

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Janice McElroy (JM)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: 1956 Air Disaster

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Keys: 1956 Air Disaster

TM: Today is June 30th, 2016. Today is the sixtieth anniversary of the United versus TWA airline disaster at Grand Canyon National Park. We are at the museum collection of the park today. My name is Tom Martin. This is part of the Grand Canyon Historical Society oral history program and today we are interviewing Janice McElroy. Janice, how do you spell your last name?

JM: M-c-E-l-r-o-y

TM: And how is it that you're at the park today?

JM: I had never come for any of the events that they did here since the accident and I felt that at this point it would just be the right thing to do. I wanted to do something to honor my parents and I didn't feel like my brother and sister or I had done that. So I felt the need to complete it, to complete the journey with this. So I did.

TM: Can you tell me the names and spell them out please of your parents?

JM: William Wallace Hatcher and Mildred Rogene Crick Hatcher.

TM: Thank you. How was it that your parents were on... and then which plane were they on?

JM: They were on the TWA flight out of LA to Kansas City. My mother's father owned a stove company in Independence, Missouri and he had died a few years prior to this. The family, which consisted of three girls, decided they were going to sell their stove company to I believe it was DuPont. I'm not sure which company, but it was a big sale. My father was an attorney and my mother was a teacher. My father, I think, felt he needed to go with her to make sure everything was done correctly. So the two of them went on this trip to close the deal.

TM: What kind of attorney was your father?

JM: He did divorce cases and civil suits and that sort of thing. Had to go to court and represent people. I couldn't tell you what you call that, what kind of attorney that was, but he was a busy attorney.

TM: And your mom, she was a teacher?

JM: She was a school teacher.

TM: What grade?

JM: First grade.

TM: How old were you at the time?

JM: That they died? Eleven years old. I had just turned eleven in April.

TM: And your siblings?

JM: My brother was thirteen and my sister was eight.

TM: Let's back up a little bit. Can you tell me the family stories of your mom and dad? Do you know how they met?

JM: Oh, sure. My father had graduated from college and went to work for his future father-in-law in the stove company.

TM: Where did your father graduate from college?

JM: I don't know. I have a good idea... Kansas or Oklahoma somewhere, I've got his degree, and really, I don't remember. But he graduated from college. His good friend, who ended up being his brother-in-law, was already working for the Cricks in the factory. His good friend, who was David Duke, said to my father, "I can get you a job," and so he got the job and met my mother. Decided to go to law school. Went to law school and don't ask me where he went to law school.

TM: So your mother's brother was David Duke?

JM: My mother's sister married David Duke. That was her brother-in-law.

TM: David Duke of popular...

JM: That was his father.

TM: And the stove company. This was a company that made stoves? As in home appliances type?

JM: Stoves that keep the house warm.

TM: Oh, gas fire heaters?

JM: Yeah, and wood-burning stoves. This was started at the turn of the century so it was... I could give you more information about the stove company. I have a picture of their brochure hanging on my wall at home. And the picture includes the old pot-belly stoves and that kind of stuff. It was a fairly large

factory. I've got some pictures of my grandfather with all the employees. It's a picture you unroll. There's probably 200 people in the picture. So it was a big company.

TM: Wow. Okay. So your dad got through law school.

JM: Correct.

TM: And he had met your mom by then?

JM: Yes. They married and had the three of us and they stayed in Oklahoma. That's where he grew up. My mother grew up in Independence, Missouri. And they made their home. I think when they were first married they were in Independence or Kansas City. One of those two spots. But soon moved to a small town called Paul's Valley, Oklahoma. They moved because he was going to go to work with his brother, who was also an attorney. They opened a law office in Paul's Valley. Which they did for, probably, I think I was eight years old when they moved to California. We moved because my father wanted to go into practice for himself and not work with family. Which can be good or bad, either way. He thought that opportunities in California were going to be better there. Ventura, California in 1952 was quite beautiful, no freeways, no shopping malls. It was really a lovely place to move to. So we were there when they died. We had been there probably...I was in second grade and the summer I was going into sixth grade was when they were killed, in '56. The summer after second grade is when we moved to California. You have to add that up—five years, something like that.

TM: What were some of the stories about your mother and father? If I was to know them by your stories, how would I know them?

JM: He was very different than she. He was very athletic. Played tennis, practiced law of course, loved to swim in the ocean, loved to hike, loved his family. Was very dedicated to family. Both of them were very Christian. I remember him speaking to the minister from our church, First Christian Church, about some of his cases that he'd be trying. He'd go meet with him when he had concerns. They were good friends and, you know, that's what they did. My mother was very quiet. Played the piano and knit, way more sedentary. I don't know how they got together, actually, but they seemed happy. They were a good match. But they were very different in some ways. It took her a lot longer to get things done and make a meal and my father was a perfectionist. His garage was perfect. He did the dishes and he would wipe the kitchen floor every time he did the dishes because it had to be perfect. So, very hardworking, well-liked in the community. He was in many, many organizations. I think he was a Shriner, he was a Mason, he was part of the church organization. Very political. I remember helping... was it, Carty? Carty for Congress in southern California. We'd drive around in a convertible. He'd take us with him and we could throw candy out to the kids to vote for this guy. He was a Democrat, I think most people were in those days. Just very involved. I think he would have gone on to some sort of political career in California because he was dynamic. People came up to me for years afterward and said "Oh, I remember your dad, he was just so interesting and he was so kind and I just loved being around your dad." My mother didn't have that many stories. She was the quiet one in the background.

TM: Well, she was raising three children which is a huge job.

JM: Yeah, and working. We moved to California without my father. We left in June when school was out after second grade and lived in Long Beach for the summer while she looked for a teaching job and bought a car and got it started. He had to close his law office. So he had cases he had to finish. So he stayed. I think he didn't come until December because then he had to stay with us. At that point we were living in Oxnard. Then he had to study to pass the California bar. So he spent a couple of months studying and then he passed the bar and we moved to Ventura. It was a big move. It took a lot of choice, a lot of hard decisions on their part. I remember hearing them talk about that. Should we do this and, we're going to break up the family. He had two brothers that were attorneys. He came from a huge family of eleven kids and my mother was only one of three. They were all either in Oklahoma or California. I think that's probably one of the reasons we moved to California. Because there were two or three of my father's sisters that lived in California. So family was there as well.

TM: So your mother had you and your two brothers?

JM: No, my brother's the oldest, he was thirteen and then there was me at eleven and my sister.

TM: So she had you and your little sister and your brother...

JM: In Long Beach.

TM: With in-laws to help, sort of?

JM: Well, not particularly. She was pretty much on her own. I say she was quiet, but she could handle things. I remember our first year in southern California, she taught at a pretty much all-Hispanic school in El Rio....I'm not sure I have the name correct. Right outside of Oxnard. And my first half of my third grade year I was in a class full of all Spanish-American, Mexican-American. I was the smartest kid in the class because most of those kids were farm workers and missed a lot of school. I wasn't a particularly good student. So that shows. I don't know that their education was very good. They moved all the time because they were migrant workers. Then we left there and went to Ventura and it was very different. More white-bread/community, lots of money for the school systems. They had oil in southern California at the time. Really, I was so impressed. I came from Paul's Valley, Oklahoma with black chalkboards and old wooden floors that creaked into this brand new school with green chalkboards and swimming pools and tennis courts and I thought "Whoa, this is something!" It was a good experience, all of it was.

TM: Did you guys go camping in the summertime?

JM: Occasionally. My mother didn't really like to camp. We did Sunday picnics a lot. We did church picnics. We would often go to Santa Barbara and go to Montecito and up to our favorite picnic ground. I'm trying to think of the name of that picnic ground. It was with trees and beautiful. We always did something on Sundays as a family. My dad would take us out for a big brunch or we'd go on a picnic. He was the Boy Scout leader and he would take my brother on camping trips. Sometimes he took all of us. That was a lot of work. He had to take two little girls. My mom was going "We have to have a trailer, it has to be clean, I don't want to get dirty." She came from a fancy background. They had maids that wore

uniforms. My father came from a very poor background. Oklahoma farmer, big family, never any money. So those two were very different.

TM: What else do you remember about life in the family?

JM: We were good. It was a typical family. My dad was capable of doing many, many things. He built the wall around our house. He built the patio in the back. My brother was his... In those days, the '50s, the son did the things with the dad. He would take my brother and teach him how to play tennis and my sister and I would practice cheers. So I missed out on a good opportunity to become a really good tennis player because we were little girls. We weren't supposed to get really good. He was just a very talented person and enjoyed life. He contributed a lot. And so did my mother, just in a very quiet, different way.

TM: Yeah. Nice.

JM: We had a dog. A cocker spaniel. A little, fat dog that we put bows on her all the time. Big old fat bows. She was just this cute little fat dog.

TM: What was her name?

JM: Suzy. We really were the all-American perfect family. I think that I had such a good background up to the age of eleven that I was able to endure or survive their death. Children are often more...they're tougher, or not tougher, they can bounce back better than an older person, an adult who feels those kinds of tragedies. We felt it, of course. But it wasn't until many years later that I ever really felt any kind of...I mean, I felt it. But when I started having my children and there were no grandparents, that's when you start going "Ah, geez, I really missed out on a lot." So, that was the way it was.

TM: How did you hear about the tragedy?

JM: My sister and I were staying with my aunt who lived in LA.

TM: Because your folks were going to be traveling.

JM: Right. So they left us. They were almost going to take us but they decided they would leave us because it was a business trip. So we were there. I had awoken that morning with the flu. I didn't feel very good the morning that they left.

TM: This was your father's sister?

JM: Correct.

TM: Thank you. What was her name?

JM: Nola Lamon.

TM: Okay, so you're with your aunt. What was she like?

JM: Oh, she was good, but, you know. They were close. My dad always kept contact with his brothers and sisters. It was important to him to have family connections and stay close to his brothers and sisters.

TM: Did he call or write? How did he stay connected with them? Did he visit?

JM: He visited. I remember years we would do the car trip from Oklahoma out to California before we moved, to go visit. Driving through Arizona and all this area we would stop. My dad was the kind of person that we would be driving along and he would see a little Indian hogan and say "We've got to go down there and talk to them." So we would drive down and make the guy come out and we're going "Oh, dad..." And we'd have these great conversations. We met all kinds of wonderful people because my dad was unafraid to approach just about anybody. He wanted us to have that experience. So we didn't just drive through. We saw what was there to see, we went to all the things. We went to the Petrified Forest, the stalactite...what's the cave...not the Cave of the Winds, that's Colorado Springs...

TM: Carlsbad Cavern?

JM: Yes, thank you. We always stopped at all the attractions.

TM: And this would have been '52, '53, '54-ish?

JM: Right.

TM: And no interstate highway then?

JM: No, I guess it was 66.

TM: And no air conditioning then?

JM: No! All the windows open and ice bags and carrots on ice. They hung the bags on the car in the front and in the back so we had that. We would get up very early in the morning, like five, and drive until two or three and then stop so we could all get out and swim in the swimming pools. He wanted to wear us out, a car full of kids. Swim for an hour or maybe two. My parents didn't have as much of a social life separate from their family. He had his business life. They didn't go out a lot with friends. They were working or they were with us. It really was very dedicated to family. He played tennis and they had friends. They went out occasionally, but it wasn't like many people now where it's once a week or go to this party or whatever. I never remember them doing that. Maybe my memory's a little slanted but I do not remember that they did that much.

TM: So, leaving you, leaving the kids and going on a business trip, the two of them, sounds like it was a big deal.

JM: It was a big deal. Yeah, my brother was with his cousins in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. So we weren't together when we found out. And I believe my brother was far more affected and far more damaged by what happened with our parents dying.

TM: You were eleven, how old was he?

JM: He was thirteen. You know that age.

TM: Yeah.

JM: I can't speak for him and he would deny that. I just saw him having a harder time with it. I don't think he would want me to talk about it, so I won't go into it much more. But it was hard for him. He was very close to our dad. As well as it was for us. All of us had our own little issues. But I think it was hardest for him at 13. That's a bad age to have your dad die, and your mom. But he was so close to our dad.

TM: So how did you hear about the tragedy?

JM: My sister and I were just sitting around the house. Like I said, I didn't feel well the morning that they left. We were playing in the living room. I remember they had a chair that had fringe hanging down off it, you know the old '50s chairs? I was braiding them. We had the TV on. The news came on and it was announced. I thought "That sounds like my parents' plane." But at eleven years old, I thought "No, that can't be, but...maybe it is." I just kind of thought about it. I didn't say anything to my sister, I don't think I did at the time. Then my aunt came rushing in. She had been at the grocery store, left all of her groceries and came right back. We knew, right away, because she was in such a state.

There were several aunts and all the relatives converged on this home of my aunt. It was quite the deal. I think the thing that was hardest for us, the whole family came to Ventura for the funeral. There was arguments about who was going to take the kids. Was it going to be the one uncle who wanted my brother but not us or the one aunt that wanted us and not my brother. Then finally, the grandfather said "You're not going to separate these kids," and so did my brother. My brother was old enough and smart enough to say "We're going to stay together." So the other aunt, who also wanted us, took us, all three, and raised us. Which was great. They lived in Oklahoma City and gave up their jobs. Her husband was the superintendent of all the, at the time they called them all the colored schools, of Oklahoma City. He was a white man. That was typical. My aunt taught school. They had one son at home and a daughter in college at the time. They were willing to sell their home, change their careers, and move to Ventura and move to our home and live with us with their son Gary who was just about my brother's age. They were about a year apart. So they were good buddies, they got along well. But I can't imagine going from one child to four, two of whom are teenagers, and keeping your sanity. I think she did.

TM: Did you ever talk to them about that?

JM: Not really, no, I didn't. It was a good relationship, but not a perfect one. I think she was doing what she thought she had to do. We were not abused or anything, but it wasn't perfect. We were taken care of and taught things that we needed to know. But when it was time to go it was time to go. It was "I've raised you, I'm done with my obligation." And then the connection didn't stay through the years. It was partly my fault. I don't think I brought that together the way I should have as I got older, just because I kind of knew. So that connection didn't stay tight. They stayed in California. There wasn't terrible animosity, but it wasn't real close.

TM: When did you leave home?

JM: To go to college at nineteen.

TM: And your older brother?

JM: He left at eighteen and my younger sister about the same. We all left as soon as we went to college. Went back occasionally to visit, but it wasn't a big thing. I think she visited me once in Colorado. It's okay. Just the way it was for her. She did the best she could.

TM: It was the way it was for all of you.

JM: It was, yeah.

TM: Were you able to make a stronger bond with your older brother and your younger sister?

JM: My sister and I were very close until we hit junior high. She decided she had to be really popular and everything was so important, you fight your girls. We were always close but we weren't the same companions that we were up until that point. And then she kind of went her way. We were in the same schools but I was different than she. If I had to be home at midnight or I was going to get grounded, I was home at midnight. She'd come in at two minutes after midnight and get grounded for the week and next weekend. So we were different people. My brother was gone. He made his way through his life with the aunt and uncle and the minute he could leave he was gone. He got married young and decided he was going to go to law school. Didn't like it, worked for an insurance company, built up his own insurance company, retired at fifty-five. He has been very successful.

TM: But in a way, that reminds me of your father.

JM: He was good. He was a successful man. He retired at fifty-five. They lived in Santa Rosa, that's where his business was. They moved to Sea Ranch. You know where that is? Northern California, along the coast. Beautiful, I mean beautiful. Lived there for twenty years or so. Now they're back in Santa Rosa. And now, in our old age, we are very close because we realize the importance of that relationship. So we are close. But I had five children, he had two. I was really busy. There wasn't a moment when there wasn't noise in the background, so I hardly ever called. By the time the kids went to bed, I fell into bed. So it was a lot my fault that I didn't stay in touch the way I should have. But it was okay, because we're really close now.

TM: That's normal American life. It's be hard to tie that back to this event because with five children, you're trying to deal with your life.

JM: Right. We lived in the mountains of Colorado in Crested Butte, which wasn't a booming ski town at the point when we moved there. We were counting on the big boom. It was going to happen but it took a lot of years for it to really happen. It has happened now. It took a lot of work to maintain a family and a career. We had different ones. We had a commercial laundry. My husband's in real estate. We had a motorcycle shop. I taught school, stopped and had some more kids. Then taught school some more. So we were very busy people living in a beautiful place and raising our kids in a wonderful place.

TM: And states away from your brother.

JM: Yes, he was in California.

TM: What about your sister?

JM: She married a guy from Golden, Colorado. They had two children. His dad owned lots of land in Golden, Colorado. As a result of my brother-in-law's work and his father's work, they made a lot of money. So they've lived all over the world. They've lived on boats and South Africa and just everywhere. I've joined them in a few places and it's been a wonderful treat to do that. My sister and I enjoy each other a lot when we share things together like sports and having a glass of wine at the end of the day. But in a lot of ways we're very different as well. I guess that's a typical family. She's got two sons. One is a doctor in Glenwood and the other is, I don't know what you'd say he is, I think he trades stock and he travels. So they're world travelers. Big contrast with all of us, you know? Dan and I have never left Gunnison and Crested Butte since the '60s. Sometimes you think "Oh, geez, why didn't we go somewhere and do something?" But it was just always the right place to be, especially for our kids. They did everything. They ski race, they were swimmers. There was some child in some sport twelve months out of the year. We traveled the entire state of Colorado with those kids just to follow their passions. They played hockey, ice hockey, they did everything. And they're all very good people.

TM: How did you meet your husband?

JM: At Western. He grew up on a ranch in northern Colorado. His dad had a ranch that his grandfather had started up in Kremmling, Colorado, by Steamboat. It's still in the family.

TM: So then let's step back between, you're growing up with your aunt and it's really nice that somebody was smart enough to say, "Let's keep these kids in their house."

JM: Yes, and to take three kids when you have one and all of a sudden you have four.

TM: Right.

JM: She wasn't perfect, but I can see the circumstances why.

TM: Were there any other aunts or uncles that came to visit every month or so?

JM: No, no, no. We would go back to Oklahoma a little bit for vacations. We didn't have very much contact with my mother's family, just because my aunt wasn't close to them. So that kind of got dropped off. I did see my cousins. Once we went to New Orleans. I visited with them a couple of times. Other than that, that was it.

TM: Were you able to rebuild that later in life?

JM: No, I was a little reluctant to. Would you want to be David Duke's...you know? Although I'm sorry that I didn't. He did come to Crested Butte. I was embarrassed that he was because people went "Oh, guess who's in town". That was in the '70s when he was well-known. But now I wish I had, because I

think he would have been interesting. I think there would have been a lot to talk about. I could still do that, I just need to reach out.

TM: Are there other family past him?

JM: He had a sister, and...no. My mother came from three girls. The oldest was seventeen years older than she and her sister were. So there was this big span. No, we didn't have much contact. We didn't have any contact. My grandparents had died when I was real young. So it was the Hatcher side that I... I have beautiful, fond memories of when my parents were alive. My uncles were all attorneys and they had farms right around Paul's Valley and Payola. We would always go out to the farms on the weekends. Huge fried chicken and deviled eggs and potato salad and dominoes and beer and the farm and running around. Always outside. It was really quite idyllic, it was really nice. My uncles were great storytellers.

TM: How did you get to Western, then?

JM: Well, I wasn't a very serious student. I stayed in Ventura for the first year and didn't do anything. I just goofed off, I had a good time. Then I went to Hawaii to go to summer school. Because I was such a serious student, I took speech and hula. So I had a really good time in Hawaii! My aunt got my grades and said "You're wasting your time, this is stupid. You can go to this, this, this, this school. You pick one, that's where you're going to go" and I went "Oh, okay." So I just picked Western because I thought I could learn to ski. My cousin was a professor there, at Western, so she had connections at these schools that she had applied to. I came home from Hawaii and packed my bags and went to Western. I got there and in two weeks I thought, "I'm not leaving this place, it's beautiful." I got on the plane in LA, got off the plane in Gunnison and it smelled good. It smelled like it smelled today driving over here. I loved it immediately. I went from the days of girls wearing skirts and pantyhose and little stacked heels to Levi's and penny loafers. I went "Oh! This is where I'm--" you know. It was a perfect fit. I got serious about getting through college. And I did. And met Dan. He was a football player at Western State—it's Western State University now—but...that's in Gunnison, Colorado. It's a beautiful place. A small school. I think there were probably 3,000 kids there at the time. So we are still really good friends with many people that we went to school with. We've kept that forty-year relationship. It's worth a lot.

TM: What did you graduate in?

JM: Oh, I'm a teacher. I have a psychology degree, too, but teaching was my main emphasis. I didn't start until I had been married and had two kids. I started when my youngest was seven months old in Crested Butte. There were forty kids the year I started in the whole school, fifteen of whom were kindergarten students. Before that they'd only had two a year in kindergarten so they'd just put them in the first grade class in the morning and then send them home. That year, they went "I guess we need a kindergarten teacher." So I got that job. I did that half-time and then I went into second. I've taught every elementary grade, but I mostly taught first grade. It was a perfect situation. Thirteen kids, fourteen kids in a class, no principal on-site, you got to do what you wanted. We did really well, those kids got a great education. Skied once a week with the whole school. Once a month we had a family potluck and learned folk dancing and danced. That was the social event of the month. Now it's way different but that's what we did. It was wonderful.

TM: So after the accident, there was subsequent litigation. Do you remember anything about that?

JM: Yes. Melvin Belli was our attorney. He was the attorney for Jack Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald in Kennedy's situation. He was a high-powered attorney. We were touted as the "Poor Little Orphans." They decided they'd get a lot of money. They filed suit against the airlines. Most of it, I think, went to Melvin Belli. Which was really stupid. We got a little bit of money out of it, but not enough to make a huge difference in our lives. We were in the paper and we were in Time magazine at one point. I remember the photographer saying "Don't smile." We had to stand there and look all sad. So I don't even think... They didn't put us on the stand. I think they did my brother. My sister and I were told to go out in the hall. They didn't want us to hear. We proceeded to play a game and laugh and be very silly out in the hallway and they could hear us. So I don't think we helped any. That was kind of traumatic. I didn't like that. It didn't last a really long time. I think it went on for maybe six months or something and then it was done and said.

TM: It was a groundbreaking piece of law that happened there. It was the first time that, due to loss of life, the case was was there a responsibility from the companies to the individuals who lost their lives.

JM: Right. The families, correct.

TM: It was groundbreaking.

JM: It was. But I don't think they ended up having to pay. They got around it. They were victims of the circumstance as much as we were. It just ended up the way it ended up. We had enough money out of their insurance and different things to get us through college and give us a little help to get started when we got married. That was basically it. It took care of us. We had enough money. My aunt had enough money to support us as she raised us.

TM: They were both working as well.

JM: Right. My uncle who raised us was principal at Oxnard High School. My aunt was a teacher. So they did well. It was a good move, I think, for them as well. I think they were happy after they had done it. So it was good.

TM: It was fortunate how that works.

JM: You're trying to think of new questions, aren't you?

TM: Yeah!

JM: There's probably more I'm missing here. It was very normal and not normal in many ways. I remember the first day of sixth grade. The girl who was sitting next to me said, "Your parents were killed this summer, aren't you sad?" I said, "Yeah, I am. Leave me alone." I wasn't going to sit there and go, "Ohh." I just didn't do that. I remember teachers along the way here and there who became very fascinated by, "What happened and how was that?" Asking questions that I didn't want them to ask. I just didn't want to do that. Now if that happened to three kids, you'd have them in therapy or you'd

have things going on. We just bucked up and went on. I don't feel like it was hard, necessarily. What did I know? I just went on with my life. Of course you missed your parents and of course it was a tragedy, but I wasn't the kind of kid that moped around and acted weird about it. I just did my thing.

TM: Today we have a term for it, it's called grief counseling.

JM: Yes, it would have been good!

TM: It's post-traumatic, debriefing, de-stressing. There are ways to be able to process and acknowledge and deal with that.

JM: Right, and it would have been good for us. Especially...well, all three of us. We all had our individual needs at the time. I was the middle child, I was the easy, good kid.

TM: The peace bringer.

JM: Yeah, I was. I can't think of anything else to tell you. I was trying to think of something that might pertain to this.

TM: There's another question I've got for you. How is it that you're here today? You said that this is the first time you've...

JM: It is. The family didn't suggest that we come for the main, first ceremony. We had a funeral at our church in Ventura. The whole family came and that was our official way of saying goodbye to our parents. I think I heard talk about what they were going to do here at the Grand Canyon or in Flagstaff. But there was never any suggestion that we would go to it. I guess they thought we didn't need it. I didn't say, "Oh, I want to go, I want to go," and they didn't say, "Let's go." So we didn't. And then the next time was the fifty-year time. I don't know if there were things before that. Were there? I don't have any idea. So, the fifty-year deal. I remember an old high school friend called me up and said, "How does this make you feel? We're reading all this stuff, do you want to go?" And I said, "Well, no." For me, it's very personal. I've had my grieving. I honor my parents. I do what I think is the right thing to do. This didn't make any difference as far as my own personal thing. Now after being here today, I think it's nice for people to visit and to connect because of what happened and to see the artifacts. To hear the details that I knew, kind of, but I didn't really know some of the stuff. So I really am glad I saw that. I'm amazed that, what's his name that wrote the book...

TM: Ted? Tim? I don't...

JM: Yeah, anyhow, that he wrote. There's a lot. I'm thinking, "I don't know if I can read all the way through this book." But I'll read it and my husband, I know, will too. And to see the pictures. I didn't know that there were that many different articles in Life magazines. I have some in a scrapbook, but not the collection that I saw today. I didn't think to bring pictures. They're important to me but they're not going to be important to anybody else. That's my attitude. I'm a very private person. It wouldn't have bothered me to take pictures and show people but I thought, "Nobody really cares about that stuff." So I just didn't do that. The wreath was important. I made that little wreath and my friend helped me. I'm

not very artistic, let me tell you. So she said, "Okay, here's the glue gun, you start gluing on all these little sticks." She'd say "Okay, put this here, put that there," I had a lot of help. I did not do that totally. I shouldn't tell you that, I should take all the credit. What am I doing?

TM: I certainly want to mention that the museum collection here would be very interested in the material you have.

JM: Yeah, I do have a scrapbook. I could bring it.

TM: Second only to your family.

JM: You know, I wanted to put all the grandkids on there. I'm going to have thirteen grandchildren by September. I have a big family, they're spread all over the world.

TM: So, the way it works is, if family is interested in the material, they are the best curators. You can send the material, always return receipt requested, to the museum collection, who will digitize it with photographs, and then send it back. So now there are two collections, in two locations.

JM: Yeah, that would be good!

TM: So if one falters for any reason, there's another one to move forward.

JM: Well, only one of our children is living in Crested Butte. We have four boys and one girl. We had two boys and then nine years, almost ten years later, we had another boy. And then twenty-two months later we had twins. That was kind of like, "I'm pregnant? I'm going to have what?" And one girl, she was the last of five. She lives in Crested Butte with her three children. She's very caring. She's the kind of daughter that calls you every day, "What are you doing? Do you want to go to breakfast?" She's busy. She's selling real estate and has three kids. But, she'd be the one that would dig through the stuff. If I said we need to do this, she would get it out. Thank heavens for girls. Boys are not very good at that stuff. And the boys are far away, all of them. Alaska and Pennsylvania and Connecticut and Africa.

TM: Wow, that's neat.

JM: And my last grandchild—not last—my thirteenth is going to be born in Africa, in September. So I'm not going to get to see him until...maybe we'll go in January or February. We're trying to plan a trip. It's an arduous trip.

TM: Oh yeah.

JM: Have you been? Where did you go?

TM: We went to Kenya and Tanzania.

JM: Patrick, our third son, was in Tanzania for eight years.

TM: What's he doing there?

JM: He started with the Peace Corps and then he became employed by the Peace Corps. He's still employed by the Peace Corps. But he's going to soon come to the end of that and come back and find a new career. I don't think he knows what he wants to do when he grows up yet.

TM: He'll figure that out. But this is wonderful because there is interest in that scrapbook that you have, outside of family.

JM: I'll get it, yeah.

TM: And I know Ray Cook today was talking about...

JM: Even pictures of us. I think there's one, I don't know if I still have it, from Time magazine. I don't know where it is.

TM: If you let others be in charge of that, that would be the best.

JM: I'll have to find it.

TM: Send as much as you're willing to.

JM: I will, sure.

TM: Trying to piece the history together is always difficult, but the more clues you get, the better off you are. So that would be very helpful if you'd be willing to do that.

JM: Oh, absolutely. It may take me a while. This is an ongoing process, isn't it?

TM: Yes.

JM: It's going to take a few years.

TM: Absolutely.

JM: Of course, if you give me a long time. Then it will take a long time. You've got to give me—

TM: A deadline! I wanted this stuff last week!

JM: All right, so I've got to go home and do it right now!

TM: The sooner you do it, the better. Because you're thinking about it. You've got a little motive and interest to do it.

JM: It's fresh in my mind.

TM: Fifty years from now...

JM: I'm gone and dead.

TM: You and the rest of us. And your grandson that was born in Africa finds this tape. Finds the transcript.

JM: That will be really valuable.

TM: What do you want your grandchildren to know about your parents that we haven't talked about yet?

JM: Well, I think that my children and my grandchildren... The interest from my grandchildren hasn't really heightened too much. They're curious, they want to know, but...

TM: Of course not. They will be our age when they really get in gear.

JM: At thirteen they'll go, "Tell me again what happened to your parents," that kind of stuff. But my kids are interested. And especially my oldest son is very, they're all very interested. My youngest son. That means something to them. They look at the pictures but even they don't get as deep into the questions as much as...I would tell them a lot more but they don't ask as much. When we get together, there's a lot of people and we're very busy. They're all athletic and mountain bikers. So it's going from, "What are we doing today? We're going to go mountain biking," There's always kids and stuff. So there's not a lot of quiet "Let's visit," This will be a good thing for them to have, I think. I think they know everything that I've said on here, but maybe I've said something they never knew. Hopefully. So, it'll be good.

TM: I'll just ask this question again, is there anything else that you haven't covered?

JM: I'll think of something when I walk out the door.

TM: Always, of course.

JM: No. Other than raising my children. I think that's when I most miss my parents. That there wasn't that support, that guidance, questions about "Should we do this? What do you think?" or "Here, let us help you get involved with this." I think they would have had the financial means and a lot of things that would have been really nice, but just having those grandparents. The kids had the grandparents on the ranch. They were wonderful people and they spent hours and hours on the ranch. Helped put up the hay every year and it was a wonderful experience. But they didn't have the Wallace Mildred background. And they're curious. They want to know. The family kind of fell away so they don't know a lot about that side or anything about my relatives, their involvement. No, that's wrong. They're close to my sister and her children and they've seen my brother a couple of times but not real close to him because he's far.

TM: But your father's family...

JM: No, we had one family reunion in Gunnison when my thirty-six year old was just born. That was it. And I have a cousin who's a professor at Western State University and he lives in Gunnison. We visit when we see one another, but we're not real close. Just kind of fell away. I became a McElroy and that's what my life was. Because it was there, close, immediate, and it was good.

TM: How did you then cope with trying to be a parent without a parent to ask?

JM: As my daughter calls me about every detail of her life, I think boy, sweetheart, you need to...I just was on my own. Dan's mother was there. She was a good woman. We had our first baby in Kremmling because we were there helping them put up the hay. I was driving the mower. I was three weeks away from my due date but, you know, you're going along. So I had to go introduce myself to the little town doc and go "You know the McElroy's, don't you? Can I stay here?" "Sure, here's a bed." It was good. And she was there to help us through that. But they had their life. They were four hours away and they were busy. Then they started going to Arizona in the summer. The kids saw them—actually, I take it back. We were there a lot with our kids. That was our affordable vacation. We would go from Gunnison to Kremmling and be on the ranch. And the kids had a wonderful time playing with their relatives and cousins and all of that stuff. We had great meals and great fun as a family. It was a really nice, tight, loving family. That was all the way through. The last three didn't get it as much because Dan's parents started to get a little older and they weren't as active on the ranch. So they didn't get that.

TM: But by then you'd gone through raising two children for the first ten years and so you had some parenting skills. In Crested Butte, did you have close friends that helped you at all?

JM: We had friends. But, you know what, I did it by the seat of my pants. I had good natural instincts and we had a faith. We're very strong Catholics. Those two things and a really good husband. We worked together. We made some really stupid mistakes, but I had that background up until I was eleven. My aunt was good. She taught us some things. So I had people, caring adults in my life, who guided me and I had good natural instincts. I was meant to be a mom. I did a pretty good job, not perfect, but a pretty good job, because those kids are good kids. Very proud of them. I've got a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, and an attorney—no, I said that...and an African, what do you call him...a diplomat?

TM: Yeah, somebody who's committed to the service of others.

JM: Exactly.

TM: I mean, wow, that's pretty good, mom.

JM: And a real estate salesman. She's the greatest daughter in the world. All my kids are wonderful and they've got good children. We couldn't be more blessed. And it didn't happen...It was a lot of work. But when we married, we knew we wanted that family. I had that background of strong family and family should be center. So it was easy for me to go back and continue that and make my family the center. My satisfaction and my joy came from that, so it's good.

TM: Nice. You mentioned when we started this interview talking about, I don't know that we used this word, but we talked about children being malleable, or flexible, a little more moldable than older people might be.

JM: Yes, I did. I don't think we understand death as well when we're that young. We know they're gone. Our interests a year later or six months later are, "Who's going to play with me today? and Where are we going to go? and What are we going to do?" You become happy in the moment. So you have that... I'm trying to think of the word. For us, we were able to handle it, I think, far better than the adults we

saw that were affected by it. Right afterwards, we were still in LA I think, I remember doing really weird things like singing Silent Night or Jingle Bells or something all the time. I think it was my kind of soothing something that helped me. But we were surrounded, at the moment, with family. We felt secure and cared for and it was okay.

TM: As you mentioned, during the post-tragedy trial, you kids were out playing in the hall.

JM: I know. So I wasn't as affected by that whole thing I just thought, "Oh, we'll get some money, that'll be good." And it was a year later, I was about 12.

TM: Children have a resiliency.

JM: They do. Although you do see children who are very destroyed by divorce. I think that's harder. I do think it's harder. Because I see kids with families that are torn apart by desertion, or divorce, or really serious illnesses that go on for a long time. I think what we went through, although it wasn't easy, was easier than to watch your mother die of cancer or to watch mom and dad divorce. Those things are far more difficult than one day you have wonderful parents and the next day they're gone. They were wonderful parents and they didn't desert you. They didn't leave you. You didn't watch them linger with horrible sicknesses. Today, what's his name who wrote the book, talked about how it was such a tragedy. I know it was a tragedy. It was a horrible tragedy. But it also strengthened me. It made me able to deal with life a lot better. To be a mother without support from a mother or just to be able to be a good wife and stick to it. When things got bad, make it through and when things are good, know you're lucky and it's wonderful and do it.

TM: And what I'm learning, as I've been fortunate to do these interviews, is each one of the children that went through this event were at different parts in their life. One was thirteen, one was twelve, one was eight, one was two, one was five...

JM: And different personalities.

TM: And had much different family support or none afterwards, had much different...Did mom die, did dad die, did they both...

JM: The other victims of this?

TM: Yeah.

JM: Really. So some were really just destroyed and others just went on with their lives.

TM: I come into these interviews with much trepidation.

JM: For what you're going to hear?

TM: And you're a gold star.

JM: Oh, good!

TM: You're a survivor. I mean, everybody's a survivor, but...

JM: Of course, of course! I mean, I'm nobody special!

TM: It's been much, much more difficult for some of these folks here and for them to express that, it's wonderful, and I think this is grief counseling for them.

JM: I'm probably far more weird than I think I am. I mean, I'm not always as easy as...You know, I'm very strong-willed, I'm very...

TM: Which is a good thing. This is one thing that has come out, is, again, we had to figure it out for ourselves, we had to fix the car because dad wasn't there to help us.

JM: My husband grew up with that kind of ranch life. He and I together learned. We built our first home. I say we, he basically did it.

TM: He brought a skill set to you. But before he showed up you had your aunt and uncle. They had a skill set. It wasn't like you were left with just your mom or just your dad that was just tragically altered as well.

JM: That's another one. I think it would be harder. You've got a single mom or a single dad and they're trying to continue and raise a family. They would be suffering and you're watching that suffering. We would pick up on it and I think you would be affected by it. I don't want somebody being like, "Oh, that was so bad." It was bad, yes, it was bad. But it was okay. I did really well. So it's okay.

TM: It could have been much worse.

JM: Yeah. My husband's really outdoorsy. I've learned skills that I'm very proud of. I'm a really good skier. I'm a really good biker. I stay in shape. I know how to cook good meals. I know how to raise a family. I know how to do things. Because I've learned. I don't know that many seventy-one year olds who would travel on their own or do the things that I do. It doesn't scare me. Its okay, because you'll find a way. I always do find a way. And I get there. I want the adventure. I love it. So, it's okay.

TM: Do you think you got some of that from your parents?

JM: I'm sure I did. These are graces that God's given me. I didn't just go out and invent them and become this person on my own. I was given people in my life that helped me get to where I am. And I did it. More than "I did it," I had help. I got there. So, it's good. I keep saying its good, but it is good.

TM: You were definitely very fortunate to have family step in in the way they did. Even though it wasn't necessarily the best.

JM: But they were there.

TM: But they did, they were there.

JM: It was a big family, too.

TM: Yeah. And then when you met your husband with his family, to come in and filled that...

JM: They filled that void and they were very loving, very good.

TM: Not only filled it, but took off, if you will.

JM: Oh yeah. They were my parents. Of course they loved Danny, that's my husband, and they loved their grandchildren. I was just the woman that took care of all of those people. They loved me, too, but not in the same way. But they were really good to me. They were very, very good. It was a good background.

TM: What did I forget to ask you?

JM: I have thirteen grandchildren.

TM: You said that already!

JM: I know! That's such an amazing thing. I'm going to have more! The other one's trying.

TM: You'll have great-grandkids soon!

JM: Gosh. I hope not, he's only twenty. He's the one that's your size. You're about 6'6", right?

TM: So he's ready, I mean...

JM: He's tall enough! He's only twenty! I've had a lot of wonderful opportunities in my life. I didn't take advantage of some of them. I'm one that looks back on, "I should have done that, I should have done it this way," because I am a perfectionist. But I quit it. Just let it go, let it be, go do what you do, and do it the way you know how to do it. You've got enough.

TM: I do.

JM: How long have I been talking? An hour and three minutes?

TM: Only.

JM: Oh my gosh.

TM: Last question, and again, I've asked you this already...

JM: Am I not answering it fully enough?

TM: No. Is there anything else? We're talking to the future here.

JM: Yeah, let me think. I just hope my family stays close and that they stay close to their faith. That's it. That's it. I know, it's good. Brings tears to my eyes. Okay, give me the Kleenex. I'm done, I have to blow my nose. [time out] You should not have put me in this chair.

TM: Why?

JM: In the background, you're going to hear this—you hear?

TM: That's good, we'll know that you're squeaking in your chair.

JM: I know, because I'm moving the whole time. Talking about my family brings tears to my eyes, it does. Okay, I'm better.

TM: Because that's the thing that happened here was family was hurt. And that might be why it means so much to you.

JM: It does, absolutely. I think taking things like that away, that's why it became so important to me. Okay.

TM: Janice, thank you so very, very much for letting us visit today.

JM: You're good at this, you are.

TM: You're very kind. And with that we'll turn the machine off.