

## What I've Learned

# Coe Swobe

'54 (political science/history)

I got lucky when I graduated from law school at the University of Denver and was hired as assistant United States Attorney. This was the 1950s, and there was only one assistant U.S. Attorney in the entire state. My case with the most notoriety occurred when the government prosecuted Lavere Redfield for tax evasion and bank fraud.

Redfield was probably the biggest property owner in Washoe County. They said you could walk from the Reno city limits to the top of Mount Rose and not step off his property. After he was indicted by the federal grand jury, it was my job to have him arrested and charged with tax evasion. At the time, federal prisoners were put in the county jail in Reno. I'll always remember one time I went to the jail to check on Redfield. I found him sitting behind the sheriff's desk, calling his stockbroker. The sheriff, Bud Young, told me, "Well, Mr. Redfield needed some privacy and he had some business with his stockbroker." Redfield was later found guilty and served his time.

While in the state Senate, I was lucky enough to play a role in the preservation of Lake Tahoe through the creation of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in 1969. (Nevada Governor) Paul Laxalt and (California Governor) Ronald Reagan knew they had to do something to save the lake. As Paul Laxalt said, "The lake is not going

to go gray on my watch." I was just lucky that Laxalt asked me to negotiate what became the bi-state compact between Nevada and California to preserve Lake Tahoe. The bi-state compact was never a sure thing. It was a very important step for Lake Tahoe, and I think it's done a lot of good for clarity and preservation of the lake. I was in the state Assembly for four years and the state Senate for eight years. In addition to shepherding through the legislation that created the bi-state compact, I think the thing I'm most proud of occurred during the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War was a different time. There was great resentment against the veterans. When I served in the Air Force in Korea, there were such great opportunities for a returning veteran: the University let you make up the credits you lost because of your service, they helped you find a job, and they let you go back to school. The climate was much different in the 1960s, and I was so disappointed that my University and some influential members of its faculty were against offering many of these educational benefits to the many returning veterans of Vietnam. So I introduced legislation to correct that.

But luckily, slightly before it came to committee for a vote, (Nevada president) N. Edd Miller reversed the University's policy of not offering these benefits. It

was a class move by a classy University president, who realized that even if you have a problem with a nation's policy, you don't penalize the people who are simply doing their job.

I was a social drinker, dating back to my days as a student at the University of Nevada and member of Sigma Nu fraternity. When I was a practicing attorney and as a state assemblyman and state senator, I continued to drink. Alcoholism is a progressive disease. I drank progressively for 30 years. When I was 55, my family had enough. They held a good old-fashioned intervention. By then, about the only time I didn't drink was early in the morning.

So 13 of my family members and friends gathered in my home at 5:30 a.m. Each took a turn and told me how my alcoholism was destroying me, and my relations with them. It was one of the most important turning points in my life. I finally admitted I was an alcoholic. A great weight was lifted off my shoulders. I will be forever grateful to my wife, Janet, who gathered all of those wonderful people for that intervention. I haven't had a drink since.

Janet (who as Janet Quilici graduated from Nevada in 1956) and I are both extremely proud of our daughters, Caryn, and Jackie. Our three grandchildren are also a source of great pride. I've been very blessed to have such a wonderful wife, and such great children and grandchildren. I truly believe that the joy of family is how interdependent your lives become.

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*From a conversation with Coe Swobe in July 2007 with University Communications senior editor John Trent '85/'87, '00M.A. Swobe, 78, a native Nevadan, enrolled at the University of Nevada in 1947, and served in the Air Force from 1950 to 1952 before returning to Nevada, where he graduated in 1954 with a degree in political science and history.*

