

**Oral History Interview of
Lola Mask**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
June 13, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*American Agriculture Movement Interviews***

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Interview Series Background:

The American Agriculture Movement grew out of the populist agrarian protests of the late 1970s. Officially chartered in August of 1977, it remains active. Materials in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library reflect principally its formation, the tractorcade protests of 1977-1979, and the farm and rural suicide hotline prevention efforts of the 1980s. Materials include oral history interviews, photographs, video and film, and miscellaneous papers.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Lola Mask, native of Richland Springs, Texas. Lola discusses her upbringing on a farm, working in agriculture, and her involvement in the American Agriculture Movement. Lola recounts her multiple journeys to Washington, D.C., and her participation in the 1979 Tractorcade. She also discusses her husband's alcohol still, and their time spent producing ethanol.

Length of Interview: 01:10:15

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Keywords

Agriculture Movement, Richland Springs, 1979 Tractorcade, alcohol still

David Marshall (DM):

It's June 13, 2013, and this is David Marshall interviewing Lola Mask, and you're from Richland Springs. Did you say you were raised out there?

Lola Mask (LM):

Yes, I was born about seven miles north of Richland Springs on a four hundred acre—back then they called it a ranch. Today we wouldn't call it a ranch. But we were diversified. We had all kinds of fruit trees, we had a creek going through the pecan bottom, and then we had gardens and corn patches and watermelon patches. Every year we had something grow up. I rode the school bus to town.

DM:

Was it pretty much a produce farm then?

LM:

Yes, basically for our own use, and then we gave away and then we sold some.

DM:

Okay, so you weren't growing a big cash crop or anything like that?

LM:

No.

DM:

Did you have livestock?

LM:

Yes, we had some cattle and we had horses. I rode horseback. We didn't own a car at first. And then when we got a car, my dad—it was some kind of Model T or something—he was going to drive in the garage and he went right through the garage! He hit the gas instead of the break. (laughter) I never will forget that. But anyway.

DM:

Well that sounds like an interesting kind of farm to grow up on.

LM:

Yes, and I rode horses to church sometimes. Sometimes we went in a wagon. Sometimes we walked for three miles.

DM:

Okay, three miles.

LM:

And when I started to school, I walked three miles for about two years. But I walked with some other children, and one time we came home and this older girl—of course, me being a young girl—she told me words that I had never heard before. So I went home and I said some of those words and my mom or dad said, “Where did you hear that?” (laughter) I didn’t know the difference, you know. So that’s what happens. And then I started riding with a school teacher—came down—I had to walk down about a quarter of a mile to meet her and I got on and rode with her to school. The next—oh, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of putting on the twelfth grade? They added the twelfth grade one time while I was in school and you got to skip a grade if your grades were good enough. So I was going to a little country school and made some friends in a little place called Bowser.

DM:

Now tell me what that was again?

LM:

Bowser.

DM:

Bowser.

LM:

A little old town that’s not there anymore.

DM:

How do you spell that?

LM:

B-o-w-s-e-r.

DM:

Okay.

LM:

And anyway I skipped a grade. I guess it was fifth grade. And then they moved us to Richland Springs and I started riding the school bus.

DM:

Now were they consolidating schools in the county?

LM:

Yes, yes.

DM:

They were getting them all into Richland Springs?

LM:

Right. That's what happened.

DM:

How many were there in that county at one time that you know of?

LM:

I couldn't tell you how many there were. There were probably three or four little schools that went into Richland that I know of.

DM:

Now what year did you graduate? You went to elementary, junior high, high school—is that what they called it at the time?

LM:

Well when I went—I guess from the sixth grade to the seventh grade—in the seventh grade I guess is when I went to Richland I guess. And then we had junior high and high school in the same place. It wasn't that big.

DM:

What year did you graduate?

LM:

Forty-eight.

DM:

Forty-eight. What year were you born? What's your birthdate by the way?

LM:

June 29, 1930.

DM:

You have a birthday coming up?

LM:

Yeah I do. I'll be eighty-three.

DM:

Okay. All right, and then when you graduated from high school, what did you do then?

LM:

Well I worked in a little café during the summer, and then I went to college, and then I moved back home. I decided that I'd go to a different college and I met the man that I married. So that ended my—and I married him and had three children.

DM:

What was his name?

LM:

Malcom Mask.

DM:

Okay, Malcolm Mask. Was he from that area?

LM:

Oh yeah. He was really from the next county—from McCullough County—but he was living with a couple. He was driving a bulldozer. He had just come out of the Navy. He had served in WWII. He was working.

DM:

And then you said during the Korean War he was working down there near Houston?

LM:

Yeah, near Houston.

DM:

Several years after WWII.

LM:

I don't remember the exact time but I know we were down there awhile. And I had a son by then. My son is sixty-something now. He'll be sixty-three this birthday I guess.

DM:

After Houston did you come back to the Richland Springs area?

LM:

Yes.

DM:

Then what did you do in that area?

LM:

We did agriculture. Let me see—we worked and went—we moved to Mississippi. I don't remember which year we moved to Mississippi. My oldest daughter was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi. We lived four years—I don't know what we did first. We still were in Houston area and cleaning up crops for rice farmers, and then found out about going to Mississippi. And so then we went to Mississippi to clean up a forest that had a fire go through it, so we cleaned up that land. My husband was driving a bulldozer and they moved—I think it was about three families of us. His cousin was already living down there and two families of us went and got us a place to live. Well they moved me out and had me a house way out in the country. Colored folks everywhere. And I came from a little town where there wasn't a colored person there. I have nothing against them but back then the thought of moving me out there by myself—I couldn't hardly take it. So I went into the next little town and found me a house.

DM:

Well that would be a different kind of country in a lot of ways. A lot of rainfall out that way too, compared to Richland Springs.

LM:

It was quite different but it was interesting. And he drove that bulldozer till they cleaned that land up, then he opened up a little welding shop there for a while. And our oldest daughter was born in Vicksburg and then we moved back to Texas. We were there about four years in Mississippi. And the land—the other guy that had gone down there with us got part of the land. Anyway, we ended up getting some of that land real cheap. I think like twelve dollars an acre or something. Anyway, we ended up with half a section of land and he got quite a bit. But anyway, we kept that land and I just sold it this past year.

DM:

Oh okay. You had it a long time then.

LM:

And got half a million dollars.

DM:

Oh that's great. A good investment back then.

LM:

Well we had it in a trust. After my husband died in '98, it was in a trust among the kids so it was divided between them. So it helped them out to pay off their farms. But anyway, from Mississippi, we moved back to Texas then and rented a house and we started thinking about building us a house, so we bought a lot and built us a brick home and I still live in it.

DM:

What kind of agriculture were you involved in back at Richland Springs?

LM:

Cattle. We raised peanuts for a number of years until we lost the peanut program and came to West Texas. If you know agriculture—I don't remember what year it was—but that was a good business. It was a good program that they had. And then we raised peanuts. Of course we had hay for our cattle. My husband took his brother in with him and they bought two bulldozers and started a construction business. So at one time we had five or six employees and he kept that going. And gradually they would find some land and we would buy some new land—the partners would. Then in later years the two brothers split up—you know, sometimes they can't get along—divided the land, divided everything, and then we ended up with the land which is still there. I still have cattle. I couldn't do it except for having the son that looks after things for me.

DM:

How did you get involved in the American Agriculture Movement? Was it you or your husband or both of you at the same time?

LM:

My husband heard about it. Of course we read the newspapers.

DM:

Is that where he found out about it? In the newspaper?

LM:

I kind of believe he was reading something in the paper. I don't remember the exact time. Basically, I know he was real interested. When he first heard about it, oh boy he was ready to

help. And he called some people I think—I don't remember—didn't pay a whole lot of attention right at first. I guess we heard about it in—was it '77?

DM:

Um-hm.

LM:

Okay. Then I know in '78 he went to [break in tape 19:12]

DM:

He did? Okay.

LM:

Yes. And I was teaching. I was just a substitute teacher for one of the homemaking teachers that was going to be gone two or three weeks or something. Anyway, he flew to Washington. My son-in-law and my son and another friend that was interested in the same way as he was, they flew to Washington and I don't remember what time of year it was. I could probably find out but I don't know. And he flew to Washington. Well he came back and he had met a bunch of farmers up there and he was telling me all about it. And I said, "Well okay. If you go again, I'm going!" I said, "I'm going!" And as it turned out, he went to McAllen—I don't remember when they went and did that. He went to all of those different things. He went to Austin. They'd meet down there.

DM:

He was at the McAllen Bridge?

LM:

He was. He did a bunch of stuff that I didn't go. You know, I had kids in school.

DM:

Right. Do you remember any details of those trips?

LM:

No, I just don't remember a lot about that part.

DM:

But you got involved?

LM:

Yes. I was thinking of going on and finishing college because I had been substitute teaching, and some of the girls were riding back and forth to college over at Howard Payne. And he said, "We heard about the Tractorcade." I said, "Oh." He said, "I think I'm going." I said, "Well I am too." So we started to prepare and getting ready for the Tractorcade until—I guess it was in January.

DM:

Um-hm, of '79.

LM:

We had some friends, some of her in-laws. I guess they owned that ranch over there that y'all live on now. Oh, Murchison, wasn't it, that had part of the Dallas Cowboys? Anyway, they were always selling tickets and having them come. Well we went to a Dallas Cowboys playoff ballgame and boy, when we started to come home there was ice. We came home and had to get out and get the ice off the wheels on it. But that was right before we took off on this Tractorcade.

DM:

Well was it icy on the Tractorcade?

LM:

Oh no—well later on.

DM:

Not till you got close? (laughs)

LM:

Not when we left it wasn't. The only bad weather I think was—I can't remember—it was right after they had the snowstorm. But that's further on down the—

DM:

Um-hm. Well how many people went from that area?

LM:

Nobody went on the Tractorcade. But my son and his wife flew up there and met us before the tractors came in. And then—I'll back up a little bit. Some people gave money to help us go. Of course the reason we were able to leave home is because we had my son and son-in-law and then we had a Spanish family that worked for us. You know, we had employees that could take care of things and were more able to do it. And really we were financially more able right then than I've been other times.

DM:

How long was that that you were gone?

LM:

It was seven weeks.

DM:

Did you expect it to take that long when you left?

LM:

Well not quite that long probably. But what we did—my husband was a member of the Conservation Contractors of Texas. And every year our vacation was going to a different city to the convention. Well, they were having the national convention in Nashville that year, and we decided we'd just leave Washington after we got up there and go to Nashville to that convention and then go back to Washington, and we did. But anyway, we left on the Tractorcade—we met—the group left from the [Interstate] 20—went down Highway 20—left from Lubbock I guess, and then went to Abilene. And we met them in Abilene.

DM:

Did you trailer your tractor up there?

LM:

We had a Ford pickup pulling a flatbed trailer with a brand new blue Ford tractor. It belonged to my son. He had just bought him a new tractor, so Malcom talked him into letting him take his tractor. (laughs) He was a farmer too and still is. Anyway, we had borrowed a friend's little trailer house to pull behind [and] had it behind the tractor. So when we got to Abilene, some of them went up there with us—I can't remember. Anyway, we took the tractor off the trailer and put the pickup on the trailer and hooked the tractor up to pull the trailer and had the pickup on the trailer and started off down the road from Abilene when they took off.

DM:

You took the pickup too then?

LM:

Oh yeah, but it was on the—

DM:

On the trailer, and then the travel trailer was back there too somewhere?

LM:

It was hooked on to the trailer. (laughs) We were set up. I've got pictures of it. I can give you a whole—I need to donate some stuff I guess.

DM:

We can get some information to you on how to do that.

LM:

I probably need to do that. I've got a lot of pictures I'll tell you about later on. But anyway, we took off on that and I was riding in the tractor with my husband. And I think the first stop was in Weatherford, Texas. And some people from my town came there and met up with us and rode on to Tarrant County Junior College. I think [that] was the next stop. But anyway, we went through the different towns and they had the scheduled stops already set up for us on down the road. The way we talked to each other was CB radio. But I rode in the pickup with two different families. I rode four whole days on the tractor. I didn't want to go through Dallas on the tractor.

DM:

I heard that was pretty congested.

LM:

Well the worst place was Birmingham. The police were really good—or highway patrol or whatever it was. But the worst place was Birmingham. The police didn't help a whole lot. They just weren't as good. We kind of got mixed up I think.

DM:

When you got to Abilene, how many tractors did you meet there that had come down from Lubbock and joined from other places?

LM:

I can't tell you. I don't remember. I'm sure there was a whole bunch. I would say ten or twelve or more, but I'm not sure. Somebody else may know. The Lubbock group might know that.

DM:

Do you remember that first day heading out from Abilene and just kind of the slow pace of taking tractors down the interstate, and where you stayed that first night? Do you remember that?

LM:

We stayed in our little trailer house that first night.

DM:

On the side of the road?

LM:

Yeah. Weatherford had a—you know, they used to have more truck stops than they do now I think, along the interstates. On the interstate there was enough room for all of us to get by there. We had the little trailer house and we cooked in it some, but going to Washington, if we were close enough to a motel, a lot of us would go stay in a motel.

DM:

Would someone stay out there and watch the tractors?

LM:

Oh part of them stayed out there I'm sure. I don't remember for sure about that.

DM:

How about bystanders? Were there people who would come out and see this?

LM:

Oh yes. I left my purse in the car. I've got pictures in my purse of the people along the bridges, people looking at us. And interviews—I've never been interviewed so much in my life. These different towns that we'd go through—there'd be somebody that came out there and interviewed you. But there were people everywhere. But I believe the first weekend, we were on the road I think eighteen days before—we weren't driving that many days. The first weekend, I believe, was Monroe, Louisiana, and they had a fish fry. We got rolled in there on Friday evening and parked at their fairgrounds or something. And they were having a fish fry for us on Saturday night. Well, having lived in Mississippi, my husband's cousin still lived over there and we took that pickup off and away we went to Vicksburg and up to Cary, Mississippi where we had lived. And I got to wash my hair and do everything Saturday, and then they came with us back to Monroe to the fish fry. And then we went back home with them, and then we came back Sunday. They had a son that was a teenager. I think he was probably fifteen or sixteen. I don't know. Anyway, he rode in the tractor. The next stop for us was going to be Jackson, Mississippi. And I rode with somebody else and the boy rode with my husband. I think he had quite a time. (laughs) That kid liked to wart him to death.

Anyway, we got to Jackson and they had a big supper for us there. Some guys stayed on all night—I don't know if it was the Capitol building or something. They took some of the guys that didn't have a place to stay. But we of course had our little trailer house and I remember the cousin had made me a pot of soup. I never will forget how good that was because we ate soup for a day or two. And then they came over to Jackson, put their sign up and took part in it.

DM:

But the local people were good about coming out and feeding you and talking to you?

LM:

Oh wonderful, wonderful. We were fed everywhere all the way down. And they were all interested and there were people everywhere. I mean everywhere. And we left Jackson and went on through Birmingham—here's those pictures.

DM:

Okay, thank you.

LM:

One place where we stayed in a motel was in Atlanta—Falcons Stadium. We were parked there, and we got to go up to stay in a motel. We just loved to get to stay in places besides that little trailer house, which was good to have.

DM:

Oh yeah here's a good picture of the Tractorcade ahead of you. Some of them are pulling trailers. Yours looks like it has a Texas flag flying and a pitchfork on the front.

LM:

That's us.

DM:

Did you have any banners?

LM:

I think we had banners everywhere.

DM:

Do you remember any sayings or slogans?

LM:

I can't remember. I can probably look it up at home.

DM:

There's one that people are holding up on that bridge but I can't read it. See that?

LM:

I don't know what it said. There's no telling what it said.

DM:

Oh, that's really good.

LM:

But anyway, then the group that was coming from Florida—I think it's Interstate 95 that goes up. Is it 95?

DM:

From Florida?

LM:

Or one of them there in Georgia or somewhere that goes up to Washington.

DM:

I just can't remember.

LM:

I think it's 95. I don't know for sure. We turned, anyway. That group met us and we went on. And one place that we camped was a—I don't know if it was Civil War campgrounds or something. Anyway, we went on in to Pohick Bay. That's where we camped outside. It was in Virginia and we left our tractors and little trailer house and we got in the pickup and went on in to Washington. Our son and his wife were supposed to get the room for us and everything. But anyway, we met them and we got there quicker. They told the other day about the change, going through the—

DM:

Yes, the toll booth.

LM:

Well I remember that well. I was riding with this other couple. We went on early and got supper ready I think, or dinner, whichever it was. We went in and met our son and his wife at the airport. That national airport—it's really kind of a dangerous airport. It comes over the Potomac River. They fly in there. They say it's dangerous. But anyway, they came on the plane and we met them. Here we went.

See, I had made reservations at a hotel because I was afraid that I would be stuck somewhere and he would be somewhere else so I made sure I was going to have me a room. So I had a room in a big hotel—Skyline? I've got that all written down at home. Anyway, we got a room and they told us, they said, There's a jury up on the top floor. Old dumb me, I believed everything they said. Well that wasn't what it was. They were taking prostitutes in that hotel where we were

staying! And for a day or two I thought, Well that's where the jury is. Dumb me. But anyway, it was quite an experience. And then we started, I guess that weekend—the tractors were coming into town and see there were three groups coming. One came down 40 and one came down that upper route and they were meeting at a different place. I don't remember where they met.

DM:

You got there ahead of that though? You went on up there and got your room?

LM:

Yes, we got our room and then my son and his wife—we started sight-seeing in Washington. It amazed me—of course it was wintertime—you'd be surprised at the people who would lay down on them—where the warm air came up—sleeping out there.

DM:

On the sidewalks?

LM:

This whole thing was an education for me. It really was. I mean, I wasn't a dumb person but it was an education. But anyway, we did our sight-seeing that Saturday and then another couple flew in from home and then some others came in.

DM:

Aren't you glad you got there and did all that before the snow set in?

LM:

Oh my, but anyway, we did all that. And they had something out in Virginia. And my husband, he's the type of person that could spy somebody—he could tell those guys that were—see they were in plain clothes but he knew who all of them were. Things like that—I couldn't tell anything. We went out there at that dance. First thing he spied this guy that he knew was an undercover person. Well what they were trying to do was find out what we were doing and what we were saying and all that. Well that guy left then. He saw Malcom had caught on to him.

DM:

He knew he was discovered so he took off.

LM:

Yeah. And we stayed there not that long. We went back and on Sunday I guess we did more sightseeing. I'm just not real sure what all—there was a bunch of us up there and we did different things [that] I don't remember. But then Monday night when the tractors were going to come in, we had that hotel room and we had beds on the floor. There were seven or eight of us

from home that were up there. My son and his wife and this old couple and then I think Wayne and Travis may have been there. Anyway, my son and me got up at one or two o'clock—I don't remember exactly—and went out to Pohick Bay and took my husband to get on his tractor. And then we came back to the hotel, and then the tractors came into town and we—of course we had to either walk or there was a trolley that went all around Washington. Anyway, we'd walk up there and you could get on or off anywhere. And a whole bunch of us went to watch the tractors come into town.

DM:

Now when they came in, did they all head right to the mall from different directions?

LM:

Well, you know I'm not sure. I didn't see the others as they came in. I just saw our bunch. I know on the ride up there people were interviewing us. You know, there were reporters everywhere but they were just asking, What are you doing? And all kinds of things.

DM:

Did they ask why you were doing it?

LM:

Yes. I talked till I was hoarse. We had a movie camera. Of course back then we had movie cameras and regular cameras and we were taking pictures. We found my husband and his tractor and they had policemen. The Washington police were wonderful. They were really wonderful. But they brought in some police from New York. I don't know how many or what, I just know they did. And some of these New Yorkers shot mace into an enclosed tractor—the tractor right ahead of my husband. And it put his eyes out. My son looked and it was his tractor and he could just imagine everything and he said, "Let's go. I'm leaving." I mean he wanted to get away from there, so we left then and went on our way.

DM:

That's when you went back down to Nashville?

LM:

No, we just left. Somewhere or other, my husband got to talking to the Washington police, and I guess one of the guys was nice enough. He said, "Come go with me." And he took my husband up there to the USDA building and helped him park his tractor, and that's where it stayed until we came home. That's where his tractor stayed, there at the mall. Of course we had a place to stay up there. And then we—I don't remember what day the convention started, but we left for Nashville then after the next day I guess, because a bunch from Texas were headed home. My son flew home. And we went on to Nashville and stayed two or three days and went to meetings

there. The banquet was going to be on Saturday but we decided we just weren't going to stay for that. We were going to go back to Washington and were ready to come home and we drove in and it started snowing. And my husband said, "Well let's just load up and I'll go get my tractor and put it on the trailer." I don't know if he had to go get the trailer or what, but he was out monkeying and I was sitting in the pickup listening to the radio, and I hollered at him and said, "I don't think we're going anywhere." Because that 95 or whatever Interstate that comes up through—they were closing part of it. I said, "I don't think we're going to be able to start home," because it was just snowing straight down.

DM:

Especially pulling a trailer and tractor.

LM:

He said, "The only thing I know to do is to just leave the tractor here and go back and get a hotel room where we've been staying," and that's what we did. And the hotel we stayed in [break in tape] underground.

DM:

But it had a passage underground where you could get to different areas?

LM:

Yeah you parked under there. We were parked there and had been and I had a daughter—my youngest daughter had just married in December before we went on this Tractorcade, and so I had fancy clothes that we were taking to go to that banquet at the convention. Well we never wore them, but anyway we had them in the pickup. I had my movie camera and I had made all these pictures and so we got in the other room. That was probably up in the day Sunday and it just snowed and snowed and they were calling for the farmers who were going to go help. And I was manning the telephone. I did a lot of that while I was up there in my extra time. They had an office in that Skyline place, so I helped tell them where they needed to go. And he stayed out all night that night. I stayed there at the hotel by myself in the room. I remember looking out and seeing that snow just piling up. Anyway, he didn't come in till the next day. He carried doctors and nurses and after we got home—of course we had to stay two or three days before we got to head home because of that snow. And they brought food from bakeries. They sent some of the farmers to get some food and they brought all kinds of stuff in.

DM:

Who set up the hotline there where people could call in and say, "Hey we need to be taken to the hospital. I'm a doctor. I need to be taken"—is that the kind of calls you were getting?

LM:

Yes, they were calling in to us. Somebody had told them that the farmers were helping them.

DM:

Do you have any idea who told them—who spread the word that the farmers were going to help them get to the hospital?

LM:

I couldn't tell you for sure. I just know I was talking on the telephone, talking to nurses and hospitals and they couldn't get home. And then there were diabetics that were having to go for dialysis and this and that for two or three days. Anyway, my husband—once we got back home—I still have all that stuff—they sent the newspaper with his picture and showing farmers and he was one of them that had specially worked at this special hospital. I know I have something that came to the Chamber of Commerce of Richland Springs, and we don't have a Chamber of Commerce and never did. But that's where they had our mailing address so they sent it there, commending him for what he did for the doctors and nurses in carrying them around.

DM:

Do you have any idea how many calls you took during that time?

LM:

There's no telling. From that night and then the next day. It would have been in the hundreds I would say. Because they'd call back and most of the men—one of them, Craig Bryant—I think he's been here—had tractors with four-wheel drive that could go in that snow. See all of the people—all of their vehicles were little bitty low things that wouldn't go anywhere.

DM:

You had high clearance on your tractors.

LM:

And of course the tractors and the pickups both were used. In fact, my husband didn't use his tractor, I don't think. Now they did use some tractors but I'm not really sure that he used it. But what he used was the pickup to get them there.

DM:

Now help me out again. You got calls from doctors and nurses.

LM:

Hospitals.

DM:

People that had to get to the hospital with diabetes and this kind of thing?

LM:

Yeah but mainly—later I think it was diabetes people wanting their treatments and all—but it would be nurses or doctors that needed to get to the hospital.

DM:

I heard somewhere that some ladies that were there with the AAM helped a little bit in the hospitals. Do you remember hearing anything about that?

LM:

I don't remember that. All we did—several of us worked on the telephones.

DM:

Now this happened—as I have heard, this happened after that blockade down at the mall where they brought the busses in and—

LM:

Oh yeah. When that happened was when the tractors came to town. That was exactly when they took busses and all kinds of cars and things and blocked them into the mall.

DM:

Did you see that?

LM:

Oh yeah. I was down there. But of course I had a hotel room but we were down there a whole lot.

DM:

What was the reaction among everybody in the Tractorcade when all of a sudden here come city busses blocking in the mall—how did people react?

LM:

[inaudible]

DM:

Oh, okay. They weren't too surprised.

LM:

They weren't too surprised at anything. We had already been through a lot. The people were nice. I talked to those Washington police a whole lot, but by his tractor being up there you know, and we were in the USDA building. See they had the telephones. That's another thing. Before the tractors came in even, they had told us to use those watch-lines all we wanted to, to call home. And we used them. They thought we would say something but instead we were calling home, "Well did you feed these goats over here?" "Did you go over and do this?" Just basic stuff. And so then it came over TV and I heard this: they had to stop the farmers from using the lines at the USDA building because they were calling home. Well they had told us to do that, but that's not what came out on the news. I heard that I know. My husband was on TV I don't know how many times.

DM:

When someone asked you, "Why are you doing this," did you give a simple answer? I know a lot was involved in that but what would your answer be?

LM:

Basically, we're trying to call attention to things that are happening in America. What we're receiving—well you heard somebody this morning tell about what the grain was bringing or what a tractor would cost—the difference in parity. Basically I just kind of went into my little spiel.

DM:

You would have to make it concise for the media. Were people responsive to this?

LM:

Well I don't know about the media, I can't say too much really. But some of them were and some of them weren't.

DM:

From what you saw from the media, was it more of a negative picture painted of this?

LM:

That's what they were trying to do is paint a negative [picture, and they] very well did that on TV, of what I heard.

DM:

You say you took film footage—home movie footage?

LM:

Yes.

DM:

Do you still have it?

LM:

I have some but I didn't tell everything. I'm going around and around. I've got so much stuff to tell. Anyway, that night that the snowstorm came, somebody broke into our pickup. They got our CB radio, they got my fancy dress that I wore, and my husband's good suit and all of our good clothes. And our pictures—I had some with me and some that hadn't been developed and all that, but I think they got my movie camera. We thought we could get insurance on the home owner's on that little trailer house but we never got it. But it was an inside job. Because of the snowstorm somebody broke in there.

DM:

This happened when it was parked in front of the—?

LM:

No, it was parked underground but it had to be an insider that did that. But I have a lot of stuff—a lot of pictures. But anyway, where was I? We finally got to head home and came back all the way home. Then my husband had got the fever to build an alcohol still. So he was going to come home and build the alcohol still, which he did. And we had to get permits from the state and the ATF people. And we got permits and he went to work on building the still. Well my son and me were the chemists. He had had chemistry in college and so we had a big stainless steel—a big outfit. I think we used maize—milo maybe. We made it out of two or three different things. And we did a lot of lobbying in Washington. I didn't tell you about all that. While we were there we went to the congressmen's offices.

DM:

How many congressmen do you think you visited?

LM:

Oh lands, I don't remember. We went to the White House. Of course that was before—part of it was before we talked to congressmen. I can't remember all of it. I could write it all down probably. Anyway, when we came home—I'll tell about that. And he built the alcohol still after we got our permit. And do you know about the little newspaper that they printed in Hico, Texas? I can't believe that y'all didn't get that little paper. If you'll give me an address I'll mail some of that stuff to you but anyway, we'll do that later. We started making alcohol. And we had people from A&M—from every college in the country—I don't remember about Tech but I imagine

somebody. And all the state congressmen people came. There was people there by the swarms, curious to see that.

[Speaking at the same time]

DM:

I'm curious to know how you did this.

LM:

And you had to [break in recording] because some of them was fond of the taste of it. Of course, coming out of what came out of that stainless steel deal was harmless, but if it went through those pipes that were built in the still—but we sold one in Mississippi, and another guy there close to home bought one.

DM:

So he designed this?

LM:

Yes, he designed it and built it himself.

DM:

Did he patent it?

LM:

I can't tell you about that. I don't know. But anyway, during the course of that time he built a small still, a little one. You know, there's a difference in how it burns with fuel and the blaze is different. And we went to every fair or everything they had around the country with that little still, putting on programs.

DM:

Oh, that's great!

LM:

We did. I don't know for how long, but we did all that.

DM:

Do you still have that?

LM:

You know what, there was an AAM group in West Texas—I can't remember which town it was—that I loaned it to and I never got it back.

DM:

If you ever think about who that is, Dan Taylor needs to know about that—the still—that would be a good item at a museum.

LM:

Yeah. I'll tell him. It may have been Brownfield. It was out here in West Texas, I know. They got it and brought it out here, and they were going to get it back to me and I guess that probably was about the time my husband died I don't know.

DM:

Did any federal people come sniffing around to see if you were moonshining out there? (laughs)

LM:

I don't know, I guess. We had all kinds of people. We had people from everywhere. I can't tell you for sure about it. But we had permits and it was quite interesting. But before he built it—we were the second in Texas—but Joe Cook at CB Texas was the first guy that built a still and he helped my husband a whole lot. But we went to Colorado with the Schroders—

DM:

Gene Schroder?

LM:

Yeah. One boy got killed. We went up there when he was building, and then we went around and gradually just kind of quit. But I've still got that big still. It's still in our home. It's sitting out there. I've got a big old shop—a junk pile.

DM:

How big is the still?

LM:

Well I'll have to send you picture. Dana, do you know how big it is?

Dana:

No.

LM:

It's a pretty good size, the main one. And we got so good and we made ninety-four proof, which is good. I think we had one person that we had a time with that tried to drink a little of it. (laughs) We had trouble—had to watch him. But anyway, so the next year we went to Washington when a group went up there, and we were driving our pickup, burning fuel. Yes we did. And that's when we got some of the laws passed. We sat through all that and lobbied for all kinds of things.

DM:

Was that in '80 by the way? That was the next year after the Tractorcade?

LM:

That was next year, and then in '81 we went again. We went three years to Washington. The third year that we went—see, we had movies of a boy getting his eye put out and that commotion. So we sent that to them and they were going to have the trial. And another couple from over toward Waco somewhere were taking their kids because they were going to have Reagan's inauguration. It was the year that he was inaugurated. Anyway, we went and when we got to Washington, we had our reservations in Virginia and we rode along with that other couple. I don't know if it was the second year or the third year that we went to Washington—we met up with a bunch of cotton farmers from West Texas. We never did raise cotton. Anyway, they wanted us to go with them through Cotton Incorporated. So we toured that and went to the meal. I remember they had a hog cooked and it was really something. We went to that, then we of course went on into Washington. And then the third year when we got to Washington they left us a message there where we had our room that my husband's nephew had been killed back home. It was wintertime and he and another boy were asphyxiated. They were out at Crane, Texas. They had been coon hunting and they came in and had a stove—

DM:

A space heater?

LM:

A space heater. And I imagine they turned the thing up real high. It was a Saturday night and [the next day] was Sunday and of course they didn't have to go to work Sunday morning. And I imagine they had that real high and all the air hose were iced over around the house and they died. When they found them they were already dead. And anyway, this other couple was up there with us and I didn't mind staying. I tried to get my husband—I said, "Well just get on a plane and fly home for the funeral and I'll stay up here." "No, if we can both go and get there in time we'll drive." But he had an appointment with that lawyer because of the trial. See he was supposed to testify in the trial and so he couldn't just take off. Well, when we found out when the funeral was set, we couldn't get there driving. So he said, "Well I'm just not going to leave

you and go.” And he had this other [thing] to do. But he did go talk to a lawyer early in case we did but we didn’t. And so we attended that trial and they had all kinds of parties for the inauguration. All the fireworks—we attended all that. And David Senter even had tickets for us to one of the balls. They had three or four. But I would have had to rent a long dress and him a tuxedo or something. Anyway, it ended up that we didn’t go to the ball. We babysat for some other group that had little kids. But we did go to a lot of receptions and parties and things and we went to the inauguration.

DM:

Now how did the trial turn out?

LM:

It turned out good. The boy won. It’s against the law I guess to shoot into an enclosed—and it wasn’t Washington police, it was—

DM:

New York?

LM:

They had I guess hired some from New York—that’s the way I understood it. Go ahead and ask any questions.

DM:

Well how long did y’all produce ethanol?

LM:

Oh, for months. I can’t tell you. I might could look it up.

DM:

But how many years did you—?

LM:

Oh no, not for—because I’ll tell you what. We tried different things and what we did—there were several others that were doing that. Well, like the Cooks. They were doing alcohol. And Miss Cook—I never did make any cookies but you’d take that byproduct—we were trying to tell people that the byproduct that’s left, where they get the goodies out, makes cookies. It’s good for people to use. They said you can send it to countries, and we tried to promote that. We went to Austin I don’t know how many times and we took those cookies that were made out of that. And I remember one of the congressmen—this is state—I don’t remember exactly when it was or anything. But all of them would taste of them but he wouldn’t. I think it was up around Dallas or

something. I remember that especially. But we did an awful lot of things. And I met the governor when he was Ag Commissioner. I've known him since then. I did a lot of lobbying. I used to belong to a club that—WIFE—Women Involved in Farm Economics. I was active in that for a number of years. I think they're still going. I did a bunch of lobbying in Austin. So I've been involved always. I was a member of Cattle Women of Texas—an officer. I've been a lot of things. Okay, ask anything you want to.

DM:

Well let me go back and just ask a couple of questions from what we've talked about. When you drove your pick-up on alcohol—fueled by alcohol, how did you publicize that this was happening? Did you tell the media or did you have a banner on your truck?

LM:

I think we probably did but I don't remember just exactly.

DM:

That's kind of an interesting thing.

LM:

We had quite a stir around home. I mean, the local colleges and professors and congressmen and just people—there were people there all the time. It would nearly drive you crazy.

DM:

(laughs) Did you happen to take pictures of these people when they came there?

LM:

I have a lot of them.

DM:

That's really good stuff. And you say you have some home movies?

LM:

I'm not sure how much home movie I have because I can't remember. My granddaughter that lives in Austin was going to take all that and have them made into one deal and I just kind of forgot about it. I got off on other stuff and I just have never had it done. That's what I need to do.

DM:

We'd sure like to see some of those things.

LM:

If I loaned some of it to you could I get it back?

DM:

Um-hm.

LM:

I'd be glad to do that. Another thing that I haven't told you that I did—we were friends, and are still friends with a doctor in Brownwood. My husband helped him on his farm and everything and we've just been friends. His kids used to come to my house and so I wrote them every day while I was [break in recording]. And I kept a diary—I've still got that—telling what we did.

DM:

Is that right?

LM:

I started writing a book but I haven't got very far. Basically the book I was going to write was for my grandkids. I've had an interesting life, really. We've done a lot of different things. We've travelled all over the United States. We used to go to Colorado every year. I've been all over the United States. We went into the Emu business—do you know what that is? Ostrich?

DM:

Oh yes, the Emu business.

LM:

We were pioneers in that for several years. I have done a lot.

DM:

But you're writing all of this up?

LM:

Yeah, basically for my grandkids.

DM:

Well I wish you would let more people than your grandkids see that.

LM:

Well If I can get it back, I've got a lot of stuff I can loan. I've got a lot of pictures of the alcohol business—of people there and a lot about that.

DM:

That's good material.

LM:

And the tractorcades. I took pictures but like I said, I had some of it stolen but it wasn't all.

DM:

Well I think your diary would be very interesting as well.

LM:

Well it is. It tells exactly what we did. And my husband—another thing that he did was in the grain field—he took his tractor and wrote “strike.”

DM:

He mowed it into the grain field?

LM:

Yeah. How he would do that I don't know, and it came out in the Brownwood paper. And then this doctor that I started to tell you about a while ago—when we left on the trip he fixed up a bunch of medicine for us to take because he thought we'd get sick. We didn't get sick but some of the other guys did when they got up there in Washington. I doctored two or three. (laughs) One of them was here today—Craig Bryant, with a mustache you know?

DM:

Um-hm, right.

LM:

Okay, I doctored him. He had high fever so I knew he needed medicine. And I helped him and got him all right. I don't know whether he had an infected what, but anyway this doctor came out and they called him and they wanted him to do an article on—they were doing abortions—two of the doctors there in Brownwood. They wanted him to do something and he said, “No I'm not going to talk to you about that.” He was against all that, but he said, “I'll tell you about the Tractorcade in this big article.” I still have a lot of the things that came out of the newspapers that would be beneficial, if y'all would get it back to me.

DM:

Sure.

LM:

Anyway, he wrote in there. And he said there was even a baby born on the Tractorcade but I don't think that was right. (laughter) But I think he was just having [fun]. But anyway, it was really interesting, the article that he wrote. He said he heard from us every day, which he did. I wrote his kids.

DM:

Well I think it's also interesting that there was communication along the way on the Tractorcade by CB radio. This was the prime time for CB radio in the seventies.

LM:

It was. If we hadn't had them we couldn't have talked to each other.

DM:

I would love to hear that jabber. Go back and forth. What was your handle? Do you remember?

LM:

Heck, I can't remember. My son will know. I'll ask him when I get home.

Lola's grandchild:

Didn't y'all have that one little TV that y'all bought in Vicksburg that y'all took on the tractor? I have that.

DM:

Is that right?

Tanna:

It's like a little radio with a little CB on it.

DM:

Oh, okay.

LM:

We bought a little air vent and it had a little picture so we could watch TV going down the road. Oh, we've done everything. Just name it and I've done it. I've hauled peanuts but we never raised cotton.

DM:

This is a real good start for us. Now if someone wanted to come down to Richland Springs and talk to you some more about this, would that be okay if we called and tried to arrange something? See the still and things like that?

LM:

Yes, it probably would. And really my son could tell you an awful lot about everything. Of course I had a part in it but he was part of it too. And he's a rancher/farmer. He has cattle and he's—somebody was talking about the good grain. He was bragging to me—he made twenty-five. One farm made twenty-five bushels, which is not good but it was good for them. We've been in a drought where I am. It's been bad and so to even have any was good. But the price has been good—seven dollars I think is what we got and then he was going to store some of it so he could sell it for seed, you know.

DM:

Now give me his name.

LM:

Bobby Mask. He's my son.

DM:

I need to talk to him too sometime.

LM:

Yeah, he could add a lot of things that I can't about the still and all because he was right there when we were doing it. But I helped him. We helped him. He had to learn how to use—what all did we use? I can't even remember now. Dana, what did I use?

DM:

Well I think that would be real good to get additional information on that, and we might just be doing that in the next half a year or so; just calling down to see if we can talk a little bit more. It's not far from here.

LM:

Well its four hours and something is what it is. I have a niece and nephew who graduated from Tech Law School. My nephew is a lawyer in El Paso and my niece is—I don't know if she works for—what place was it? I just haven't stayed up with them.

DM:

Well I don't have any more questions for you this morning but I bet we'll have some more later on. And we'd sure like to borrow some materials.

LM:

Well I guarantee that I'll let you borrow some material because I know I've got a number of things.

DM:

Have you happened to sign one of these forms that allows us to—

LM:

I've already done that. They had us all sign one yesterday afternoon I guess. I think they thought they'd talk to me yesterday afternoon but I got to listening to all them other guys tell their stories.

DM:

You just can't do it all in a couple of days.

LM:

And we went so many different times. My husband was a firm believer and he went every time they all went anywhere—Austin or anything. But now, he didn't come up here to Amarillo or anything.

DM:

Well thank you so much for the good information.

LM:

Well I hope I helped a little.

DM:

I enjoyed visiting with you and I hope to talk to you again soon; if not me then somebody else.

LM:

Well that's all right.

End of Interview