one-way traffic out there and that road is stopped, and those trucks are there, and the fumes are coming in, *that's* bad. The one that has the worst job out there right now is the shuttle bus drivers. Those shuttle bus drivers, if you talk about a stress job, they have got, in my estimation, one of the worst jobs out there.

Storey: Why is that?

Lewis: Hundred and ten, 120-degree temperatures, people, they can't put them all inside the shuttle bus, people waiting out in the parking lot to come down, no shade. They need to rotate those bus drivers to where they would have set breaks, have set lunch. They need a little bit of time away from those people. People are great, but you need a little bit of time to catch your breath

and go back to it. And they're at it eight hours a day. And they don't really achieve anything, because when they come down, they have to stand on top to get the shuttle bus, come down, they stand there in line to take the tour, it can be pretty touchy.

Storey: You didn't tell me when you were born. (Lewis laughs) Would you mind telling me that?

Lewis: September 30, '38.

Storey: Really?!

Lewis: What did you think?! Is this going off the record? (laughs)

Storey: Well, I didn't realize you were fifty until you told me that, and I would have thought you were about my age, about fifty-one.

Lewis: Well, thanks.

Storey: Or a little younger, actually.

Lewis: Oh, I love it!

Storey: What haven't I asked you that I ought to have asked you that's interesting about what the tour guides do? Or about the dam? The ring-tailed cat thing, for instance, is fascinating to me. Do we have rattlesnakes living in the dam too?

Lewis: No, because the ring-tailed cats would probably eat them. I don't know if they could eat a rattlesnake or not, but I've never seen a

rattlesnake, I've never heard anything about it, nothing.

Storey: Did you ever have problem people, for instance, visitors?

Problems with Visitors

Lewis: I must have a very commanding voice, I have *really* been lucky as a tour guide, and I really try and look my group over. But sometimes in the summer months they get drunks that come down there. But it's amazing, even when the drunks come down inside, they came for a reason, and they will usually shut up, as long as you're projecting and giving them what they want to hear. As long as you're acting to the best of your ability, they seem to . . . I don't know.

Storey: How often do you have people faint? And is it only in the summer?

Lewis: More so in the summer, and it happens quite regularly. I mean, it happens one or two a day on every tour guide's . . . It seems like the nurses have records of all those, because as soon as somebody faints, you usually call the nurse, because you don't have time to sit there and hold their hand. You can sit them down, we use a lot of ice packs, put the ice behind their neck and whatever.

Storey: Where do we have ice packs available?

Lewis: At the bottom of the elevator there's a first aid kit, and there's ice packs there. There's some up

on top in the tower area, and those are usually the worst two areas. Once they get on tour, they seem to be okay. If they're going to faint, or they're going to throw up, it's going to be coming down that elevator and right at the bottom: temperature change, stomach change, whatever. That's usually where they're going to get you. It will be nice to have more accommodations for people in wheelchairs. That'll be a real plus.

Storey: But the tour is now wheelchair accessible?

Lewis: Uh-huh, but if you get more than two wheelchairs . . .I mean, if you take–one time I had a tour that had eight wheelchairs on it. It's wheelchair accessible for up to two, but you get that many, there's just no way. You've got seven steps to go on the adit, there's no way that they could do this. With the new Exhibit Building, I understand a new adit area, there should be a couple.

Storey: Did you ever take tours out to Hoover when you were doing your tour business?

Taking Tours Out to Hoover Dam

Lewis: Oh yeah, sure.

Storey: How did you arrange that, or did you?

Lewis: No. I was lucky back then because we had–it wasn't as busy. I was probably one of the first step-on guides. Usually Gray Line takes it out and their bus drivers do their thing. I worked for a company here in town, and I would step on, and

so I would do plants, animals, history, of Las Vegas, Henderson, on the way out to the dam. And then I just was, "Hey, those dam guides know everything!" And I'd tell them about McBee [phonetic spelling] and walking the cables, but I wouldn't give them anything the tour guides would tell them. I didn't know it!

So I'd take my group over, forty people, and back then Tom Gailey [phonetic spelling] was in charge. And I'd just take them in line and wait. There weren't as many people out there, they had more guides, because as a general rule, I'd get my people in line, and he'd use them like a specialty, take them down the other side, and my people would go right in. That doesn't happen anymore, we don't have the guides to do it.

Storey: And when would that be that you were doing this?

Lewis: In '73 I was working as a guide in town, '74.

Storey: Until '88?

Lewis: Uh-huh, off and on.

Storey: What's a "step-on guide"?

Step-On Guide

Lewis: People come and they have a special convention in town, and the people who arrange that convention will rent their own buses–they won't use Gray Line or K-C or whatever, they'll rent their own buses, so the drivers just know how to

drive. So what they do is, they use a person who is in a specialty in that area, and you step on and you tell them whatever the area. I do that, even now I do special ones of Grand Canyon, Death Valley, things that I want to do. I just kind of cover it all.

Storey: And so basically you would just escort them out there, giving them local information, and then their group would buy tickets for them and put them in the line and they'd take the tour, and then get back on the bus and you'd escort them back.

Lewis: Right. Sometimes you'd take them to lunch, sometimes you'd take them on a boat ride. Sometimes you'd stop by museums. Spouse programs: when they'd have a lot of doctors' conventions come to town and stuff, they set up programs for their wives to do. And it could be anything from fashion shows to going up to Spring Mountain Ranch. You offer a variety of tours, and you set up a special spouse program and work in that area. I've also done meeting and greeting, showroom seating. I had a lady call me just the other day wanting to know about Death Valley and timing on Death Valley. Like I say, I did one last year, Zion, Bryce, whatever. I only do some special ones.

Storey: Uh-huh, but when you were dealing with Hoover Dam, you weren't dealing with the tour director or anything like that.

Lewis: Nope, didn't call out for a special. No, nothing. We let them know if there's a lot of buses coming. A lot of times I would call because I'd

be working really close with the company and I'd say, "Oh, if we know we've got a lot of people going out there, it's good to let the dam know." So we'd call out and do that.

Boulder City Walking Tours

Storey: What about Boulder City? Did you get any questions about that when you were a guide, or Ragtown or anything like that?

Lewis: Oh sure, we used to have walking tours of Boulder City, have lunch in the Boulder Dam Hotel, walk them around and show them all the . . . That's the reason I have a little bit different background–I had a lot of that before I went out to the dam, so I could draw on that information. Then I had to just concentrate on power. (laughs) But yes, we'd do Boulder City and . . . Oh, what's her name? Austine Studios–she's the one who does the three-dimensional drawings on glass, and she was right there next to the Boulder Dam Theater. And so we'd have lunch in the hotel, show them the rooms of the hotel, take them over to Austine's. She's done a lot of things for Disneyland and stuff like that. And just kind of do a walking tour of the town, show them the old railroad houses.

In fact, was it last year the Republican Women's Convention was coming to town, so one of the tour groups called me up, so I took out, as a representative, took out the ladies from the Republicans Club and showed them Boulder City and where they could eat and what they could do.

Storey: Well, now when you were doing tours for Reclamation in the dam, did you get many questions about anything besides the dam? (Lewis: Yeah.) Questions about like, "What's the Bureau of Reclamation?" about Boulder City?

Lewis: Never got the questions so much on the Bureau. I know that's probably very disturbing, but never really . . . I always encouraged them to see the movie. I would relate the history of Boulder City quite often, because it had to be built as part of the whole project, the dam, Boulder City was. And so I would do the history of Boulder City. It just depended on what the people wanted to know. When they're standing there to go back up in the elevator, then you can sort of see what their special interests are, and you can pretty well pick out. Of course the name of the dam and whatever it took to cover that time. And that's strictly a guide option, they don't have to do that.

Storey: Or you can push the button and _____ elevator talk. Okay, well, I really appreciate your spending your time with me today.

Lewis: My pleasure.

Storey: You don't think of anything else that I should ask you? You know, it's always a problem, "Did I ask all the questions I should have asked?" (Lewis chuckles) Well, in that case, I'd like to ask you if it's alright for researchers within Reclamation and from outside Reclamation to use the cassette tapes and the resulting transcripts from this interview?

Lewis: Sure.

Storey: Thank you, I appreciate it.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MAY 5, 1994.
END OF INTERVIEW.