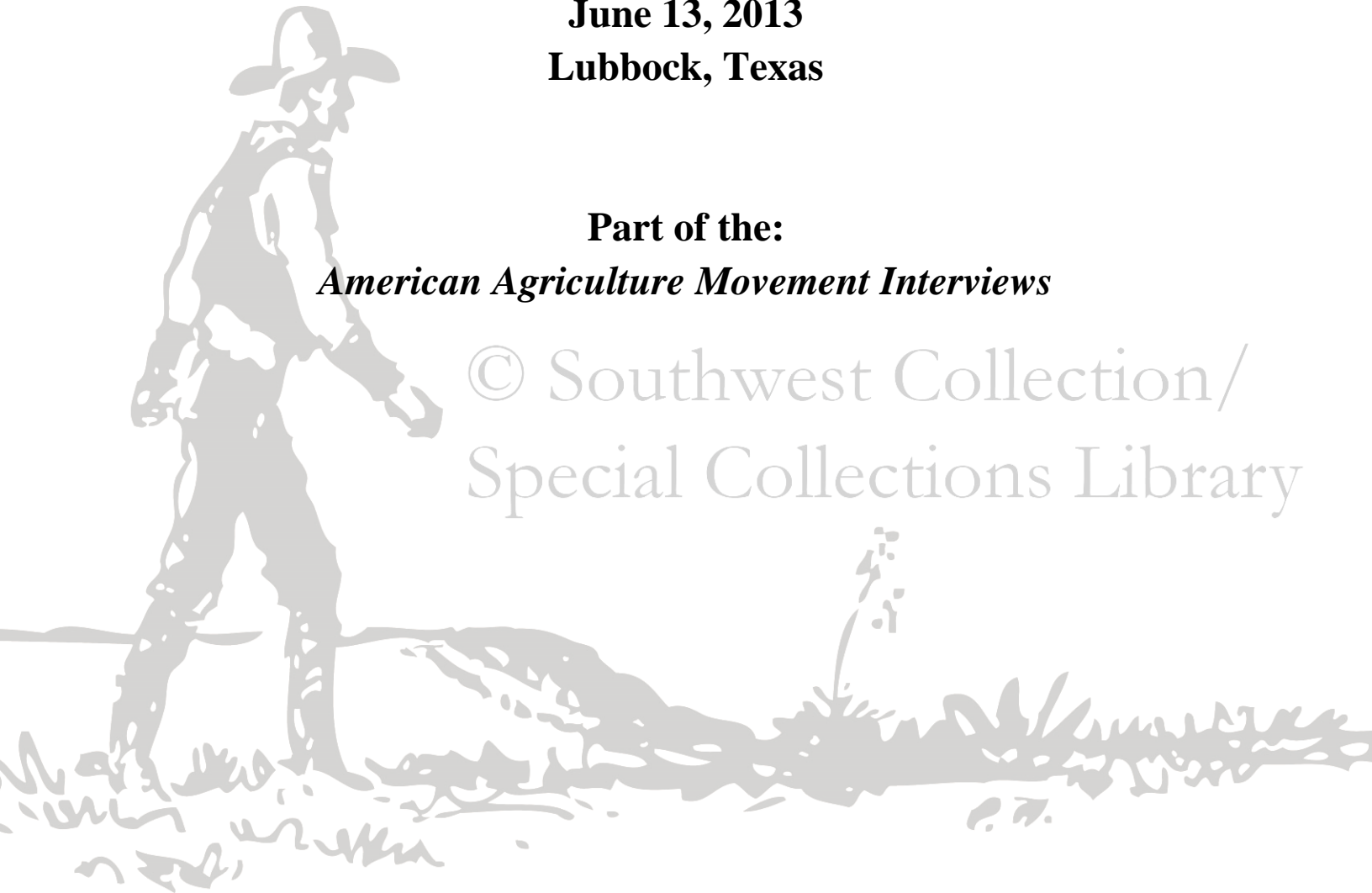


**Oral History Interview of
Kolleen and Gerald McCathern**

**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:

Done during an American Agriculture Movement Reunion held in Lubbock, this interview is a look into Kolleen McCathern's personal experiences with the Tractorcade to Washington D.C. in 1979. She was thirteen at the time when her father was involved in American Agriculture protests.

Length of Interview: 01:23:06

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Remembrances of the Washington D.C. Tractorcade	5	00:00:00
Gerald's Job as Spokesman	12	00:19:00
Selling Merchandise at Tractorcade	18	00:34:20
Kolleen Actively Engaged with Gerald's Political Work	22	00:43:35
Moving to Washington D.C.	24	00:48:12
More on Tractorcade from a "child's perspective"	25	00:51:00
Leaving Washington D.C.	27	00:56:35
Friends of McCatherns in Washington D.C.	29	01:02:20

Keywords

American Agriculture Movement, Tractorcade

David Marshall (DM):

Do you remember the incident when the police were with him, about to arrest him and you grabbed his leg?

Koleen McCathern (KM):

Yeah.

DM:

So you can talk about that?

KM:

Yeah. I mean we were talking last night about [it]. I got on the tractor when we got to the toll booth, and he was stopped. I ran and I jumped on the tractor.

Gerald McCathern (GM):

This was at three a.m. in the morning.

KM:

No, it wasn't quite three. It was after that because the sun was about to come up when y'all started.

GM:

Well it was three when we started.

KM:

Yeah. So I was asleep in the camper, and so when I felt the camper stop I woke up and I looked out the front and I saw that the toll booth was up there and the sun was—I could see it peeking up over the horizon, and I grabbed my coat and I was like, I'm out of here. And I ran. I don't know how far he was in front of me, but I ran down the road until I got to the tractor and came up behind him and whacked the door and the reporter was sitting there and he was like this. And Daddy reached over and opened the door. And he kept talking to this guy and I'm climbing over in the back and Daddy said, "Yeah, that's my daughter." And I just laid up in the back window back there on that foam behind the seat. That's how I rode into town. The traffic—I remember the traffic not being real happy with us.

DM:

(laughs) Honking or—?

KM:

Lots of looking and stuff. It was because you know, he was the first one and it was pretty awe inspiring. And as we got closer to town, because all the tractors were kind of coming up along beside us—but we reached a point, and I guess when we got close to the USDA or up to the USDA and sort of all the tractors were all coming up and just all cattywompus. (DM laughs) So we got out and at that point is where—because everything was happening so fast because here we are, we're in town and all the tractors are coming in—I mean they're still coming in. The reporter was talking to Daddy, and we were walking and I think I saw my brother with the camera because we got separated at some point. And he ended up—I don't know where he went so I think I followed my brother for a while and then I saw the camper.

We'd already found out that mother was on her way to the hospital, because she fell and broke her wrist. Arliss Edwards was driving the camper and had to hit the brakes. Well she happened to stand up then, and she rolled forward and put her wrist down. So they had to stop and call the ambulance, and they took Mother off to the hospital. We heard that on the CB. So you know, I was like, "Okay." So I saw my brother with the camera. So I went after him. And it didn't take long to lose Daddy because everybody was getting out of their tractors and stuff. And so I followed him around for a little while, and then I saw the camper. So I went to the camper, and Arlys was there manning the CB. And I wasn't in there very long, and I believe it was Robert Diller from Hereford came in the door and he said, "Where's Gerald at? He needs to get to the jail because somebody's there."

DM:

Someone had been arrested?

KM:

Yeah. And so he was going to go that way because I think Arlys said, "I think he's there." So Robert was going that way so I was following him because he was going where Daddy was at. And we were walking as fast as we could and we got to the jail about the time Daddy was coming out of it. And then somebody else said as we walked out, Gerald you need to get down here at this intersection—wherever it was at—it's bad, it's bad.

GM:

Let me add: the first time that I went to the jail a young man—fifteen, sixteen years old was parking his tractor on the street in the middle of the Mall. And as we walked by—I thought Kolleen was with me but she said she wasn't—as we walked by a police cruiser stopped there and got out and told that young tractor driver to move it off the street up on the grass. And he said, "Well my dad told me not to get on the grass." And he said, "I told you to get on the grass. If you don't get on the grass I'm going to arrest you." And the boy said, "I'm not going to get on the grass. My dad told me not to." And so he just grabbed the kid out and put him in a paddy

wagon, or in his squad car, and took off to the jail. So I knew where he was going. I didn't want that young man at jail by himself.

DM:

How old was he, you think?

GM:

Probably fifteen or sixteen. So I got there about the time he got there, and I asked the policeman, "What's it going to take now to get him out of here." He said, "Ten dollar fine." I pulled a ten dollar bill out and gave it to him and told this boy, "Let's go." So we went out, and that's when we met Kolleen.

KM:

And then we're going down—what was that intersection?

GM:

Third.

KM:

Was it right by the Justice Department?

GM:

It was Third and Constitution.

KM:

Like the Supreme Court building or the Justice building was right there on the corner.

GM:

I don't know.

KM:

I'm thinking because—well I'll tell you why in a minute. But we had to—I mean there were throngs of people walking to go to all these government jobs. Lots of suits and women in dress stuff—

DM:

Do you have an idea of about what time of day it was?

KM:

It had to have still been rush hour. But we get up to the intersection, we're getting close and there's just people everywhere, and we had to push our way through the crowd. And in the middle of the street is this green tractor. And when we walked up it was surrounded by police officers and there were those little mopeds that they were riding were all in front of it. And, I mean there were like cop cars pulled all in front of it. There was a paddy wagon. And as we walked up, Wayne Cryts¹ was being drug away and I remember he had a trickle of blood coming out of his eye right here. And they literally were dragging him by his behind. He saw us and he said, "Gerald, Gerald, you've got to stop this." I was just like, Oh my god. And they threw Wayne in and shut the door. At that point there was a guy Kenny—

GM:

Kenny Hilton from Nebraska.

KM:

Kenny Hilton in his green tractor and Daddy could tell you what started it. But when we walked up on it, on the opposite side of the street they already had the cab door open.

DM:

The police did?

KM:

Yeah the police had the cab door open, and there was a guy inside— because he had ahold of the steering wheel like this. And he was like beating his hands trying to get him to let loose. And about the time that we pulled up or walked up, they had just opened the door on our side of the street and a guy crawled up and started whacking him over the head.

DM:

They're using night sticks on them?

KM:

Uh-huh. And so it was about that time that Daddy stepped out into the street and started to walk over to—there was like a sergeant or you could tell there was like this one guy in charge. And Daddy walked up to him and said, "Let me talk to him. We can stop this." And he was like, "You need to get back on the sidewalk." Daddy said, "No, he's one of my guys. Let me—" And he said, "You're just going to jail." And he grabbed him by the arm, and I was standing behind him and that cop didn't even see me. But as soon as he grabbed him I grabbed the cop by the arm and yanked him. And I said, "You let my daddy go. You let my daddy go right now!"

¹ Kolleen McCathern noted she meant to say Wayne Peterson instead of Wayne Cryts.

DM:

You would have been how big by this time? How old were you?

KM:

I was thirteen. So I wasn't tall by any means, but I was able to grab his elbow, because he had ahold of Daddy. I never backed down from an argument, so—(laughter) I was like, "You let him go! That's my Daddy." He's got to bail everybody out you know.

GM:

It surprised the policeman because he hadn't seen Kolleen. She was back behind. He didn't realize what was happening, and when he looked down and saw this little girl, he felt like, I need to do something.

KM:

But yeah, so we stepped back on the curb. By this point they had busted out the back window of the tractor and one of the cops had his night stick under Kenny's neck and just yanked him out the back window, and he flopped down on the street. All the hydraulic hoses came undone and hydraulic fluid because the tractor is still running. The tractor was still running and the hydraulic fluid was spraying everywhere. So I think Daddy said, "Stay here." And he walked out there again and he said, "I can turn this off because it's hot grease." He was like, "You need to get back up there." So all we could do was stand on the curb and watch them whack this poor guy who apparently was told to go one direction, and the police tried to stop him and he just got—and popped the clutch in the tractor. Things happened but the reaction that the police had at that point—that was the worst thing. That was probably the casualty of the Tractorcade at that point was — because that was just ugly. And I remember standing there. Daddy was trying to get them to let him turn off the hoses and stuff. And I was looking at the people that were standing on the street. Nobody was moving. All these people in their business suits, and they had tears in their eyes for this kid that was getting beat up, because he wasn't that old. And I remember looking up and I don't know for sure what building it was, but I want to say it was like the Supreme Court building—

GM:

No. It wasn't the Supreme Court Building—

KM:

—or Justice building or something—it was one of the legal buildings. Big, white, with the columns. Because the corner—it was a pretty big intersection. At the light you turned left and then it had another concrete thing. You know, it was a big intersection.

DM:

Did that create a conflict in your mind? Here's this justice building and here's this injustice going on.

KM:

Yeah. I knew it was some kind of justice building. And I looked around me, and there wasn't a dry eye. I think at that point for me, because earlier I found it kind of funny that people in the traffic were flipping us off and things like that (laughs). You could see them cursing and honking their horns and everything. At that point, though—they could tell—we're just coming in big slow vehicles but what happened there—I mean obviously those people witnessed more than what Daddy and I saw. So they could see that he didn't do anything. That was pretty—

DM:

Did they gather around and watch or did they kind of continue by and watch as you went?

KM:

No everybody stopped because it was a crosswalk intersection. But they were lined down the street, and more people are coming up because that's the way they walk to work. And there just wasn't—I don't remember how many people ended up in the paddy wagon besides Wayne. I think there was somebody else that tried to stop them before we got there.

GM:

Yeah, the guy from South Dakota. They pulled a gun on him, and he was pretty tough. He was a South Dakota Congressman—State. And so when they pulled this gun he said that the barrel of it looked like it was that big around you know. But he said, "Feller, you either fire that S.O.B. or put it back in your pocket." And so the policeman looked at him a little bit and put the gun back down. But from that point Kolleen and I got separated again. I went back to the jail. I wanted to be there when Kenny got there because he was bleeding pretty bad— face, hands, and shirt torn, and of course oil all over him. And I got to the jail about the time they brought Kenny in. I could only get so far in the room where they was—I don't know what you call them—

DM:

Booking them?

GM:

Booking area. And so I hollered and I said, "Kenny, are you all right?" He looked at me and kind of grinned and he said, "Yeah, I'm okay." He had so much blood on him—on his hands, I told the booking sergeant there, I said, "I want you to take him to the hospital right now, and I want

him left in the hospital overnight because we don't know how bad he's hurt." And he didn't argue with me, he just turned and told them, "We'll book him and take him to the hospital."

DM:

Up to that point it sounds like there were a few times you tried to reason with them. You said, "I can go talk to this guy." And then you said, "I can turn the tractor off." But nothing doing on the part of the police—they were just not paying any attention. Is that the—

KM:

Well we had just gotten into town. There was a point where there was sort of a peace made. But this is like literally within the first couple of hours of getting into town.

DM:

It was the first reaction?

KM:

Yeah.

GM:

This group of tractors—the Colorado—the I-70 group—Kenny was with that group of tractors and they came in from the north. The campground that they were in was north. We came in from the southwest. So they were late getting in. All the other Tractorcades had arrived but the group coming in from the north was just getting there, and that's the reason that we ended up right there when that was happening.

KM:

But I think that because we had the headquarters at the Skyline at that point, and I had already as a child been to Washington so many times with Daddy that all that downtown area I knew like the back of my hand. I don't know how we got separated after that. I think I was kind of in shock. I'm sure that we walked away together because I think I remember telling Daddy, "All those people on the street were crying Daddy." I remember we were walking—probably I saw somebody else but—

DM:

Or something grabbed your attention.

KM:

Yeah. Either that, or he may have said that because there was so much happening so fast he may have told me to go back to the hotel.

GM:

About that time they had started the rally in front of the Capitol building you know where the reflection pond is? Between the reflection pond and Capitol building. And it was just covered with farmers. There was a lot of congressmen. Some of the senators was down there making speeches—farmers making speeches, congressmen making speeches. And so we all gathered there, and I think I got separated from her at that point—again.

DM:

Big crowds though.

GM:

Yeah. And I don't remember if I told Andy [Wilkinson] this the other day or not but, while we were all gathered there. There was a black dude who came up and said, "Are you McCathern?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Where is Mr. Kersey?" And Tommy was right there pretty close. So I said, "That's him." He said, "I want you and Mr. Kersey to go with me." I didn't know who he was. He had a zoot suit on—you know a hip hopper—lot of gold chains.

DM:

I thought you were talking about a policeman at first, but this was not.

GM:

No. I said, "Where are we going?" He said, "The mayor wants to talk to you." And so we walked down. It was about four blocks down. We left the crowd, just Tommy Kersey and myself. No, and we had a black farmer with us. His name was George Harrison who had come up with Tommy Kersey from Georgia. A well-educated man, he had about three degrees. But he was a farmer in Georgia. So we followed this dude down to the courthouse. There's a D.C. courthouse down there amongst all of them, and that was the mayor's office. And so we went in, and he introduced us to the mayor and the room was full of people—not farmers—just workers and whatever. So he took us back and introduced us to Mayor Marion Barry. You hear his name all the time. Very cordial, very nice man.

After he got through with the small talk he said, "I want you guys to know I was involved in the Martin Luther King protest. I got arrested twenty-seven times. I don't want to have to arrest you guys. I want you to do what you came here to do. I want you to do everything that you came here to do. We're going to help you, but you're going to have to obey some of our rules. I'm on the other side of the fence now. I've got to protect my people here in D.C. The rules are that you can take your tractors, and you can drive anywhere you want to in Washington D.C. anytime that you want to. We'll have an escort with you—a police escort. And you can't get on the street before nine in the morning and until after five in the afternoon during the rush hour. You can do anything you want to do as long as you stay peaceful. We want you to do what you came here to do to get your story told."

So that made us feel pretty good to know that they wasn't all against us. But now the police had been told—I found out later—the police had been told, “Try to cause all the ruckus you can when they first get there. Any kind of confrontation that you can make will help us to get these farmers out of town.” All you had to do is speak a little crossways or something, and they were going to try to arrest you or something.

DM:

Where did that instruction come from? From the police commissioner, you think? But not Marion Barry's office.

GM:

Well, each one of them got their own little world up there— their governing world. And they've got three or four police departments: the park police, the D.C. police, Capitol Hill police. And so actually all of the police groups had met with a group of our farmers a few days prior to us getting there with the tractors. And some of these rules and regulations was laid down then, but I wasn't there, I wasn't a part of it. So kind of like showing a politician saying, “Well I didn't ever hear that.” But anyhow, after the first day we were able to do just about whatever we wanted to do. We got along well with the police. They had their headquarters sitting right in the Mall, right next to our camper—our headquarters—was right across the street there from the police headquarters. Captain Klotz was in charge of all of the police that was involved in that area. So we eventually became pretty good friends working together. He found out that he could work with me, and I found out that I could work with him. And so anytime we wanted to take the farmers out, all I had to do is go over and knock on the door and say, “Hey we've got a bunch of farmers that want to go down to the Treasury Department. They want to go.” Get some police together.

DM:

Would this be on tractors or on foot?

GM:

Yeah on tractors.

DM:

How often would that happen? Was that a daily occurrence?

GM:

Sometimes two or three times a day.

DM:

Did you see the same thing—a rough first day and then them apparently saying, Well they're not going to turn around and go out of town today so then the policy changed?

KM:

Well, yeah. And then there's the point where they barricaded all the tractors.

DM:

Do you remember that?

KM:

Well I think we were at the hotel whenever that started going on. So everybody kind of ran out and, "They're doing what?" And the next thing we know there's busses everywhere because they did it while—they told us to park there. But then there was something going on so the tractors were there but the farmers weren't there. So obviously there was a meeting, and they just kind of took that. But somebody obviously stayed behind enough to come back and say this was going on. So yeah, I found in his buttons, found Mike's button that said, "I was a P.O.W. on the Washington Mall." (laughter)

GM:

She worked—we had a little closet in the Skyline [Hotel], and they set up a shop—caps, whatever—

KM:

Caps, pins, t-shirts.

GM:

Had all these pins and everything. They all wanted one of these little pins.

KM:

And the caps with the scrambled eggs on them [insignia on the bill of the cap] was what they called them.

GM:

But Kolleen and some of the other ladies, and Mike especially—if there was somebody there peddling or was there all the time, paid the expenses of rent on the office, the main office for the national headquarters for the time they were there, they sold enough stuff—souvenirs.

KM:

We had t-shirts and stuff and my cousin Andy was there with his dad, Don— Daddy's nephew. And Tim and Bev Hammond—Bev Hammond was, she spent a lot of hours in the strike office in Hereford [Texas], answering phones and stuff. And her son and my cousin and me got out of school. We all went to school together. Andy was a couple of years younger, Bob was a year older, and so they'd be out running around and then I'd go to find my running buddies because I'd lose Daddy again. Mother is in the hospital, you know—

DM:

Golly. How long was she over there by the way?

KM:

They had to put pins in her wrist.

DM:

Oh, golly.

GM:

She had quite a story to tell, being sent to the hospital before the tractors got into Washington D.C., and they had the television on in the waiting room or wherever they took her. And this announcer for the TV station looked like he'd been up all night and his tie was crooked and his hair was messed up, and he said, "There's tractors come from everywhere." He couldn't believe there was that many tractors in the whole world. He said, "It had to be the most devious plan that anybody every made to be able to do what these farmers are doing up here." We had no plans. (laughter) No plans at all.

DM:

All negative, huh.

GM:

But then they put a cast on her and got it too tight, and before she got back to the motel her hand started swelling real bad. So a friend of mine from South Texas, Gene Proctor, was there and he said, "We need to get that taken care of." So they took a cab and told this cab they wanted to go to the hospital. They didn't know where the hospital was in D.C. They had left the hospital over in Virginia. This cab, he said, "Which hospital?" "Well we don't know which hospital." So he took her way back over on the other side of D.C. to a hospital over there and they took the cast off and redid it there. But then, of course we had snow. There was snow every place and cold and mist and rain. They couldn't get a cab there. So Gene asked somebody at the door at the hospital or whatever, "Where is the Skyline Inn?" I guess. So they pointed way back over there and said, "See that tall building way back over there?" It must have been two or three miles. He said, "Yeah." "Well it's right by there by that." So they had to walk. They couldn't get a cab. There

weren't any cabs running because of the—and she had on sandals walking in ice water for two or three miles to get back over to the motel.

DM:

What an ordeal.

GM:

But that was her day, her first day in Washington D.C.

KM:

I remember at one point, I don't know when it was. They were having some kind of rally. There was always somebody following Daddy around after that first day because he couldn't keep up with anything, and he's always been pretty much an accident waiting to happen. And there was one point where I had been out running around or selling something and I heard them say, "Oh Gerald just came in. He fell off the tractor or something." And I was like, "What?" And I went running in there and pushed my way through everybody, and he's sitting there with his hat all cattywompus and somebody's trying to pull his boot off and he's like laughing. He said, "I'm okay, I'm okay." And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "I was sitting up on the edge of the tractor—"

GM:

I was standing on that step going in. Bruce Parr's tractor— an International tractor— I think it was a 1014 or 1046 or something.

KM:

It had dual tires on it.

GM:

But they had a problem down at the other end of the Mall. And Bruce said, "Get on my tractor and I'll take you down there." So I was just standing on this—I don't know if you remember how the steps are on those tractors, there are two about that big around (gestures). And I was standing on that one, and I don't know if I slipped or if I was talking to him or something but I turned my foot and I caught my foot between the lugs on the tractor and that step and it tore the heel off of my boot, tore my boot, and my ankle was already all swelled up.

KM:

You have bad ankles anyway (laughs)

GM:

It looked like it had to be broken or something, but I didn't have time to go get it checked. They wrapped it up a little bit and gave me a crutch, and so I run around the rest of the day on a crutch.

DM:

Well you almost went the same route as your wife then?

GM:

Yeah. I didn't ever go to the doctor with it though. But when I got it caught I hollered at Bruce right quick and he threw the break on it. Otherwise it would have just sucked my whole leg in there, and that step was sharp. It would have probably cut my foot off. There were some good things that happened and some bad things that happened.

DM:

With all the bustle of activity I can just imagine being in a hurry here, running over to do this.

KM:

There was always that—I mean after the first day, it was like you know, they had two people with him because that was when people wanted—they wanted interviews, they wanted meetings, they wanted this or that. So Mother was not getting around real good. I think my sister was kind of taking care of Mama some. And so I would maybe go with Daddy to the Skyline. We were staying in an apartment, somebody's apartment.

GM:

Well yeah it was there—

DM:

Near the Skyline?

KM:

It was just right off of—

GM:

Pretty close to the Skyline.

KM:

It wasn't too far off. It was a couple of blocks away from the Mall and downtown and everything.

GM:

Well it was probably closer to the Library of Congress and the Supreme Court building. Just a block down from them where we had an apartment that we had rented before we got up there.

DM:

But the Skyline was kind of the central place?

KM:

Yeah.

DM:

This is where they were selling things? Who were the enterprising people who were selling?

GM:

That was my son, Mike.

DM:

Did he have them made beforehand?

KM:

Yeah we had like boxes and boxes. We were selling out. We sold out of those caps. When people see them today, they're still like, "I never did get one of those." Because I think he had to order some more a couple of times.

DM:

These caps that you're wearing were from there? I thought this was something that was made maybe recently.

GM:

No we had a different—had a deal down there that said 1977.

KM:

Seventy-nine. But it had all this stuff on the bill. That was something new. So they all would come up and they would say, "I want one of those scrambled egg caps." That's what we called them. Because it looked like you had scrambled eggs on your bill. (laughs)

GM:

And by the way, while all this was taking place I didn't know that my wife had been hurt.

DM:

Oh, golly. Just too much going on.

GM:

Yeah it was after I hurt my foot and got back to the apartment that I found out that she had been hurt, and she had gone through all of that trying to get her arm set and get back to the motel.

KM:

I thought—we didn't hear on the CB—didn't Arlys say something about that?

GM:

I don't remember knowing at all anything about it until we got back to the room.

KM:

There was too much—I mean it was like—

DM:

Especially for a thirteen year old girl. Your daddy is a celebrity in the middle of all this and everything going on and then your mama running off to the hospital. And then all these other people you know going this way and that—the police—

KM:

But that was the thing. It was like there wasn't one time that I ever felt—the most scared that I was was when they were going to throw him in jail. Every other time I was fine. If I didn't leave the apartment with him, I would ride with my sister to go—we'd either walk or take a cab down to the Skyline. But then I'd go wander around, and I always had enough money in my pocket to get a cab and I always knew—I had several cab drivers that would say, "So you know where you're going?" "Yes. I need to go—they're meeting at the—." A couple of times we had to go—what was at the Capitol Hill Hilton?

GM:

No it was the Quality Inn. The Quality Inn at Capitol Hill. We had another office set up over there later on.

KM:

Yeah. Anyway, I always knew where something was going on or else I would just go to the Skyline. But I knew how to walk everywhere because I had been there already. And I always knew, you know, it didn't matter which farmer, if they didn't know me—I could just tell them, "Can you radio around and see if you can find the wagon master?" (laughter)

GM:

The environment in 1979 was different than it is now. You wouldn't dare take a thirteen year old little girl and turn her loose in Washington D.C. without supervision now. We didn't think anything about it. But she wasn't the only kid. There were a lot of kids that came. Maybe they didn't come with the Tractorcade but had gotten there and they were getting an education. An education nobody else had ever gotten.

DM:

Absolutely. Well how many do you think were there? How many children would you guess?

GM:

After the first day there was a gob of them— Virginia and Maryland, Delaware farmers had come to town with their children but on the Tractorcades coming in with the tractors—of course a lot of them flew in.

KM:

Yeah we flew in on the first or the second, something like that.

GM:

But I bet there was a thousand or more kids.

DM:

Wow. Some of these attended some kind of school? Is that what I understand? Someone gave some instruction because the kids were out of school. Do you remember anything about that?

KM:

I don't remember that, but I know T.G. said that he had to study for two hours because he was fifteen. But I guess the Schrodgers took their kids?

GM:

Well John Stultz and I don't know his sister's name—she was on "Good Morning America" with me one morning—Patsy, Patty Stultz. Their mother was a schoolteacher in Yuma, Colorado, and so she took a bus or a motorhome or something and she had a school and she taught those kids every day. And she would teach them the history of where they were at and where they were going. And they probably got more education out of that one trip than they got all year in the school.

DM:

Was she kind of tying this event in?

GM:

Yeah, yeah. See the Stultzes and the Schrodgers and the Bitners and all that Colorado bunch were all together. So on their Tractorcade, they decided they was going to take some children along. I don't know how many children they had. I heard that she had five in her class on the bus going up there, but I think they had more kids that went along that were in her school.

DM:

Did you have any trouble getting out of school? Was there any flack about that?

KM:

You know, at that point in my life, because whenever they had the meeting that ended up getting the map out to plan the Tractorcade, Daddy told me, he said, "You're not going to be in school for this many days. We're going to Colorado." I said, "Why?" "It's top secret. You can't say anything. You can't say anything when we get back." I was like, "Cool." (laughter) And I'm sitting out there. All the ladies were in the kitchen, talking about I guess— running phone banks and stuff. And I was like, always, anytime that I got to go with Daddy to something, I was always sitting in his lap listening. I grew up knowing a lot of these men from the time that I was little. They all called me the boss. (laughter)

GM:

She was with us when we went to Purgatory. Our Purgatory meeting was a secret meeting where we planned our Tractorcade.

DM:

I see.

KM:

And we were way out somewhere.

GM:

The Purgatory River went through the Schroder ranch.

DM:

Oh this is what y'all were talking about yesterday when you said, "West of Trinidad." Out there.

GM:

Yeah. Out in the middle of nowhere.

DM:

Okay. So you were at that?

KM:

Uh-huh.

GM:

At the time the Schrodgers were—I don't know, Gene may have told you, but they were in a lawsuit with the federal government. They were trying to take part of their ranch away from them to use it for a bombing area for the fort there in Colorado Springs. I think they finally had to give it up, the power of—what is it?

DM:

Imminent domain.

GM:

Imminent domain. They took part of the ranch away from them I guess they paid for it. But that was all going on with them at the same time that we was out on the Tractorcades.

DM:

How many weeks were you in Washington?

KM:

I was only there for one week then. That summer we were back up there weren't we?

GM:

Yeah we was there three months when we took the tractors all up there before. We went up in February and March and April and May— before they finally voted and we came home.

DM:

Okay.

GM:

But I was gone nearly all that three months. I didn't realize it until my wife reminded me here recently.

KM:

But there were so many times—my childhood was we'd go to Washington D.C., and one day I might go look at the Smithsonians with Mother and the next day Daddy would say, "I've got to go meet with congressmen and stuff." And I was like, "I'm going." And it was great. We'd go into George Mahon's office, and usually he was coming out the door because he would know we

were coming. And he would say, “Hey Gerald! I see you brought the boss with you.” And he’d come in and hand me—was it him who’d always hand me the buckeye?

GM:

The buckeye nuts? Yeah.

KM:

And he’d always say, “You rub these for luck.”

DM:

Right, that was his trademark.

KM:

And Daddy would sit there and visit with him for a while and George would say, “Let’s go down here. I want you to talk to somebody.” And I got to ride that train that goes between the House and the Senate so many times. Now it’s like that’s way off limits, I think, after 9/11.

DM:

And how many kids get to do this? You know—that’s incredible.

KM:

Right? But we’d be walking down the hall and somebody would call out, “Hey Gerald how are you doing? I haven’t seen you in a while.” Or, What happened with this or that? And Daddy would say, “This is my daughter Kolleen.” And I was the only kid who had an autograph book that had politician’s autographs in it. (laughter)

DM:

So you carried your autograph book around huh?

KM:

Well I got to a point where I did. There’s so many—I got to meet so many of the powers that be. That’s why I think this is great, because it’s like I tell people, My Daddy did this and I was with him. Because he’s always been—that was his life. He doesn’t brag. He’s very humble about it you know. If a conversation comes up he’ll say, “Yeah I took part in that.” Because no, it wasn’t just him and it didn’t start as—you know he didn’t start something. But he has this natural ability apparently to be a leader. I sometimes wonder about that because he trips a lot. (laughter)

GM:

Well I—

KM:

But I know— because he's like the smartest man.

GM:

Every one of us was involved in the Tractorcades. Dan [Taylor] and Dan Carter over here, and Marvin [Meek]. But no matter who or where they were from, each one of them was an individual and he was his own boss. He could do what he wanted to do and they kind of pushed me to the forefront. But it was kind of like, I think it was Confucius or one of the Chinese philosophers who said— in talking, “Well I've got to go. There goes my people and I'm their leader.”

(laughter)

DM:

Right. Well that's one of the interesting things about this whole movement. You see so much cooperation without one dictatorial kind of leader you know who is forcing it all.

KM:

Well you're talking about country people, country folk. This is like the first time that they've ever been rambunctious about anything. Or what is it that Willie [Nelson] called you? Rabble-rousers. This is like the first time— all this pent up political frustration all these men are going through—all these families are going through and man we hit the big time you know. There's got to be—they're naïve, and a lot of them have never even been to Washington much less a city that big and so you've got to have someone that you can at least tell yourself, If I have a problem I know who to contact.

GM:

After Reagan was elected, he had promised Marvin that if he was elected he would appoint somebody to serve from American Ag in the Department of Agriculture. So when that was all said and done, well they appointed me. So we moved to Washington D.C. and Kolleen went to school—

KM:

I didn't like it there.

DM:

How long were you there?

KM:

I wasn't there very long. I was kind of bratty about that whole thing.

GM:

We were there during the summer, and she wasn't in school. But then when she was a senior in high school and I can understand—

KM:

I was a junior.

GM:

She had been in the same school all her life there at Hereford. And all the other kids that was her age— graduating and everything. And she didn't know anybody up there except Kent Hance's son.

KM:

He was in my English class.

GM:

Ron— she knew him. But we lived over there, and Bonnie didn't like it at all. She was afraid to drive in the traffic. I was gone all day—leave early in the morning and get in late at night. So I finally decided that I was probably going to end up with a divorce if I didn't make some changes, and so I resigned and came back home.

DM:

What a difference too—Hereford, Texas and Washington D.C.

KM:

I liked it at first in the summer when I wasn't in school. I liked it because I could go down and get on the subway and go into town and meet Daddy. And I remember being in his office one day and the really big guy that was one of the Iraqi—those people that were kidnapped in Iraq for so long?

DM:

Oh yeah, the hostage crisis.

KM:

Hostage, yeah—was in some office and Daddy shook his hand or something or he walked by. Anyway, we were in there with somebody and he was like, "He was one of the hostages." And I was like, whoa.

GM:

She got a real education.

DM:

Oh yeah. As far as the Tractorcade, was there anything else that we should know about from the child's perspective that you haven't already talked about?

KM:

Um, you know, I absorbed so much. I loved to watch everything. It's like I see it, and its stuff—I'll never forget it. I've told my kids stories and you know sometimes they're like, "Mom, really you've told me this." But sometimes they really don't—because every time you tell a story it's like whatever mood you're in it comes out a little different. And as my kids got older they appreciated it more. My youngest son every year when he gets in a new history class or whatever he's like, "Are we going to write any papers? My granddad was the Tractorcade leader." And so I'm glad that there's finally going to be somewhere where he can go and actually find research and footage and stuff. But you know, to me it was greatness because it was all of my life and following Daddy around or him being gone because he was involved in NFO, and he would go to conventions and have meetings—

GM:

Campaigned for Kent Hance.

KM:

A lot of stuff—and sometimes I was with him and sometimes I wasn't. So to me it was just another step in that whole process. The most important one probably because somebody needs to listen to us, and these are the lengths we have to go to.

DM:

It caught attention.

KM:

Mm-hm. And so it's something that will never go away. But because I was only there for that week—but like I said, I spent a lot of time just kind of wandering around from the camper to the—and I was never—I would always have somebody say, "Call and find out where the wagon master is at," because I'd be wanting to know what was going on, because usually that's where the action was.

DM:

Right. Was there any interaction between the kids that were there? I mean did you see kids from Colorado or were you separate and doing your own things?

KM:

You know when I wasn't with Daddy or at the hotel I was, like I said, with my cousin and with Bob because we were from the same town. And we'd wander around. Every once in a while we'd run into Doug Roming. His dad Ralph went on the Tractorcade. One day I remember we were kind of walking down the Mall where nothing was parked, except a bunch of mopeds, the police mopeds were parked. And we came up on Doug Roming who was maybe a year or two older than me, and he was walking along grinning and he was like, "Y'all want some of these?" And he pulls his hand out of his pocket, and he's got a bunch of toothpicks and he had been going along and putting the toothpicks in the key holes of those mopeds and breaking them off. And I was like, I'm pretty sure that Daddy might not appreciate if I did that. I have to like put on a responsible side if I'm going to be able to wander around like this. Knock yourself out though!

DM:

You were the wagon master's daughter.

GM:

He had accomplished one thing: it kept the mopeds out of the park.

(laughter)

KM:

They couldn't go anywhere so. But right after that, this man walks up to us and he was like, "I see y'all walking and you've got on these American Agriculture things. Are y'all part of the thing?" I was like, "Yes." Mostly because Bob was really tall. So he was addressing him more, and Bob doesn't talk a lot. So my cousin Andy, he was like—

GM:

He doesn't talk much either.

KM:

Yeah, he doesn't talk much either. So he kind of addressed some questions to him. And finally I said, "Well actually my dad is Gerald McCathern, and he is the one that is the national wagon master." So he asked us a few questions, but he was some reporter for some newspaper. He only talked to us for a few minutes. But I don't know because we were in the park by ourselves. I mean we were out there on the Mall by ourselves. And I didn't really say a whole lot. I was just like, "Yeah, we've seen a lot. We're here for a good reason. We're not mean people." Then we just kind of went on our way. Andy was like, "Did you ask him what paper he was from?" And I was like, "Was I supposed to?" (laughter) I don't know.

But I will tell you, I have a story about trying to come back from there. Because when we flew out, when we were flying into town, it was right after that airplane crashed into that airport in

Chicago. Well we had to fly through Chicago to get to D.C., and there was a bunch of us. But there were like thirteen McCatherns on this flight. Because my sister went, and I think Mike was flying in, Mother, then my cousin Andy and his mom. I don't know— there was several McCatherns on the flight. And we had to walk past the plastic—all they had was plastic up where the plane had crashed through. We were like, "Wow this was on the news." I mean that was on the news more than the tractors were, which is kind of sad at that point. But we hadn't gone into town yet. So when we were flying home, we get to Chicago to change planes and I think I went to the bathroom or something, but I get up there and Mother gets on the plane and I'm the last McCathern getting on the plane. And I'm like the last one standing there and these people are telling me, "We're full." And I said, "What?" I'm looking around, I go, "What? Wait, I'm Kolleen McCathern. Look at your list—all my family is on the plane, okay? I'm thirteen!" And she goes, "Well we don't have any more seats." And I go, "I'm pretty sure that this says that we have reservations, and this is my boarding pass and that plane isn't going anywhere." And they shut the door. Mother and Cathy didn't even notice that I wasn't even there. And I'm standing there like, "You better open the door because you're not leaving me in Chicago. I don't have any money, my Daddy is in Washington D.C. with the tractors and my mom and my sister are on that plane and the rest of my family. And you go down that list and you find my name because I'm supposed to be on that plane and I don't care if you stewardesses have to stand up but you're putting me on that plane." Well Bob and Andy were all excited because they were sitting there by one of the stewardess's seats. They thought she was pretty hot. So they open the doors and everybody kind of turns around and here I come, and I'm sure that I had smoke coming out of my ears. And Mother was like, "Were you not on this plane?" And I said, "Well now I am, thank you." So the stewardess sitting by Bob gets up and moves and I sat down and he was like, "We were going to get to sit by the stewardess." And I said, "Well I was going to have to stay in Chicago so get over it." It was like, yeah.

DM:

(laughs) I'm glad you spoke out. I mean some thirteen year old girls wouldn't have done that, and they might have gotten left behind.

KM:

I was raised following him around. At home when everybody goes into their political spiels and stuff—when politics and religion come up I usually leave the room because he raised us to have our opinions and we all are allowed to express our opinions. Most of the time we don't agree, but when it comes to farm politics, that's my soapbox. It was everything that he lived and breathed, and I followed him everywhere he went. My brother and sister are so much older than me that they were raised when he was still just farming.

DM:

Okay, I see.

KM:

It wasn't really until I was born that he started getting political. He was just really good at it. People listened to him when he talks. So that's how come me and Daddy can argue about stuff. Because I was always there, and I learned how to argue from him.

DM:

(laughs) You got the lifelong education anyhow.

KM:

I did.

DM:

Okay. Well do y'all have anything else to add? I know we've talked to y'all a lot and I appreciate all the good information.

KM:

I'm glad that you're doing this.

DM:

This will go in the archives. And by the way, George Mahon's collection is at our archives as well. And he probably has some information tucked away on the movement.

GM:

Yeah I wanted to make one statement. I met a lot of politicians, but the only one I ever really respected was Mr. George.

DM:

A lot of people say that too.

KM:

He was so nice. And he always remembered me. Like Kent, Chancellor.

GM:

Kent wasn't there then.

KM:

No, I know.

GM:

He took George's place. But Kent is a whole lot like Mr. George.

DM:

I'm glad you had a friend in Washington too. Were there others that you could point out and say, these are helpful to us?

GM:

Well you never know when you're dealing with politicians, if they're being honest with you. But we received a lot of help from Senator [Bob] Dole and Senator [John] Tower. Most everybody that was involved was looking more to the Democrat Congressmen for help. But of course Senator Dole, he sponsored our bill with the Dole Flexible Parity bill. And Senator Tower worked with Dole hand in hand trying to get the bill passed for us.

KM:

We would see him a lot.

GM:

They could have been doing it for politics, but at the time I didn't think so. I thought they were really sincere in trying to help us solve a problem.

DM:

I was in Washington in '77 as a high school kid with that FFA conference that they used to hold in Washington. And John Tower really embraced us, showed us around and kind of took us under his wing so that was pretty impressive.

KM:

He always remembered my name too. We would see him enough.

GM:

But they were a big help to us. So I respect them for it. At the time I was a Democrat. I'm an Independent now. I say a pox on both parties. (laughter)

DM:

It's easy to see a lot of problems in both parties.

GM:

But they'll never make another George Mahon.

DM:

Any final thoughts?

KM:

I have always been his [Gerald McCathern] number one fan. And so I'm probably the proudest wagon master daughter ever.

DM:

Well I probably shouldn't say this to you because I know you're a pretty modest guy, but you've heard the same thing from several people, at least several people or a dozen people here. You know I've heard, "I'd follow Gerald McCathern anywhere." You know, that kind of comment.

KM:

Well you know, I always tell people, I have my Rick Perry story. And it's just recent, but he did go on the Tractorcade. And Daddy called me one day and said, "Rick's got my books, and he's got this book that came out, Boy Scouts or something, but I want to get his book. I want an autographed copy because he has mine. Will you go?" Because it was in Dallas and I was there. And he said, "Will you go and get me an autograph?" I couldn't tell him no so I was at Borders [Bookstore] with all these people in their scout uniforms and everything and here I am. And I got my number when I got there, and I sat and I waited. By the time I got up there the store had already closed there were so many people. So I didn't even stand in line. They get to a certain number and then they call the next group up. So as I'm still standing in line and after the store is closed, the people are kind of looking at me like, "Well what scout are you with?" I said, "Oh yeah I'm not so much a scout kind of person. My dad kind of got Mr. Perry—Governor Perry started in politics; so he sent me over here to get an autograph." And they're kind of, "Yeah, whatever."

So by the time I get up to the table, he's sitting up there with his head down and he's waiting for somebody to write on the sticky and I just stood there and I said, "In 1979 you were in Washington D.C. following around a little man." And he goes, "Oh my god, you're Gerald's daughter." And I went, "Yes, yes!" He hadn't even looked up. He was like, "Oh my gosh. You had to have been a baby." I said, "I was thirteen." He goes, "That's where I got my start. He's my mentor. I have his books. I can sit at my desk and tell you exactly. I can look up and see Gerald's books, and they're autographed to me." And he signed that book, "To my mentor." And he was asking about me and Daddy, and I was just like so proud. And the people that were standing and still waiting were like, Okay well maybe she wasn't so full of it. (DM laughs) Because he stood there—stood up and shook my hand and talked to me there for a long time. Those other people, poor people that were still waiting. But you know it woke him up a little bit because he was about to nod off. I have never seen so many people but you don't get that chance with the Governor. So I tell it and always start out with, "I don't care what you think of Rick Perry's politics, but I have a Rick Perry story."

And that means a lot to me because Daddy had an impression on the Kent Hances and the Rick Perrys and the George Mahons and John Towers. The Bushes both still know him, walk up to him by first name. He was in Austin talking to [George Bush] Senior at this book conference and it was whenever George [W. Bush] Junior was just starting to run for president the first time and he walked over to his dad's thing because he was governor then and he said, "Well hey Gerald, how are you doing? I didn't know you were here."

Not many people can say that they have pictures of their little farmer dad sitting across the table from Reagan and Carter. And George Bush Senior flew him to Houston to get his opinion on the farm politics before he ran for president and ended up being Reagan's Vice President, right? So I wasn't there—I didn't get to go sit at the president's table. They kind of put the kaubash on that, but there was so much of it that I was and that's something that most people don't get.

DM:

Oh, no. That's priceless.

GM:

Her sister says she remembers a lot of things that didn't happen.

DM:

(laughs) Thank y'all so much. I really appreciate that.

GM:

Thanks.

KM:

Thank you.

DM:

Thank you.

End of Interview

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