

Lynn L. Excell
Interviewed by Loren Webb
For the Washington County Historical Society

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Participants: Loren Webb (Washington County Historical Society Interviewer)
Lynn L. Excell (Hurricane Utah Police Chief)

Webb: Good morning, everyone. My name is Loren Webb. I'm with the Washington County Historical Society, and here with me today for our sixteenth oral history interview is Lynn Excell. He is the Hurricane Police Chief, and he's also been a good friend of mine over the years. So I'd like to just get started. Tell us again, what is your full name, Lynn.

Excell: Lynn L. Excell.

Webb: Okay. And how did you get interested in law enforcement?

Excell: It's kind of interesting. I've kind of thought about that just a little bit. It really goes back to when I was a kid. When I was just a young kid, I actually had two big things in life that really interested me. One was law enforcement, the other one was driving truck. And before I could become a law enforcement officer, I actually drove truck for a construction company, then got into law enforcement, and I've been here for quite a number of years now.

Webb: Okay, so where and when did you first apply for a job in law enforcement?

Excell: I applied for a job in law enforcement back probably in about, I'm going to say late '70s, about '78, '79, somewhere around there, and I actually applied at Cedar City Police Department.

Webb: And did you get hired?

Excell I did not.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: I was rejected.

Webb: Oh, and that's always tough. So, did you apply elsewhere?

Excell: I really, at that particular time, no, I didn't. I actually had an opportunity, actually got presented to me, from LaVerkin Police Department to come on as a

Reserve. I was actually working construction at the time, and I came on there as a Reserve Officer.

Webb: Okay, so tell us a little bit about that. What did that job involve as a Reserve Police Officer?

Excell: As a reserve police officer, and back then, unlike today, you could actually work for 18 months before you went to the Police Academy and was certified. And what my primary role was at that time was traffic enforcement. I would respond to burglaries and different calls within LaVerkin, but at the time LaVerkin was probably about four or five hundred people. Not a lot going on at the time. Spent a lot of time out on the road, which we all know SR9 goes through there, and on the way to Zion Park, so there's a lot of tourist traffic.

Webb: So what did you, what did you like or find rewarding about that job as a Reserve Officer?

Excell: You know, as a Reserve Officer, probably just learning, and probably trying to understand really what it entailed to be a police officer because a lot of people get into it for a lot of different reasons. But back then, and probably my biggest goal was to try to help people and try to make our community safe.

Webb: That's great. So was there anything that was frustrating or stressful about that job?

Excell: You know, not really, other than I really had an interest in law enforcement at the time. There was nothing else other than that Reserve position.

Webb: Okay, were there any experiences that you had that during that time period that stood out?

Excell: A couple of bad ones if you want those.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: It was one of those deals, I came home, and I think I came home to eat lunch. And I took my gun off being really safe, and I put it in the gun safe at home and ate lunch. And then I went back out on patrol, and I actually stopped a car, and it was somebody that I really, just something in, you know, that sixth sense in you said, you know, something's wrong here, something could be bad. But it ended up going okay. And then I thought, you know, if he'd have done it, I could have drawn my weapon, and I could have handled it. And I realized at that point my gun was still back in the gun safe.

Webb: Oh.

Excell: So it's one of those things that I learned after one time, you don't do that one again.

Webb: Yeah.

Excell: So.

Webb: Okay. So when did you come to the Hurricane Police Department? I assume you transferred or were able to apply, from LaVerkin to—

Excell: What happened is I went to work for LaVerkin as a Reserve Officer in May. And in October, first of October, I went into work one afternoon, and the mayor told me that the chief had quit that day. And he looked at me, and he goes, "You went to college, right?" And I said, "Yeah." And he goes, "What was your major?" And I said, "At that time it was police science, and now it's criminal justice." And he goes, "Do you want to be Chief?"

Webb: This was LaVerkin?

Excell: Yeah. And that was just, virtually, how I did it. And then approximately six years later, Hurricane and LaVerkin decided to put the two departments together.

Webb: So, wait a minute. Did you become the Hurricane, or the LaVerkin Police Chief?

Excell: Yeah. [LaVerkin] Police Chief, yes.

Webb: What year was that?

Excell: It had to be, like, right around, I'm going to say right around '81.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: Somewhere right in that area. And then, and I served in that position up through that time. I ended up with one other officer that worked there. And then in 1986, Hurricane and LaVerkin got together and decided to put the two police departments together.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: At that time.

Webb: So tell me a little bit about the jurisdiction and the population and the area that you had to, was involved in that?

Excell: Which site?

Webb: With Hurricane and LaVerkin.

Excell: With Hurricane and LaVerkin we had all of Hurricane, which Hurricane was nowhere near then as big as it is today. Today Hurricane is about 58 square miles. LaVerkin was a small community then, too. We probably had a total population of maybe between four and five thousand people—

Webb: Okay.

Excell: At the time. When I actually came on, Hurricane had four officers and LaVerkin had two.

Webb: Okay, so when, when you combined, who became the police chief?

Excell: Well, at the time, there was a police chief in Hurricane and LaVerkin.

Webb: Right, so how did that work out?

Excell: And the City informed both of us we had to test for the job. And the really ironic part to that, as far as my history, is we'd went ahead and went through the process with them. And we were just waiting for the answers or the selection process from them. And actually, I went home one night and I had a job offer letter there from the Utah Highway Patrol. At the time, Utah Highway Patrol started troopers in port of entries. And they had assigned me to the Wendover Port of Entry. And I'm like, ah, I really don't want to move to Wendover. The next morning, the Hurricane City Council member that was over the police department came and met with me and said, "You've been selected to take the police chief's job in Hurricane." And everybody would think, "Okay, trooper in Wendover, police chief in Hurricane, that's an easy fix." But at the time, the longevity of a police chief in Hurricane was 2.2 years.

Webb: Why?

Excell: They just, for some reason, would go through police chiefs quite regularly at that particular time.

Webb: Wow!

Excell: And that was a concern. You know, if you're going to do research on a department, there's things you need to know. And I'm sitting there going, okay, what do I do? But my wife, family and I, we did not want to move to Wendover by any means, although I knew that would be very stable. So I took the job in Hurricane. I came to work there. And as of right now, I've been there 37 years.

Webb: Thirty-seven years.

Excell: Yeah.

Webb: Okay, what year was it?

Excell: Be 38 in April. Eighty-six.

Webb: In 1986, what month?

Excell: And, actually, my official start day was April first.

Webb: Okay, so April first.

Excell: So we always worry about that being an April Fool's joke, but.

Webb: Okay, so April 1st, 1986, you became the Hurricane Police Chief.

Excell: Correct.

Webb: Okay. So what was interesting about that position, and what were your duties at that time?

Excell: You know, the big thing, and what I was really assigned for by the City is the City really wanted me to do everything I could to improve the image of the Police Department. It was one of those things that there had been a little bit of concern on over time. So I came in there, I got really involved in the community. We looked at different things that we could do to support, help, and benefit the community. We started a community policing program. We actually started a few years, well, we actually even started right after that. We did in-school programs. I got involved in the Chamber of Commerce. I got involved with the Lions Club. I got involved with the County Fair. I mean, different organizations so that we could prove and show the community we were part of the community, and really that we worked for them and how we could be of better service. That was my big thing is to kind of bring those things together and kind of, you know, make sure we could do for the community what the community really wanted.

Webb: What kind of feedback did you get from that?

Excell: You know, it actually ended up being very positive. I mean, it's been one of the things that's really stood out in my career is the fact we're still doing it today. We're the only community in Washington County that's teaching DARE in our elementary schools. And we're still doing it.

Webb: Spell out what DARE stands for.

Excell: Drug Abuse Resistance Education.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: And it's a nationwide program. It was actually started in L.A., but it is much more advanced now and doing an absolutely great job. And I think currently I have actually, I believe it's five or six officers that are currently trained and certified as DARE officers.

Webb: Okay. So who were some of the officers, detectives, or police chiefs that you worked with? And maybe you could just tell us a little bit about each one and how they impacted your life.

Excell: You know, I kind of thought about that question just a little bit. And, you know, starting way back, I mean, there were several that were there at a time when I was actually in LaVerkin and then left there and actually came to Hurricane when we combined the departments. I had a guy that worked for me there. His name was Gary Hartog. And he wasn't from this area or anything else. And he worked there, did a really super spectacular job. He taught me a lot. One of the biggest things that I felt like he taught me was I would go home at night and leave my radio on and listen. And every time he'd do something, I'd call him and say, "Hey, you need to handle it this way." Finally, one day he set me down and he goes, "Chief, I'm not going to do it exactly your way. But I do know how to do my job." So I turned my radio off, and you know what? He did a great job. Did he do it my way? No. But that was one of the big things he taught me. Shortly thereafter, he went to Los Angeles and finished his career down there for the Sheriff's Department. I got to Hurricane, I had some great people over there. We did a lot of good things. We hired a gentleman by the name of Shayne Copeland.

Webb: Yeah, I remember Shayne.

Excell: Shayne was an amazing guy, started on as an officer, worked right up through and ended up actually to be my Deputy Chief or Assistant Chief. And Shayne taught me a lot of things. One of the things that he did is if he came into a meeting, he'd tell you exactly where he stood. You could accept or reject it, but he would tell you. He wouldn't come in and sugarcoat anything. He was really good, but talk about an incredible detective. He did some amazing things. Him and I worked very close together on some of those things. He was a great man, and there was a lot of times that I've sat back and said, "What would Shayne do?"

Webb: Wow.

Excell: And so I've kind of, I've kind of tried to still to this day do some things like that. I've got a lot of other really great people. Somebody you might even remember is Stacey Gubler. I always tease Stacey. He's now Sergeant over my Investigations Division. But I tease him a lot, because when he was younger I

used to chase him over in LaVerkin. And I told him the only reason I hired him is I got tired of chasing him, and which is not true, because I'm going to tell you, talk about an incredible officer, an incredible supervisor, and an amazing, amazing detective.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: That guy can just do some great jobs. Um, I've had, like I said, several others. I've got some good sergeants and supervisors. This last August, I got to put in a new deputy chief with the department because, again, I'm getting to that point that at some point, I'm going to retire, and we need to start moving the department in the direction that's going to move it forward and move it ahead. And it's a gentleman by the name of Kurt Yates.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: Kurt Yates came to us through State Parks. He was actually a teacher prior to that, at Tuacahn. He actually has an education degree as a teacher. And he worked for State Parks, became Deputy Park Manager, Assistant Park Manager. We hired him from there. And I don't know whether you remember a lady out at Sand Hollow by the name of Laura Melling.

Webb: Oh, yes.

Excell: Great lady.

Webb: Of course, Laura.

Excell: Great lady.

Webb: Did you hire her?

Excell: No, I did not.

Webb: Okay, because I—

Excell: Let me tell you, when I hired Kurt, she wouldn't speak to me for a year because I took him away from her because he did such an amazing job there. And I knew it. I could see that in him.

Webb: Tell me his name again.

Excell: Kurt Yates.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: And he came up through as an officer for our department, moved in to Sergeant. He's went off on his own and got himself a master's degree in public administration. And I saw the handwriting on the wall. So this last year I worked with our city administration, our council, and was able to appoint him as Deputy Chief as of August.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: And he's doing an amazing job.

Webb: Well, great.

Excell: He is such an example.

Webb: How many police officers do you have?

Excell: Currently right now we have 38 sworn.

Webb: Thirty-eight sworn, okay. So what criminal cases have you or the department worked on during your tenure there that stood out?

Excell: You know, there's been a lot of them. Just a couple of them that I've kind of been involved in is we right early on coming to Hurricane, we had some burglars that actually came in that were just going through every store around, stealing weapons, and stealing everything they could steal. They were actually out of, I believe Minnesota. They'd went up into Canada and committed a bunch of crimes and come down and had actually burglarized Ace Hardware, actually the Ace Hardware in Mesquite, as well. And we knew who they were. We were able to get pictures. We posted them all over town. Well, they went into an old fast food place that was in Hurricane, and the clerks there, they'd seen pictures of them, and they'd seen them come in, and they kind of, "Oh, crud," and they called in to dispatch to let them know they were there. Right after that, two missionaries walked in. This is what we got from the guys later, is they thought those could have been FBI agents and almost shot them in the store. But they exited the fast food place, got in their car and headed down the road, which we'd got the call, so we were on them, got a roadblock. They shot at officers, they shot at officers all the way down the freeway, and the car ended up catching on fire and burning in Bloomington. And we ended up taking them into custody. You know, that was one of the really big cases. We've had a lot of really tragic ones over the course of the years. We did have a gentleman a while back, Shayne Copeland was involved, that had actually hid his identity and actually had staged his death in Nevada as burning up in a trailer, and it ended up not being him. It ended up being a transient that he'd actually put in. He'd sexually molested his daughters. Here, Shayne was a bulldog. He would never let something go. If he got on something, he wouldn't let it go. And he was able to do that. They were actually able to get this guy, get him arrested. He went to Nevada. Unfortunately, he, he actually committed suicide in jail. And,

but you know Shayne, when he came to me and told me that, he goes, "I'm going down there. I want to make sure he's not staging this again." But you know, for his family that was very tragic. We also had a big case here not too many years back where we had some guys come in, stage another incident away from it, but went down to our Wells Fargo with a track hoe and actually ripped the ATM right off of its frame. With the help of not only my detectives, the FBI's, and several others, it was a major crime ring out of California, and we were able to arrest, convict, and they are now in federal prison.

Webb: Wow. Good for you. So, dispatching, let me just ask a clarification on that. Is dispatching still done by the St. George Police Department?

Excell: Yes, it's done by the St. George Police Department, and all of us are paying partners into that program.

Webb: Okay, and that's County-wide?

Excell: Yes.

Webb: Okay. So, what other advanced training have you completed in connection with your job at the police department, and how has that made you a better law enforcement officer?

Excell: Probably one of the bigger ones that I've done is I attended the FBI National Academy back in Quantico, Virginia. It's a training course that's put on for administrators in law enforcement. They can be like lieutenants and above. And it takes you back there, you're back there for three months, and they go through all kinds of administrative training, whether it's law, whether it's budgeting, whether it's personnel, case management, etc. That was probably one of the most interesting. And, you know, everybody asked me what was the most interesting part of that is I was in an administrative class and the first day in that class they had us write our own obituary.

Webb: Oh, isn't that interesting.

Excell: I'm going to tell you something, if you've ever done something like that, that is probably your best life tool you can ever do is what really do you want to be remembered for. Now plan and live your life in a way to where that can come true.

Webb: Right.

Excell: That was one of the big ones. I've done a lot of others. I've done a lot of work for FEMA. I've been trained a lot with FEMA stuff. I've went through a lot of law enforcement administrative classes. You know, I've done a lot. Recently, you know, we're doing a lot in law enforcement dealing with de-escalation and

different things like that. I've been part of the Arbinger program, anybody that knows about Arbinger. I've went through their entire program, the Outward Mindset, Outward Leadership.

Webb: What was the Arbinger? What's that about?

Excell: Arbinger is an organization that's put together, and they're actually in northern Utah. Our insurance company, the Utah Local Governments Insurance Trust, actually got this to where their users or cities and governments can be part of that. And we've become part of it. As a matter of fact, I've sent all of my supervisors through the Outward Mindset. It's just to have you instead of look at people as objects, you look at people as people. These are people. Every one of us have our pluses and our minuses, but instead of looking them as an object, or treating people like objects, you treat people like people, and you try to understand. So I've went through that. We went through the leadership program and I've also went through the Inclusion program, which is not judging people, it's taking people for just who they are and respecting, understanding and appreciating them. And I've went through also the instructor's program for every one of those as well.

Webb: Going back to the FBI Academy, Kelly Larson told me he went.

Excell: Correct, he did.

Webb: He said that was a life-changer for him.

Excell: It is.

Webb: It really, it just really did a lot of great things for him professionally.

Excell: It takes you to that next level.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: It takes you to that next level of leadership and it's hard to get in that. I mean, right now there's probably a seven-, eight-year minimum waiting period to get into that.

Webb: Wow. Okay. So what are some of the most rewarding things that you enjoy about working at the police department?

Excell: Probably the most rewarding is helping people. You know, especially in our work, we get to see people when they're literally at their worst, whether it's something that's happened to them or something that's going on, and it's trying to be there, to be that light, to be that person that can take this tragedy in their life and try to at least get some meaning to it or at least some answers to

it. And that's probably been the big thing, is trying to get that to where people know that what's going on in their life, we do understand and we want to be that help and that resource for them to try to get their life back to the best semblance it can be.

Webb: Okay. So what are some of the most frustrating things that you face at the police department, and how have you and the department dealt with that?

Excell: You know, one of the toughest things we always deal with, we're government, and so we have to deal with tax money. And nobody ever wants to raise taxes. Nobody ever wants to do that, but it costs money to do this job, and so one of the most frustrating things we deal with is more or less trying to get the budgets to where we can actually do the things we need to do. Now government can't be to the point where we have every trinket, every toy, everything. My biggest thing is, is trying to get good employees and trying to keep good employees. And one of the ways you keep them is to be fair with them on pay. And some of the things we've done is, you know, after the whole Covid thing and, you know, the whole attack, the Black Lives Matter, everything against law enforcement, we lost a lot of officers. Every agency lost a lot of officers. And we were trying to get them back, and agencies were stealing officers all the time. And you know, we were looking at that, and a lot of it was based on money and a lot of other things. Hurricane City did a great job at the time in working through that. But we noticed we had a problem. And the other big thing we noticed is we were hiring people, and it was a constant hiring battle. And we were washing out about fifty percent of our applicants. And we looked at that, and we said, "Okay, there's got to be something different." So we looked at our whole hiring process. We went back and instead of trying to hire this person that maybe could interview to be the best cop in the world, we hired people with morals, ethics, values, and communication skills, and then we'll train them to be law enforcement officers. And right now, and for quite a period of time, I'm fully staffed. We send people to the Police Academy, and they've pulled me in, cornered me, and said, "What are you doing? You're sending us the best of the best, and how are you doing this?" And we talked about that, and you know, and I really respect and appreciate everybody in my department. My personnel, in my opinion, are the best ever. Are they human? Do they make mistakes? Yes, they do. But you know what? They'll stand up for every one of those at the same time. But they're great people doing a great job and they're absolutely spectacular individuals, and I learn from each and every one of them every day.

Webb: How about that? That is so awesome to be able to work with good people.

Excell: I have the best.

Webb: And that's great. So what are some of your most important accomplishments with the police department?

Excell: You know, honestly, I think the community policing aspect that we do, because we give back to the community. We do a lot of things that way to where, because again, this is tax money. And so we want to do everything we can to give back to our community, to make sure not only, yes, we're answering the calls. Yes, unfortunately, we are issuing citations to people. But the fact of it is, is doing the different programs that give back. I think doing the, we have school resource officers in, technically assigned to every one of our schools. They're assigned to the high school, middle school, and intermediate. And outside of that, they're also assigned to an elementary [school] as well. And that they do that, and they do a lot of work there. Plus with my DARE program, and everything, we go in and teach that program. And you know what, the interaction with young people is amazing, because you know, we have this opportunity to show them exactly what we are and who we are. So later on in life, we're not the person to be feared. We're not the person that's coming out after them. We're actually here to help them and do that. The other big thing that we've done and we've done it for a lot of years very successfully is the Shop with a Cop program. We were instrumental years ago in getting that going, and it's still moving. You know, we're up to about 75, 80 kids a year on the east side of the County that we take out Christmas shopping every year. But outside of that, we've actually started another program three years ago where we do a back-to-school shop with a cop program.

Webb: That's a great idea.

Excell: Every August because there's a certain number of kids that are going to go to school and just don't have clothes. They don't have the things they need, and we work in very close coordination with a big store here locally—best time of year, best sales, everything they can get. We take kids, we give them \$200 to go shop for clothes. By the time they're done they get over \$700 to \$800 worth of clothing

Webb: I bet that really helps, too.

Excell: And we're taking about 30, 40 kids. But again, those are the things that we get involved in that, again, it's giving back to the community. And I don't want to say it's all us because if it wasn't from donations that we get from a lot of very, very good sponsors, these things wouldn't happen. And, but we try to make sure we're giving to the community everything we can. So businesses and others really want to be part of it.

Webb: Okay, and I'll bet they do.

Excell: They do.

Webb: I'll bet there's a lot of businesses that really love to participate.

Excell: There is, there is, and we appreciate the partnership.

Webb: So, what is it that keeps you going, you know, after a long and successful career with the Hurricane Police Department?

Excell: You know, it's interesting you say that, because I, I tell my staff this constantly. "If you guys would start treating me worse, I'd leave here." But they are the best, they are amazing. I actually come to work every day to do everything I can to help them, to support them. They are amazing people doing [an] amazing job, and I appreciate every day the opportunity to work with them. I have a good administration in my city, too. They are great people doing great things, and they support me every way they can. Do we have everything in the world? No, we don't. But you know what, we keep fighting, we keep doing everything we can to get better. But the real reason I stay there is my people, and the other biggest part, the citizens of Hurricane are amazing. I mean, these are people that you drive up and down the street, you'll see the "Back the Blue" signs. You know, these people support us, lock, stock, and barrel. That's why I still do this.

Webb: Okay, so Bob Flowers told me that you're the longest-serving police chief in the United States. So I looked that up.

Excell; I doubt it.

Webb: And I don't think that's correct.

Excell: It's not.

Webb: But I know that it's pretty neat to see that you're still doing it, you know, that you're still out there making a difference, that you're out there going to work every day and that you look forward to it. So, what advice would you give to someone thinking of making law enforcement a career?

Excell: It's interesting, I had an opportunity just the other day to meet with a young man in a crisis situation that he was dealing with. And, you know, I asked him, I asked him the question, I say, "What do you want to do? What do you want to do in life?" And he goes, "You know, when I was a young kid in preschool, he says, they had career day." And he says, "I was probably three or four years old." This kid, like 17 or 18 now. And he says, "The one thing that stood out was a police officer." And so he and I talked for a period of time. And I said, "Research it. Research what it takes to be an officer. Research what police officers do." I said, "When you turn 18, I want you to come and do a ride-along. And not necessarily with just me, with Hurricane. Look at some other agencies. Find that niche for you. But if you're going to do it, know what you're coming into and understand it is hard work. It is miserable work." You know, when we hire people, I tell them, you know, look, you're going to have

to work, you know, your birthday, holidays, your anniversaries, and stuff like that. A lot of them look at you like, "Nah, that can't be true." It is true. And in 2023, I worked my anniversary because we had a major incident that occurred. I'm out there. My wife was very understanding, and I appreciate her for that. It's just what it is. But do the research and be ready because you're going to work graveyard shift, you're going to work swing shift, you're going to work in the middle of summer, you're going to work in the middle of winter. Know what you're getting into when you get into it, and be ready to give it your all.

Webb: Okay, thank you on that. So what other civic or religious organizations have you participated in, if any? You've talked about several, you said the Hurricane Chamber of Commerce.

Excell: Chamber of Commerce.

Webb: And what else?

Excell: Lions Club, I've been involved in that. The Washington County Fair.

Webb: Fair, yeah.

Excell: Fair. Years ago, actually believe this, I was actually Fair Chairman—

Webb: I believe it.

Excell: For a year.

Webb: And I'll bet that was a great experience.

Excell: It was a heck of an experience. It was a real mind -blowing experience. But my predecessor was Buck Hurst. I actually served as Co-Chair and then Chair and then Past Chair, and I worked with Buck Hurst—what an incredible man, and what a leader, what a teacher. So, you know, that kind of stuff. I've been a member of the LDS Church all my life and been involved in different parts of that. I'm a member of the FBI National Academy Association. I've been that, Utah Chiefs of Police. All kinds of different organizations. You stay involved, you get involved. And again, I just, before I came here, I was actually in a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. And you have to stay involved in those people because if you're not reading your community, you're not doing them the due diligence that you really need to do. You need to know what the community wants, not just necessarily what you want. You know, you spoke of Kelly Larson a long time, you know, and what, some things he said. Kelly Larson taught me a lot about myself at one point. He walked in to me, and he says, "I finally figured you out and how you've survived." I said, "How is that, Kelly?" And he says, "You figure out how to do your job the way the Council

wants you to do it." He goes, "You've done that." And I figured out the other day, and I think I'm on my, I think it's the fifteenth mayor I've served under—

Webb: Wow.

Excell: In my career.

Webb: That's amazing.

Excell: And I have no idea how many council members. But, you know, you have to know what their goals, what their objectives are. They're elected by the people. The citizens of your community elected them to do that job. My job is to make them successful. So I have to know what their goals and objectives are and then make my department make them successful.

Webb: Okay. So where and when were you born?

Excell: I was actually born in Cedar City, Utah, in 1956. At the time, I believe we lived in Springdale. My family was kind of from the Springdale/Panguitch area. My parents, grandparents, etc. came down to that area to help a lot of, build the road up through the tunnel, up in Zion and everything. So I lived there, then my dad transferred to Bryce Canyon. He worked for the National Park Service, worked in Bryce Canyon for a number of years, loved it, still do by the way to this day. Then he transferred to Yellowstone and then retired out of Yellowstone back to Springdale.

Webb: Oh, my gosh. So you lived, where did you live? West Yellowstone?

Excell: No, we actually lived in Mammoth, right inside the park.

Webb: Right inside the park.

Excell: Yeah, and my dad was the maintenance supervisor over the Old Faithful District—

Webb: Okay.

Excell: In Yellowstone. And, but my life, my whole career, I mean, I guess it could have been just the time in my life or whatever it was, but I love Bryce the best, and I go back there every year.

Webb: That's so amazing, Lynn. Who else was in your family?

Excell: I've got two brothers, one sister. My sister, unfortunately, has passed away a few years back, but I still have two brothers. And going back to a previous

question that you asked of how did I get in law enforcement, my oldest brother was actually a sheriff's deputy and a police officer here in Washington County.

Webb: His name?

Excell: Mike Excell.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: And I looked up to him. I looked up to him a lot in what he did and how he did it. And he was a lot of the inspiration in what I did.

Webb: Okay. Describe your grammar school and high school years, anything that stands out there.

Excell: I remember starting school, I believe it was in Bryce Valley, which is in Tropic.

Webb: Wow.

Excell: Went through there then again—

Webb: A small town, very small.

Excell: Oh, yeah, lived in Bryce Canyon and rode the bus down there every day. I will not tell you stories about that because my wife has banned me from telling stories of my youth because my kids should never know. I one time faked my death because, you know, just to do it. The principal called my mom, and I wished at that point I would have died, but no. But anyway, it was great. I enjoyed going to school there. And then my dad transferred to Yellowstone. I ended up going to school, elementary school, in Mammoth, right inside the Park. And believe it or not, back then inside Yellowstone National Park, they even had a ski lift—

Webb: Wow.

Excell: Inside the park.

Webb: That must have been really interesting.

Excell: We as Park employees could go out and use the ski lift in the wintertime. But [I] went to school there. Then there were some things, we ended up coming back to Springdale for a year, and went to Springdale Elementary. Then we went back to Yellowstone. I went through in Gardiner, Montana, which is just outside. I love that.

Webb: I mean, these are really just cool towns.

Excell: Yeah.

Webb: I mean, they're, you know, they're just surrounding the Park, and they're just so interesting.

Excell: Yeah. I played football and basketball in Gardiner and actually lettered varsity football and basketball in ninth grade. Moved to Hurricane, somehow football and basketball was not something they wanted me to do. They wanted me to wrestle. And I tried that for one year and went, that's not me. But anyway, I came back down, graduated high school. We lived in Springdale, graduated high school out of Hurricane.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: And went to SUU [Southern Utah University]. At the time it was SUSC [Southern Utah State College] and then started off with my career.

Webb: Okay. So what, did you have any influential teachers, any teachers that stood out?

Excell: There was, and I can't remember his first name, it was a Heaton that was at Hurricane High School. One of the biggest things that he taught us is not better late, or don't be late, but better. I can't remember the exact words he used, but you should bet, you were never late to his class because if you were late, you paid for it. And anyway, so you always remembered that, and you were always at his class early. That was just, I mean, and that was a great life lesson. Because, you know, and even it drove my wife crazy when I was dating her, because I'd tell her I'd pick her up at 6:37. Whatever it would be, I'd be there 15 minutes early because you knew you were never late.

Webb: Right.

Excell: And you did that. We had another teacher named Rex Lilly. He even taught me in driver's ed, although I have to tell you that I had a driver's license in Wyoming before I ever came down here because up there you could get a license at 14.

Webb: At 14.

Excell: So I actually had a license. I came down here, the State wouldn't renew it because you couldn't renew a license, and they were only good for a year up there. And so at 15, I couldn't drive again. And so then I had to wait till I was 16, but I already knew it. So when this Rex Lilly, when he, and he taught drivers ed plus numerous other classes. We'd drive out around through Kanab and then back down through the Park. And we'd get out there and he'd go,

“Okay.” He'd make me drive through the tunnel because he knew I'd done it before. He wouldn't let any of the other kids drive through the tunnel or down the switchbacks. But he'd always make me do that.

Webb: I bet you loved doing that.

Excell: Oh, yeah.

Webb: That's awesome.

Excell: It was, because I'd done it before.

Webb: It's really quite the cool venture. And you actually got to see the windows that are no longer there.

Excell: Yeah. Actually, I hate to tell you this, we actually got to park in the windows.

Webb: Oh, I know.

Excell: Yeah.

Webb: I remember parking at those windows, too.

Excell: You know, something I remember from that is tunnel running. Now it's a federal felony to walk through the tunnel, but we used to run it.

Webb: Yeah.

Excell: You know, you stick, a bunch of kids would go through it.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: Yeah.

Webb: So education-wise, you said you attended, it would be Southern Utah State College, right?

Excell: Correct.

Webb: And you graduated in what, what degree? Police science, did you say?

Excell: Yeah.

Webb: Okay? Did you have a minor?

Excell: I actually minored in psychology.

Webb: Okay. Anything that stands out about your college years.

Excell: No.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: Not really. I attended there. I attended actually here at Dixie, here. I actually went to Weber State for a short period of time. And when we were at the FBI National Academy, we actually got college credit from the University of Virginia.

Webb: Okay. Describe how you met and married your spouse.

Excell: My wife, from Hurricane, lived there her entire life. And she actually worked in a fast food place there. And I'd pull in there and ask her for a Pepsi and a date. And finally, because I just pestered enough, she finally agreed and went out with me. But, yeah.

Webb: And where was that again? Which drive-in?

Excell: It was a place called Chicken Time in Hurricane.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: It's actually, it's long gone. It's now where I think Taco Time is, or Taco, Del Ta—or De—

Webb: Del Taco, or?

Excell: Not Del Taco, it's Taco Bell.

Webb: Taco Bell. Okay.

Excell: M-hm.

Webb: Okay. So, describe any important aspects of family life and raising your children.

Excell: You know, the one thing about my kids that I think, you know, is really important, my kids work hard. I mean, and they were taught that.

Webb: How many children?

Excell: I have four kids, I've got three girls and one boy, and we always tell the son if he'd have been born first, he'd have been an only child. He was the last, he's

the youngest. I have four kids. My oldest daughter actually works for the Dispatch Center in St. George. She's a supervisor there.

Webb: Wow.

Excell: And has been there over 25 years. She started there when she was 18.

Webb: Wow.

Excell: And the chief back at the time, Jon Pollei, great man, great.

Webb: Yes, he was.

Excell: Great, great individual. He was such a mentor to me in my career. And I just absolutely love and appreciate him. He actually came to me one day, and he goes, "Hey, this new girl in our dispatch center, her last name's Excell. Any relative?" I go, "Yeah, that's my daughter." And he goes, "Why didn't you say something?" And I said, "She's got to get the job on her own." And she did. And so I got that. I've got another daughter that manages a business here in St. George. I've got my youngest daughter who I understand actually is starting for the dispatch center in the next month or two. And my son actually works for a fiber company here locally and doing a great job.

Webb: Okay.

Excell: But one thing about those kids, they work hard. They knew it and they had to.

Webb: Did any of them participate in 4-H programs?

Excell: No.

Webb: None?

Excell: None.

Webb: Okay, 'cause that was a question my sister-in-law, KayJean, was going to ask me to ask you.

Excell: Uh-huh.

Webb: She thought, because she was heavily involved with the 4-H program, she thought maybe one of your, some of your children were involved in the 4-H.

Excell: No, nope.

Webb: Okay, so, and my wife also says to tell you hello.

Excell: I love her.

Webb: Because—

Excell: Your wife is an amazing person.

Webb: She was involved with the, you know, the State Tax Commission [State Division of Motor Vehicles].

Excell: Yeah, she was, she was, she's such an amazing person. She does such a great job. You know, I can see why you married her. She made you a better person.

Webb: She did, for sure.

Excell: But I will tell you, my wife made me a better person too.

Webb: Okay, good. So as you look back over your life, what would you like to be remembered for?

Excell: You know, I thought about that. And earlier I mentioned the fact that I had to write my own obituary. And I've went back and looked at that numerous times. You know, I hope the thing that I get, that I am remembered for, is the honesty, the integrity, and the work ethic. I always want to be fair with people, and again, you were a great mentor for me on this as well, because I want people to know that I'm going to be straight honest with them, I'm going to be fair. You know what? I, in my career, I've made mistakes, and I've went back to the people and told them I was wrong. And I've done that, and I want to be known that that's what I'm willing to do. I want to be the honest, fair individual that people can count on.

Webb: Yeah. Okay, good. Is there anything else that you feel is important that I haven't asked you that you would like to share at this point?

Excell: You know, again, I will say just one thing, and that's how much I respect you. You were a great mentor in my life, and I appreciate you. Your work with the media years ago, actually, was so incredible, and it's such a dying art, and I appreciate everything that you've done.

Webb: Well, the feeling's mutual, because—

Excell: And by the way, don't trust anything Bob Flowers said [laughed].

Webb: Okay. I just, yeah, I just want you to know how much I respected being able to work with you, and when I look back at Jon Pollei, I get really emotional because he was such a good mentor for me, too. I felt like, you know, and I

got to work with so many good people in law enforcement. I grew to really love and respect the job that they did, and so I appreciate what you do for your community, so.

Excell: Well, a lot of my success, I go back to John Pollei because, again, I was a young chief. I didn't know what to do, and like I said, I was actually an officer for less than six months. And when I got moved into the chief's job, I had no idea what to do. I, I was probably a lousy cop, let alone a chief, and Jon Pollei took me under his wing, and the one thing he always told me was, "Look, I'm going to tell you what I think. I'm not telling you it's the way to do it. You make your own decision, but I'm going to give you the answer the way I see."

Webb: Great advice. Gosh.

Excell: And it was awesome advice, and I can always count on him. I could call him at any time, and he was always there for me.

Webb: Yeah.

Excell: And a lot of my success, I put back to his mentoring when he did it.

Webb: Okay. Well, Lynn, thank you so much for being with us. And thank you, the listeners out there, for being with us.

Excell: Thank you.

Webb: Again, my name is Loren Webb with the Washington County Historical Society, and thank you for joining us for this oral history interview, and until the next time.