

**Oral History Interview of
Jim McGee**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 31, 2013
George West, Texas**

**Part of the:
*George West Storyfest Interviews***

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Related Interviews:

This interview was one of eight interviews conducted on October 31 and November 1, 2013 that discuss the George West Storyfest. Other interviews include: L.T. Davis, Ross Harris, Jim Huff, Julie Kaase, Mary Ann Pawlik, Pauline Word, and Glynis Holm Strause.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jim McGee, who discusses the behind-the-scenes work of the George West Storyfest, the importance of volunteer work, and being the first Storyfest Board President.

Length of Interview: 0:41:15

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Introduction and background information	05	00:00:00
Roots of the George West Storyfest	09	00:08:55
Community's response to Storytelling and the festival's audience	11	00:14:17
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Storyfest's board members	22	00:33:33

Keywords

George West Storyfest,

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

So that nothing—

Jim McGee (JM):

You're going to record?

AW:

Um-hm, but no video. Well, my memory is—I don't know about your memory, but my memory's not that good.

JM:

I'm pretty good on numbers, but don't ask me somebody's name. [Laughs]

AW:

No, I'm the same way. In fact, I could tell you some—everything about a person and the name just is—I don't know. There's a spot in there that's gone south.

JM:

I talked to him yesterday, too.

AW:

Yeah. Let me tell you just really briefly what we're doing at the university. We have an archive called the Southwest Collection, where I work, collecting stuff. Are you familiar with archives versus libraries or museums? A little bit?

JM:

A little bit, but not much.

AW:

Well, we are sort of halfway in the middle. We collect information, like a library does, but not necessarily artifacts like a museum does. We're interested in what we call first-source materials: letters, journals, diaries, business records, all kinds of things. But also, oral history is where a person sits down, like we're doing this morning, and simply relate something, in their own voice, in their own language, and then we archive it for scholarly research. What we're interested in for scholarly research here is this festival, which has gone on now for twenty-five years. That's a pretty big mark to hit for a festival to keep something going for that long. Especially, in a smaller town and especially, with the economy, and the drought, and all the other things that have gone on. So we thought it would be really of interest. Our hope is that two hundred years from now, people will still have access to all this material. So that's it. If you want to have me pause the recorder for a moment, just let me know and we'll do that. Otherwise, we'll just let it connect.

JM:

Why don't you pause it for a minute? And we'll—

AW:

Sure, okay. No, it'll take just a second.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Let's start at the beginning. What's your date of birth?

JM:

Date of birth?

AW:

Um-hm.

JM:

April 16, 1939.

AW:

Great. And where were you born?

JM:

I was actually born in Paris, Texas.

AW:

Oh yeah. I know it. Just a moment ago, you'd said you'd been here forty-seven years. How did you get from Paris to here?

JM:

Right. Well, my family moved to Corpus Christi in the summer of 1950. We ate the first Whataburgers there.

AW:

Really? You opened it up?

JM:

Well, no, we didn't open it up, but he was—we were there whenever he started selling them, I guess you'd say. My dad used to—we moved down there. My dad was manager of an ice

company. Then, on Saturdays, he would stop at Whataburger and bring Whataburger home. But then, after a while, the ice company sold out and he went into the service station business. Me, liking automobiles, well, I hung around them quite a bit. I don't—the automotive was just in me, I guess you could say. Anyway, after high school, we got married very young. We had a chance—I was working at a service station for about forty dollars a week in 1959. And we had a chance to go to Colorado. My wife's sister and brother-in-law lived there. Said I can make seventy-five dollars a week up there, so we did. We moved up to Colorado.

AW:
Where in Colorado?

JM:
Rangely, Colorado.

AW:
Where is Rangely?

JM:
Northwest corner, where Dinosaur National Monument is and all that area.

AW:
Yes, yeah.

JM:
Okay, it's just outside of Dinosaur National Monument.

AW:
I lived in Lakewood and Broomfield for a number of years in the seventies.

JM:
That's over by Denver.

AW:
Yeah, right outside of Denver. But when you mentioned Rangely, I knew the name but I couldn't place—

JM:
It's as far north and as far west as you can get in Colorado. But I worked in the oil field there for a total of almost six years, between rough-necking and working for Halliburton. We moved over to Vernal, Utah when I went to work for Halliburton.

AW:

Was it oil there or natural gas?

JM:

Mainly oil. There was some natural gas, yes, but it was mainly oil. I've been all over Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming in trucks. I mean, some of the roads were three and four miles an hour because they were not roads. They were just rocky trails that we drove over. Anyway, after we got through there, we moved back to Corpus. We, I guess you would say, got tired of being on-call twenty-four hours a day and all that. We moved to Corpus and went to work for a bread company, Sunbeam Bread. They needed a route man up here in George West, and offered me the job so I came up to George West with a bread truck. We rented a house. I worked for Sunbeam for about six months, and then Mr. Henry Brown, who had the HM Brown & Company, also Western Auto—that was our Piggly Wiggly store, the one that's closed up down here now.

AW:

I worked for Piggly Wiggly, too, one time.

JM:

Well, this was independent-owned, you know? But I worked there and went to work—he asked me to go to work for him in the Western Auto Store. They had auto parts in there. And I went in there, taking care of the auto parts area. About a year later, I guess it was, Henry and his wife and two kids were killed in an auto accident in Europe, and left one son who was—I think Marc was twelve at the time. His brother-in-law, Jimmy Pawlik, who has Pawlik's now—there was family conflict in there after a while—who owned what. And Ross Brown came back. Anyway, not to get too deep in other people there. They split up. And I left Pawlik's and went to work for Bernard Bednarz, who, at that time, had just had a garage up here on the corner. But he wanted to put auto parts in. Needed someone to take care of the auto parts. So that was in '60—'68, I think, or '69. Sixty-nine, somewhere in that area. Sixty-eight, I think. No, '67. Anyway, we—I went to work for him. We started out with four thousand dollars' worth of auto parts. In September—in mid-'71—early '71, some people—men came in and talked to Bernard about going into the dealership business. They wanted him to do all—put up all his property and all this kind of stuff. He discussed it with me. I knew what was going on. They—I just told them. I said, "I know you've got money in the bank. What's it cost to open the dealership?" And he told me what a franchise would cost and everything. So I said, "Let's do it." I said, "I'll work for you. I'm not going to be a partner or anything like that. I'll just work for you and we'll work it together." So in September of '71, we started the '72 Model Chevrolets, the Oldsmobile, Pontiac and Buick. From there, we built a big dealership, and I worked for him till he sold out. I worked for another man for ten years that bought it. Then, I injured my back and I was basically retired because I didn't want it, but that's the way it happened, anyway. I was out there a total of thirty-four years, I guess it was. It was a good life. Didn't make a whole lot of money, but it was a good

life. Somewhere back along the line—I guess it was in '89, or early '89, that the Chamber here was wanting to form some type of entertainment or something to put George West on the map. [Laughs] That's when Rob came with up with the idea of storytelling.

AW:

And who is Rob?

JM:

Rob Schneider.

AW:

Schneider?

JM:

Schneider. And he's S-c-h-n-e-i-d-e-r. His dad had a—was an attorney here, also. At first, you know, it was, "Well, who wants to listen to people telling stories?"

AW:

[Laughs] Yeah. Most of us do that at the Dairy Queen, right?

JM:

Right. Yeah, that's what was happening. Anyway, they told him, "That's probably the best idea. It's your idea, so you do it." Well, he had another friend, Jimmy Moore, who was a carpenter and a contractor. And he tore down an old house and he brought the front wall of the house, or the front porch, in. Jimmy Moore and Rob and I—that's the first year he needed some help, so I took off on Friday and I helped him. We built the front part of the house back again with a tin roof and the whole nine yards.

AW:

Just a façade? Just the front of it?

JM:

Yeah. It took off from there. That's all I could say. We used that for about, I think, three or four years, and then got a little bit bigger and we rented a stage, and then we got to where we needed more help, and we got some help through the federal prison with their trustees to bring them over. And we had one of the trustees there that—he was—I'm not going to say "older." He was in his mid-fifties, I'm sure, or early sixties. He said he was a contractor on the outside. And he offered to build stages for us there at the prison. He said, "If you furnish the material, we can build them." And that's how we got our stages built.

AW:
Really?

JM:
And they're still working. Still working. This guy was good. He was a trustee there for about—I think we had him here, like, three times [laughs] so he was there for a long time. And he told me one time that—I asked him—I always questioned the guys what they're there for, and most of them are there for drugs and stuff like that. He said he was there because the—some invoices weren't actually right. He said that they found out that he was doing a little bit of cheating on his taxes and stuff like that. He said, "That's all right. I only got about another year to go." I said, "What are you going to do when you get out?" He said, "I'm going to go start spending that money then." Because he said they never found it all. [Laughter] And I believe him, too. He was just that type of guy.

AW:
So he had a savings plan of another sort?

JM:
He had a savings piled up somewhere, yeah. But since that time, though, we've had good luck. We've had—started with one stage and increased it to two, and now, we have three. And it's all—it was all volunteer. It's not all volunteer anymore, because of—we're too big, I guess, you could say.

AW:
Yeah. This is a city of twenty-five hundred people now. And what—was it about that size when you started?

JM:
Around twenty-two hundred. Yeah, something like that. Twenty-two.

AW:
Yeah, so about the same size.

JM:
The city hasn't changed size at all, hardly.

AW:
Yeah. And I know any city has got—you've got the Elks and the Lions and the Rotary Club, and you've got church, and you've got sports, and you've got all kinds of things that are volunteer-driven.

JM:
Right.

AW:
And so how do you get people to pitch in on a big thing like what this has grown to be?

JM:
Well, that's what we're having a problem with now. I've been doing it for twenty-five years. It was to the point where I had to take vacation days, you know, to do this. People won't do that now. "Well, you know, I need the money.", "Okay, you need the money." As far as volunteer work, it's workers that's really, really hard to get them. We eventually end up with some, but it's always a last minute thing, it seems like. It really scares you. [Laughs] It really scares you.

AW:
Yeah, because you think you're going to have to be there by yourself.

JM:
Right. Just about. And it's a process that—it's just really getting hard, I'll put it that way. Especially, at my age. You know, I'm down here in the next—today, tomorrow and the next day. I'll probably put in—in three days, four days, I'll probably put in fifty or sixty hours. My hips are not quite what they used to be. My knees are not quite what they used to be. Seven or eight miles a day is not working too good anymore. [Laughs] But it's been a fun thing, and I want to stay with it.

AW:
How has the community, as a whole, received it? I know when you mentioned that someone said the first idea of storytelling, your face said, "Well, that's a crazy idea." How has it gone over with community itself?

JM:
Yeah. Gone over really good. Really, really good. If you could hear some of these storytellers—which I hope you'll be here.

AW:
Oh yeah, I will.

JM:
And you've been to them before, I assume.

AW:

Yeah. In fact, I've played here before—

JM:

Oh okay, yeah.

AW:

—several years ago. Alanna Ingham is my—one of the—she's my cousin.

JM:

Oh.

AW:

Yeah, so.

JM:

[Laughs] Then you know what a storyteller is.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. And they're fun, but everybody understands that until they've heard it, you know?

JM:

That's the key is trying to make people come and listen one time because they'll come one time, they'll come back. It's a—it's—some, they can make you cry or make you laugh.

AW:

Yeah, and sometimes, both.

JM:

Yeah, both.

AW:

Yeah. How—so, it's gone over as the community—what is the audience—what have the audiences been like over this twenty-five years?

JM:

We have—as far as size?

AW:

Well, size and composition. I mean, I know you're bound to have up years and down years with the economy and everything else.

JM:

We have a lot of people that come for two or three hours. So we have very few that, I'm going to say, comes and spends ten, twelve hours here. Even though it's a free thing, you know? We—they'll come for two or three hours, they'll listen to storytellers and some music, and then they'll go. And then we have more people come in and do the same thing. It's—as far as the people. I think in the last year or two, we've seen some more younger people—

AW:

That's good.

JM:

—participate and come. We—it's really a hard—with an open festival like this, it's really hard to say that we had ten thousand people, or we had three thousand people, or what. Our stages are set where we have five hundred—if we've got two stages, have around five hundred chairs at each one, and the other around 350, or so. And when the storytellers are on, normally, those are just about full all the time. Sometimes our music doesn't draw quite as many. And we've got a few tellers that don't draw.

AW:

Yeah. So that's interesting. So it's really the storytelling that drives this and not the music, which in other festivals, is the complete opposite.

JM:

Right. Oh, we've got one or two bands that will fill up, but they're the ones that have been coming for a long time.

AW:

People know who they are.

JM:

People know who they are. And they've got the kind of music they want to listen to. As far as just a country western band, you probably won't find half of the chairs filled up. Some of our Spanish music will fill up half of them. Because we have it all. We have everything.

AW:

Yeah. What's the music that fills up the most?

JM:

Rock and roll. The old-time rock and roll.

AW:

Yeah. Old fellows like me appreciate that.

JM:

That's right. [Laughter]

AW:

What kind of stories and storytellers seem to be the most popular? If that's possible to say.

JM:

I couldn't tell you that. You know, that's—I don't know. I just really don't know that.

AW:

Well, that's an answer. That means that they're all over the map.

JM:

Yeah, they are.

AW:

There's really not a particular—

JM:

They are. Probably—no, it's just—I'm going to say, probably, the cowboys are probably among the top. But then, generally, I would say most of our storytellers are about the cowboy period anyway. So it's hard to put a finger on something like that. You just can't do it. Not with three stages. I'm to where I don't even get to sit and watch them anymore. [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah, I bet that's right. You're doing too much work.

JM:

Yeah, there's always something happening over here, or somebody needs you over there, or got something over here. "Come help me with this." Luckily, we've been very luckily—we have a children's area. We don't have any—we're well-patrolled. We watch everything really, really close. We don't have a problem with people leaving their kids. It's a safe area. Our whole area is safe. And we actually have a deputy or two usually around all day long. I don't think we've ever needed them. I don't know that we've ever actually needed one. Three or four years ago, we had

some lady faint, but other than that, that's about it. We've never had a problem with fights or anything like that. We just don't—and we sit over here, but it's—we watch it pretty close. We watch it. We've got too many Baptists here. [Laughter]

AW:

Does the community see this as an economic value?

JM:

Oh yes. Oh, you bet. We pack the motels, and the motels will be full. Of course, with this oil boom we've got going right now, they're full already. Before, they would be filled up to the brim. The grocery stores would be selling lots of food, and the cafes that we had were always full. And there's always people buying the gas to get here and go back home, or whatever, too. So yeah, I feel like it's been a—it's really a good thing for the town. It's just a one-weekend thing, but it's well worth every effort that we put into it, I think.

AW:

Mary Margaret was saying that—are you currently the county judge?

JM:

Me?

AW:

Yeah.

JM:

Oh no. I don't do—you're talking about—that's Jim Huff.

AW:

Jim Huff, that's right. I'm sorry. I'm going to see him this afternoon. Forget that, then. I had the wrong Jim. Well, what—and we were just talking about how hard it is to get involved here. What is the future of an event like this? How does—because twenty-five years is pretty good—pretty good record as festivals go.

JM:

I don't—I think it'll continue. I really do. I think we're going to see a lot more people here this year because our town has got a lot more people in it, due to the oil field. I think we're going to see a younger crowd this year. And hopefully, they'll remember us.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. When you say it's a bigger town now—is it bigger than twenty-five hundred? Because that's a several-year-old—

JM:

It's twenty-five hundred on the population sign. And normal—I'm going to say normal residents, that's probably very true. Quite a number of people have opened up their homes to rent them out on a weekly basis. And they're renting a bedroom for two people, two hundred dollars a person per week. You know, things like that. And we've got a couple of people that have bought houses, and they've turned them into bunk houses. It's a matter of six or eight people living there, and just using it as a bunk house is what they're doing.

AW:

Has that been a strain on the city?

JM:

[Sighs] I don't know that it's been a—yeah, it has, to a point. When you go to the store and shop, our prices have gone up. Our prices have gone up.

AW:

Gasoline is probably higher.

JM:

No, the gasoline is staying, you know, in with the rest of the country there. But our food, clothing, stuff like that that's local, is probably—I'm going to say it's 25 percent higher now than it was two years ago.

AW:

Yeah. Yeah, so if you're a local not making the big monies—yeah.

JM:

It's hurting people. I mean, everybody says that the oil is good, and it is good, but it's not good for me, because I'm on a fixed income. So I can drive to Beeville, twenty-five miles, and do my shopping on a weekly basis cheaper than what I can shop at home now.

AW:

Oh yeah, that's sad.

JM:

It is. It's really sad.

AW:

I see my notes from yesterday. As I said, I had the Jim's mixed up. Mary Margaret said that you were also—you had—besides being at this at the beginning, you were also the first Board President after you became an independent entity.

JM:

Um-hm.

AW:

Why did you decide to—as a group—to operate independently, and how did that go about?

JM:

Well, the reason we wanted that—to get the 501(c)(3)—is to—where the companies that donate to us, it would be a tax write-off for them.

AW:

Yeah. And that wouldn't be the case if you were under the Chamber?

JM:

No. If we were just under the Chamber, it would not work that way. But since we're a 501(c)(3) federally recognized non-profit organization, any company that donates to us can write that off as a tax write-off donation, which it is legal. We don't—we're not here to make money. We do regulate our food booths to maximum of twelve, and they all to be non-profit organizations. Where, you know, like the church, or the Boy Scouts, or anything like that—that's one of our requirements. And I don't know—I'm thinking Mary Margaret said—I'm thinking, ten or eleven of them last year pulled in over twenty-five thousand dollars.

AW:

So it's really—it's a big advantage for them, too?

JM:

Oh yeah, it is. And the good thing is most of the people that operate the food booths—whatever they sell has been donated to them. My wife, right now, Betty, she's home baking cakes for the church booth. [Laughs] So, you know, that's going to be donated to the church so that they can sell those cupcakes, or whatever you want to call them, that she's making. There's some of them that buy stuff. Also, the church. I know—I was in Beeville yesterday at the First Methodist Church, they've got some kind of deal, they slice up raw cucumbers and put stuff on them. I loaded 150 pounds of them things for a girl in Beeville yesterday. It was raw cucumbers. [Laughs] Just happened to see her there when she was going out of the store with them. I said, "I'll help you."

AW:

Golly. That's interesting. So—well, that's good to hear, because—so that means it wasn't, like, a falling out between the Chamber and—

JM:

Oh no. No, no. They still participate with us, you bet. In fact, our chamber is sponsoring our street dance this year. The kids area is also sponsored by our—furnished by non-profit organizations, which is either something in the school or something like that, also. I don't know if Mary Margaret told you or not, but we have our storytellers going into seventeen schools tomorrow.

AW:

Oh, that's great. Yeah.

JM:

We started out just going to the school here with a storyteller, and somebody else heard about it, then somebody else heard about it, another school district heard about it. And now, they want—because it's becoming a lost art.

AW:

So seventeen school districts or just schools?

JM:

Seventeen different schools.

AW:

Yeah, but that'd still be several districts.

JM:

Oh, that's nine or ten different districts.

AW:

Wow. That's pretty impressive.

JM:

Yeah, they're going from here, to Three Rivers, to Pawnee, to Tilden, to Beeville, to Orange Grove. I think, Pettus. I'm not sure. But it's—there's eight or nine, maybe ten different school districts that they're actually going to.

AW:

Yeah, that's something.

JM:

And it's free to them.

AW:

To them? Right. Which is also good for schools.

JM:

Oh yeah.

AW:

They really don't have budgets for that kind of thing.

JM:

Right. All they have to do is put the kids in the gym or the auditorium, you know, for the teller. They do, I think, thirty, thirty-five minutes for each one. Something like that. I think each one of them will do two or three different ones there at the schools. I'm not real sure. But I'm never there. [Laughs] I never get to go to that.

AW:

You're too busy loading cucumbers. [Laughs]

JM:

Yeah, or something.

AW:

Well that's interesting. It strikes me just—I mean, I've been out to the festival once, and then, I've been here just today. I got in last night. I'm really struck by how it seems like the community, as a whole, functions pretty well together.

JM:

We do. We have, really, just one enemy. We have one enemy here in town. He doesn't like us. I don't know why. I've spent hours trying to talk to him, but there's something that he just doesn't like about Storyfest. He—it's not—it's not something that he makes money off of is what it amounts to. That's the whole key, I think, right there.

AW:

I'm kind of glad to hear this, because I was beginning to think this was too much like a Disney movie. [Laughs] So there is one person that—

JM:

In fact, the store right, Pawlik's Supply, they're going to close tomorrow. Not Friday, but Saturday, they're open half a day normally. No, for Storyfest, they just close up. That way we don't interrupt them. The feed store on the other end of town—he used to do quite a bit, but he's going to close up the front door, and he'll sell out the side door of his building down there now. And really, that's the only thing that we interfere with. We have a beauty shop over here on the far corner, but her people can park out front instead of on the side where we block that street off. And the bank's been wonderful. The bank has—well, you can see it. They've just been wonderful. They take care of all our tickets and ticket booths. Or insure—not insure, but take care of our money that changes hands, and put it in the bank for us. I think they used to have all volunteers, but I think they're even having to pay their people to go in the ticket booths now.

AW:

Really?

JM:

Yeah. That's what I was—

AW:

I know that the year I was here, they also hosted the green room, or the lounge, a refreshment area, for the performers, which was really nice.

JM:

Yes, they did.

AW:

They fed us and—

JM:

They let us use the room, and it was really good, but we're going to use the library now. It's worked out for two years now. Worked out really good over there.

AW:

What do you see needs to be done to keep these kinds of events—this event in particular—but these kind of events workable for the future? I mean, you mentioned the volunteers. How do you get people to volunteer?

JM:

Well, that's the hard part is there's always going to be one, or two, or three that need to be paid, like Mary Margaret. She works all year _____ [00:31:23]. She may work three days in January and February, but then, come this time, she's working sixty hours a week now.

AW:

Yeah, I know. I get emails from her all year round. [Laughter]

JM:

But, you know, that's the whole problem right there is trying to get volunteers. The people want to come. They like it. But they don't want to work for free, you know? We can't go and pay everybody. And generally—well, like, stage volunteers and things like that. You know, this involves maybe three, four days preparation. Not full-time, but two weeks ago, and then this week, and then the full day on the stage, or at the stage, being, you know, stage manager or something like that. It's not a big deal. But it's just trying to make people—or get people involved to do that. It's just—it's almost next to impossible anymore. I don't know what would drive them any better. I really don't.

AW:

I sometimes wonder if it's because it just costs us all more to live than it used to. You know, we think about that. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's not the economic side of it, or the perceived economic side of it, I guess.

JM:

I guess. It's—like I said, it's—you know, I don't know. It's just something that—to get people to do. I guess some of them don't see the benefit.

AW:

Yeah. How long were you president of the board?

JM:

Seven, eight, nine years. I don't remember. Something like that.

AW:

A long stretch, though?

JM:

Yeah.

AW:

And your board is populated by what kind of folks?

JM:

Well, we have a lady from the bank here, and we had—we had an independent attorney on there to kind of look over our shoulder in case we needed it. We have just average, every day people that—most of them are either a small business owner or just really enjoy Storyfest. That's the whole thing.

AW:

Do you have trouble keeping people—keeping board members?

JM:

No, we don't. Not keeping a board member—we've had a little trouble, sometimes, getting them to attend the meeting. [Laughter] But other than that, no. They've been—it's been pretty good.

AW:

And does your board participate in the Storyfest and doing the work?

JM:

Oh yes.

AW:

That's good.

JM:

They all—every one of us has got a job, I guess you could say. In one way or the other, you know? Flo takes care of our sales booth. Flo Moore. Actually, she's been doing that probably twenty years or better.

AW:

Wow.

JM:

Yeah. In fact, her husband is Jimmy Moore.

AW:

The same one who built the façade?

JM:

Who we used to build the first stage, right. So she's been involved in Storyfest ever since it started, also.

AW:

That may be part of your success, having your board that's involved.

JM:

Yes, it is.

AW:

I'm on the Board of the Arts Alliance in Lubbock, and we—very similar to the Storyfest, we broke away from the Chamber of Commerce. And it's been forty years ago, I guess, when ours changed. And for the same reason: the 501(c)(3) and the contributions. But as the city's gotten bigger, it's been harder to get board members who are both board members and volunteers because we get board members now to raise money. And once they raise the money, they're content, you know? They're not going to haul the cucumbers. [Laughter]

JM:

Yeah. Mary Margaret does just a wonderful job on the—raising the money. She knows where to go, who to go to, and how to write a letter. We all have a little bit something. Like Offshore Energy, when they first moved in out here, they bought this big building that used to be the dealership. And I actually worked for them for a year out there, kind of overseeing, or underseeing, the renovation of the building. And I hit them up for donations. Yeah, why not? You bet. In fact, this last year they donated a spool of—six hundred foot of [clears throat] four conductor number six wire, I think it is. So I'd have—we could make more of our power cords out for the booths. That alone, was three or four thousand dollars right there.

AW:

That's the kind of stuff that people steal when they see them laying around.

JM:

And they—yeah, that's for sure. Yeah. They donated that last year. The year before last, I think they gave me a thousand, fifteen hundred dollars, something like that. You know, just—there's a lot of people—almost all of us, at some point, raised some money somehow, including—but Mary Margaret is the one that knows how to get the big bucks, really, I guess you could say.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. I know. And that is—that's a big job.

JM:

Yeah. You know, right now, we have this Eagle Ford stuff going and our hotel-motel tax is really good, at this point. We went before the city—because the city has to spend that money.

AW:

Right, and only in certain ways, too.

JM:

Yes, only in certain ways. And we get some of it. The only thing I disagree with is the way the city—our city manager did it. It was not the way it was voted on, but we can't do anything about it, unless you put a cap on it. Oh well. We'll survive, you know? We'll get by. I have a—I just have a big disagreement with the way she had it written up after this council voted on it. It was not—as far as I'm concerned, it was never approved like that, with a cap. But she says it was, so, okay. What can we do?

AW:

When you say cap, meaning capping the total amount of dollars that can be raised? Or the—

JM:

Capping the amount of the hotel-motel tax money that goes to George West Storyfest from the city. The city gets—out of their 100 percent, 40 percent goes to the Chamber of Commerce. Forty percent of the hotel-motel tax goes to the George West Storyfest. And she—they put a cap on it.

AW:

So forty percent—forty-two-x dollars, and above that, nothing?

JM:

Right, yeah. I think we're guaranteed forty-seven thousand dollars or something like that a year now.

AW:

So if you cap it, then the rest of the money that you would've gotten goes somewhere else.

JM:

It's got to go someplace, and I don't know that the city is going to spend it on anything. They can't spend it on streets.

AW:

Yeah, yeah, because it's—I know when we were wrestling with that in Lubbock, they were some pretty straight and pretty winding [0:39:27].

JM:

It's got a little bitty narrow road, and that's to go down. Believe or not, we get checked, too. Oh, yeah, we get checked on that.

AW:

Yeah, that's right.

JM:

So it's not something that you can cheat about or anything like that. The only thing I've asked—the only reimbursement I've ever asked for, I think, was last year on fuel to go pick up some stuff in—north of San Anton. You know? I mean, that was—

AW:

That's a haul.

JM:

That was a hundred dollars' worth of fuel to go up there in my truck, pick it up and come back, you know? So that's the only reimbursement I've ever had from Storyfest.

AW:

What should I have asked you about in this discussion that I didn't?

JM:

Are we going to have fun?

AW:

I can answer that. I think so.

JM:

Yes, [laughter] we will. Other than that, I don't know. I think it's been very good. I don't know of anything that I could add at this point, really, unless you have more questions.

AW:

No. You've done a really good job. You've got—excuse me just one second. Let me—

[Pause in recording]

AW:

—aren't we?

JM:

We aren't anymore, that's for sure.

AW:

What is your mailing address?

JM:

Mailing address? [REDACTED].

AW:

[REDACTED], George West?

JM:

George West, [REDACTED].

AW:

Okay. Thank you so much.

JM:

Enjoyed it, actually.

AW:

Good. I tell people it's not—it's rarely fatal, and it's not all that unpleasant to get interviewed.

[Laughter]

JM:

It was good. I enjoyed it, myself.

AW:

Thank you.

End of Recording