

AN AQUEDUCT PATROLMAN/RESERVOIR KEEPER'S LIFE

ALVIN EDGAR AND MARY JANE MAJORS

Interviewed by Dick Nelson

One of a series of oral histories covering the growth and development of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power as seen by the participants - its employees.

Produced by

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Biographical Notes

Alvin Edgar Majors

Born: November 8, 1908 in Cortez, Colorado.

Parents: Jesse Wilbur Majors and Julia Mae (Schalles) Majors.

One brother and three sisters.

Married: May 11, 1941 in Mojave, California to Mary Jane McIver.

Mary Jane born June 2, 1920 at Los Angeles, California. Her parents were Murdo George and Mary Katherine (Russell) McIver.

Children: Kathleen Mae (Majors) Fanell  
Russell Alvin  
Donald Raymond  
Dennis George  
Marilyn Jane (Majors) Kriss  
Kenneth Vernon

Grandchildren: There are 20.

Alvin joined the DWP July 1, 1925 as a laborer in the water system. Retired December 1, 1973 as a reservoir keeper at Fairmont Reservoir.

This is to certify that I have reviewed this transcript and attest that it is true and accurate. Also, by my witnessed signature below, I grant the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, or its designee(s), sole right to use this material in any way, and for any purpose, it deems appropriate.

Alvin Edgar Majors 7/15/91  
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TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE ONE

ALVIN EDGAR AND MARY JANE MAJORS

GIVEN THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 1991

AT

THEIR HOME IN ONYX, CALIFORNIA

THE INTERVIEWER IS DICK NELSON

**NELSON:** Okay Al, why don't you tell us when and where you were born and your early days while growing up.

**MAJORS:** I was born in Cortez, Colorado, November 29, 1908. We moved from Cortez to Pagosa Springs, Colorado and as to what date

that was, I don't know for sure. Then we went over the Rocky Mountains on the east side to Del Norte, Colorado. We left there in 1924 and we went to school there, of course, and went to school a little while here in Wilmington and then I went to work for the Water Department. It was just the Water Department then. My uncle worked for them and that's how I happened to get on.

**NELSON:** What was your uncle's name?

**MAJOR:** Raleigh Mitchell.

**NELSON:** And what did he do? Was he in the Water Department too?

**MAJORS:** Yes. He was a foreman in the Water Department. Then the superintendent was John Frye and he was a big, old, burly, Irishman. Just a wonderful man. We all loved him and would do anything in the world for this man. He was a guy that would really stand up for his men. That's the one thing I remember so well.

**NELSON:** What exactly were your duties?

**MAJORS:** Well, they were mostly construction and maintenance for the Water Department. After July 1, 1925, when I went to work for them, we were building what they called a "gallery," a big pipeline about 4 1/2' - 5' in diameter that was put in the bottom of the river about 20' deep. It was cemented up about half way

and the top part was not cemented so that the winter rains could pour in there from the river and in the summer they would pump water in there. And they dug a string of wells along there and pumped into the gallery.

**NELSON:** This was in the area which is now Griffith Park, Crystal Springs?

**MAJORS:** Crystal Springs. It's right under the freeway now, but it was on the east side of the golf course of Griffith Park. Then we worked there all that summer and we did maintenance work in the old original tunnel that went way up along the hills in Griffith Park and up to the Headworks Pumping Plant and on above. We'd be doing work there working on those wells and tunnels. It was real deep under Griffith Park there and the line came along Riverside Drive and then it went under Elysian Park through a tunnel, started about Pasadena Avenue bridge and went through to Buena Vista Reservoir where there was a pumping plant.

**NELSON:** What was the size of that tunnel?

**MAJORS:** It wasn't a very big tunnel, it didn't seem like. I'm not sure that I was even in the tunnel. That Buena Vista must have been one of the old original reservoirs for the City when it was very small. It wasn't even owned by the Department originally.

**NELSON:** How many men were in your crew at that time that you worked with?

**MAJORS:** There were about twenty.

**NELSON:** All under Mr. Frye?

**MAJORS:** Yes. And I would like to say one thing about building that big pipeline under the river. What you did then for power, your superintendent went down to Los Angeles someplace, southern Los Angeles, and he rented a bunch of mules and that's what they used for power for moving dirt and, of course, the gas and electric drag line -- cast that dirt out and they had a bunch of men and mules and fresnoes and they'd drag that dirt out on the spoil bank. That was along about the last days for the mules, I guess.

**NELSON:** Your work was a lot of pick and shovel type work?

**MAJORS:** Oh yes. I was raised on pick and shovel. You had your part to dig and I was only 16 1/2 at the time. I had to do my part of it.

**NELSON:** What kind of wages were you getting at that time?

**MAJORS:** We were getting \$4 a day. That was the most money I'd ever seen in my life. Then we had two weeks vacation. We worked six days a week.

**NELSON:** Where were you living at that time?

**MAJORS:** I was living in a house right off of Riverside Drive.

**NELSON:** Were you with your family or you were by yourself?

**MAJORS:** Yes. With our family.

**NELSON:** I might go back and pick up on question. What did your father do for a living?

**MAJORS:** He was a shoe and harness maker.

**NELSON:** Did he come to Los Angeles?

**MAJORS:** Yes. In 1925.

**NELSON:** Did he pursue that occupation here?

**MAJORS:** Yes he did, all his life. Didn't make any harness here, but he worked on shoes.

**NELSON:** Do you remember any other fellows that worked with you in that first gang that you were in?

**MAJORS:** Yes. There was a kid about my age by the name of John Banning and there was Jimmy Chappell, Bob Bolletti, John Baptiste,

Fred Marshall, Bill Mitchell, Joe Hernandez, to name a few that I can remember.

**NELSON:** Okay. No problem. What was a typical day? How did your day go? Where did you assemble and how did you get to the job and how did you get back home?

**MAJORS:** We had to furnish our own transportation.

**NELSON:** To the job site?

**MAJORS:** To the job site, yes and we just went to work at 7:00 a.m. and worked an eight hour day, had an hour off for lunch and I'll never forget my first day. We were cutting brush and trees to clear for this big pipeline and about 10:00 a.m. I was just about dead. I thought noon would never come. That first day was the worst day I ever had in my life. I was only 16 1/2 and weighed about 135 pounds, maybe.

**NELSON:** A few calluses were created I suspect, blisters?

**MAJORS:** Oh yes. You didn't have no gloves. Your hands got hard.

**NELSON:** At the end of the day then, I guess there was car pooling and things like that?

**MAJORS:** Yes, we had to ride with somebody.

**NELSON:** Did you have a car at that time?

**MAJORS:** No, I didn't have anything. Two years later I had a motorcycle.

**NELSON:** You mentioned lunch time. I guess in those days they didn't have the lunch cart that came around. What did you take for lunch?

**MAJORS:** We'd take a couple of sandwiches and maybe a piece of fruit. I remember one old guy, Bill Taylor, he'd have a great big old T-bone steak. Hold on to the bone on one side and that's all he brought, but we didn't have coffee. I was a kid. I didn't drink coffee. We had water. Sandwiches, maybe a cake and fruit.

**NELSON:** Did you see any of the brass? Did they come out at that time?

**MAJORS:** Yes, we did. Bill Mulholland, he'd come out once in a while and he didn't talk to us laborers, but he handed me a shovel one time. That was kind of historical to do some shoveling with. He was a kind of a gruff guy. St. Francis Dam hadn't broke yet at that time and he was kind of gruff, but believe me you'd want to be working when he come along.

I remember a guy got canned right after he left because he was standing doing nothing. Fred Fisher would come on the job once in a while. He was Chief Mechanical Engineer.

**NELSON:** You said you were paid \$4 a day. You were a permanent employee at that time?

**MAJORS:** Yes, that's right. I've got the card yet that I signed when I went out to Crystal Springs.

**NELSON:** Then after that project, what happened Al?

**MAJORS:** Well, let's see now. Like I say, after we put that project in, put all those wells down and that pipeline, we did a lot of maintenance work. We worked at the different reservoirs and pumping plants and the aqueducts and tunnels and worked on pipelines. We put in steel pipelines, drive pipe, old drive pipe, some were welded and some were cast iron leaded joints. We put a cast iron small line around lower Franklin and a guardrail of concrete around there, a wall. Worked at upper Franklin, Stone Canyon, cut brush and then we actually got as far as San Pedro when they were building an underground reservoir down there.

We'd go down to Ducommun Yards, get on the truck in the dark, go down there, work eight hours, come back, get on my motorcycle at Ducommun, come home and it was dark all the way, going and coming because we were putting in eight hours right there on the

job. There was no travel time in those days. You were glad to get it too because the depression was starting.

**NELSON:** How long did you stay in the crew that Mr. Frye supervised?

**MAJORS:** I stayed nine years and then, I'd been home so long and I hadn't seen nothing so I decided to go into the Marine Corps. I was in there a couple of years in the Marine Corp out at Pearl Harbor.

**NELSON:** What years were those now?

**MAJORS:** That was 1934 to 1936. And then when I came back, I couldn't get to work with the City right away, so I worked for Van de Kamp Bakery. Then I got a call. Marvin Owens called and they had a job for me out at Stone Canyon. So that's how I got back to work and he said it was just for the summer, but I was on ever since. Fred Fisher really ordered Owens to give me the job.

Then we were taking care of the shrubbery around the pumping plants and reservoirs way up on the top of the Hollywood Hills and all over from one end to the other.

**NELSON:** What do you mean "taking care of?"

**MAJORS:** We'd make plantings around the tanks and things. Horticulture. Let's see when did I come up on the aqueduct. I

came up about July 1940, I guess.

**NELSON:** Okay. Let's go back and pick up a couple of things. What were you doing when the St. Francis Dam collapsed?

**MAJORS:** We were laid off about half the time along in there it seemed like. Fry would come out to your house and tell you, "Well we're going to have you work some more now." He'd always give us a leave of absence for those couple weeks at a time. Then when St. Francis Dam broke, we went right up to the tunnel above Dry Canyon Reservoir. I was to take some batteries up to the superintendent up there I remember and they said just go right up the tunnel there. So I started up the tunnel and I heard a lot of crashing and banging and I stepped aside and here come a mule. They'd hauled something in and they slapped him on the hind end and he'd run right on out to the end of the tunnel and come back with another load.

We were doing concrete work at broken places in the tunnel and then we went out to Santa Paula and we worked on flood damage out there from Piru clear through to the ocean where it was flooded. Mostly farmers pipelines that were filled with sand or broken. That's what we did up there.

**NELSON:** The nature of the repair work that you did was primarily with irrigation systems?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Mostly. Then I worked for Dean Van Norman there, too. He wanted me to work in the garage and also drive the trucks, so I had a little stretch of that. We left there, got all through about, I guess, August or something like that.

**NELSON:** How many DWP employees were up there working?

**MAJORS:** They hired a lot of extra help. There was the office force from the department and our gang and some others. I can't remember just how many there was, but I've got to say one thing for old John Frye, the superintendent there. We had a big camp, big tent, and we were charged so much for our board and room. First pay check that came out, they didn't charge the office force, and when he saw our checks, he went storming into that office and he said, "I see you didn't take out any board and room for me or my foreman or the office force." "I'm no better than my men and my men are just as good as any of you, so I want you to refund the money that you took out for their board and room and I don't want you ever charging again." And they never did. Now that's the kind of a guy he was.

**NELSON:** Where was that camp located?

**MAJORS:** Santa Paula.

**NELSON:** The outskirts of Santa Paula?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Just on this side of the town. This side of Santa Paula.

**NELSON:** Then equipment and all your vehicles were all brought up from L.A.?

**MAJORS:** Yes, everything. In fact, I drove an old Marmon car taking some guys to work that Bill Mulholland had driven many years before.

There were several camps. There was a camp at Piru, one at a place called Bardsdale across from Fillmore, there was that one at Santa Paula, maybe another one that I forgot.

**NELSON:** Were you working seven days a week at that time?

**MAJORS:** No, we worked five and a half days a week and came home Saturday afternoon.

**NELSON:** You continued to live in Los Angeles at that time?

**MAJORS:** Yes. That's right.

**NELSON:** Whereabouts in Los Angeles?

**MAJORS:** Right off of Riverside Drive right near Elysian Park on a little street called Purtle Street.

**NELSON:** Were you still with your family at that time?

**MAJORS:** Yes. That's right.

**NELSON:** Did you have an opportunity to get up to the St. Francis site at any time?

**MAJORS:** Sure did and I'll never forget that column of concrete standing in the middle because the dam broke from both ends and left that column of concrete. The water going down the canyon, wherever there was a turn, it just scoured the hillside out to bedrock. Way off down there was Harry Cary's, the movie actor's, ranch, and it just cleaned it. Nothing but sand and gravel and rock. Power Plant No. 2 was taken out. The dynamo's were buried in the sand. The bridges below there, steel bridges, like the one going to northern California, just wound up and twisted. An enormous amount of water.

**NELSON:** Your reference to Harry Cary, was the movie star?

**MAJORS:** That's right. But Mary Jane could tell you something about the people she knew that was lost up there by the power house.

**NELSON:** We'll catch that a little later. How soon after the dam failure were you up there?

**MAJORS:** Actually I had quit that day. The day that it went out, I knew somebody that got me in with L.A. Gas and Electric Company and I was going to learn to be a cable splicer. So when I went down there they said, "All right, be out at Second and Hill, downtown L.A. at 2 o'clock this afternoon." So I went down there and they didn't give me anything that looked like cable splicing. They gave me a pick and shovel and told me to work there digging a ditch right downtown in the middle of the street.

So about six o'clock that evening the boss came along and said, "Twenty minutes for supper." And I've been gone ever since. The next morning I went down to the Water and Power building and told them, "I'm one of John Frye's men, and I got left yesterday." So they had a car going up there, I think it was the head sanitation man, I rode up with him.

I'll always remember that road above San Fernando. There wasn't a soul on it but us. Everything washed out, road closed.

**NELSON:** Was this the so-called "Burma Road?"

**MAJORS:** No. You went up through San Fernando and the starting of San Francisquito Canyon, you didn't go up San Francisquito Canyon, you went right on up to the Dry Canyon reservoir.

**NELSON:** So you got up there the next day?

**MAJORS:** Yes, the next day after. That's when I took those batteries up and I passed that mule in the tunnel. That's where

I met my boss.

**NELSON:** What did you do up there? The rest of that day or the next day or two?

**MAJORS:** We were pick and shoveling and carrying sacks of cement uphill, I'll never forget that. 100 pounds uphill. They were mixing concrete and repairing the damage that was created by the flood.

**NELSON:** Was there still quite a bit of water left in the reservoir?

**MAJORS:** No. There was nothing left in the St. Francis reservoir. It took it right off to bedrock.

**NELSON:** Then from that time on, Al, when did you go to the camp in Santa Paula? Do you recall how many days, weeks?

**MAJORS:** The first camp, you see, was at Saugus. That's when we first went up and worked on the tunnel after the dam went out. They had a big camp just full of all kinds of people. They hired a lot of bums and good people and everything. Fed us all real good and we were only there for about a week. Then we went out to Santa Paula.

**NELSON:** Getting to that Saugus camp, that was how many days past the failure of the dam, do you recall?

**MAJORS:** They probably set it up right away. They were fast. They got it going quick.

**NELSON:** How long did you remain in John Frye's gang?

**MAJORS:** Nine years.

**NELSON:** As a laborer the entire time?

**MAJORS:** Well actually it was nine years and a few months. Yes.

**NELSON:** Is that when you went into the Marines?

**MAJORS:** Yes, after that I went into the Marines for two years.

**NELSON:** Well what happened in the Marines?

**MAJORS:** We had a hell of a good time out there at Pearl Harbor, Honolulu. Really at that time it was more of an old soldier's home rather than a Marine Corp compared to what they have now.

**NELSON:** Where did you take your training?

**MAJORS:** San Diego. Still there, just like it was right now. There's still the same squad rooms and everything that I had when I went through training.

**NELSON:** And then you shipped out to Pearl Harbor?

**MAJOR:** Yes, I'll always remember, we were out in the rifle range, firing and the sergeant came out one day and said, "Well boys you're going to shoot for the record tomorrow and you're sailing for China the next day." That was quite a thrill, but our platoon got off at Pearl Harbor.

We were on the ship for a month because they had to paint it and scrape it and outfit it and everything at San Francisco over at Mare Island and so by the time we got off at Pearl Harbor, that was the most beautiful place on earth. We didn't have to stand up to eat any more and I remember one guy came out of there and he looked up and he grinned and he said, "Just like Thanksgiving."

**NELSON:** What prompted you to join the Marines?

**MAJORS:** The family could always depend on old Al. He always had a job. I got so tired of being home and I just wanted to get out. Over there at Pearl Harbor I was only a regular Marine for about two months and then they called me over to the fire barn where eight Marines formed the fire department. So that's what I did all the time I was out there.

**NELSON:** You were still a Marine, but you were a fireman?

**MAJORS:** Yes. We put out fires.

**NELSON:** Was two years the normal enlistment?

**MAJORS:** No. I got out on dependency discharge. My folks got in hard shape up in Colorado. They had gone to Colorado and they were working on a ranch and so I went up there to help them for only about six months then I came back down. I was back working for the Department in little over a year after I had left the Marine Corp.

**NELSON:** That was in the mid to late 30's at that point?

**MAJORS:** 1936. I came out in about June, 1936.

**NELSON:** Between the work that you did after St. Francis Dam failed and joining the Marines, you were still working around the City in various water projects?

**MAJORS:** We were working up there at the Headworks Pumping Plant when I said good-bye to John Frye the last time. And he died within six months after that.

**NELSON:** Died as an active employee?

**MAJORS:** Yes, he was an active employee when he died. I don't know what was the matter. He had gotten bad sick and you know, in those days they didn't take care of themselves too well.

**NELSON:** It was relatively sudden?

**MAJORS:** Well he had been sick that winter before for a long stretch there ... several months and then he came back and he was doing pretty good and then bang, he died.

**NELSON:** When you came back to the Department in 1936 from the Marines, you came in as a laborer again?

**MAJORS:** Yes. I was kind of a gardener out there at Stone Canyon and then a job came up. I had a truck and I'd go up to the pumping plants and tanks high up on the hilltops.

**NELSON:** That was basically landscape maintenance?

**MAJORS:** Yes, all the way from Eagle Rock. There's a tank at Eagle Rock and, one just outside of the gate at Forest Lawn, right by David's statue. We used to watch them carving on David's statue up there during that time too. Way up on Lookout Mountain above Hollywood and the other tanks we worked on.

**NELSON:** Who was your boss during that period?

**MAJORS:** Henry Murietta. A real nice guy.

**NELSON:** How were your work assignments arranged? You'd go in in the morning and you'd have pretty much a regular routine or?

**MAJORS:** Yes. You'd go in and get your truck and then head out for whatever you were going to do that day and maybe mow some lawns on some of the tanks. There's one right there by the planetarium underground.

**NELSON:** But this assignment was more regular than working on the crew? You pretty much knew where you were going to be tomorrow and you had a routine pretty much?

**MAJORS:** Yes, you used to be your own boss. You never saw anybody all the time you were gone. You'd come back in the evening.

**NELSON:** Were you working five or six days a week at that time?

**MAJORS:** Five days a week. Way back we started working five days a week ... before I went into the Marine Corp. I don't know, maybe it was six then.

**NELSON:** What kind of truck were you driving?

**MAJORS:** You know, I think it was an old Dodge.

**NELSON:** Pick-up?

**MAJORS:** Yes. We had a lawn mower, tools, you know.

**NELSON:** You generally worked by yourself?

**MAJORS:** I had a helper and I'd take him to one tank and I'd go to another and that's where we'd work. Then I'd pick him up and we'd come home.

**NELSON:** How long did you work at that job?

**MAJORS:** I guess it was about four years because I came up on the aqueduct in 1940.

**NELSON:** How did that position open up for you?

**MAJORS:** They gave examinations. There were some titles created about that time and I forget what they called us. Utility something on that job. I remember there were two examinations that came up. One was horticulture work. I forget the title. The other was aqueduct patrolman and reservoir keeper. The gardener thing was awful hard. We had to know botanical names and everything. It was a hard examination, but I didn't pass it near as good as I did that reservoir keeper and aqueduct. That's how come I came up in 1940 on the aqueduct and I worked about a year as relief patrolman. Then I was about four years at Little Lake

Aqueduct Station, a regular station there and then I went to Fairmont Reservoir, that's where I went. Was there for 28 years.

**NELSON:** Okay, let's back up a little bit. When you came up in 1940, you came up where? You came to where?

**MAJORS:** I went to Mojave.

**NELSON:** Out of the Mojave Yard?

**MAJORS:** Yes. That's right. And then..

**NELSON:** Who were you working for at that time?

**MAJORS:** I was working for Fleming. E.H. Fleming. He was the superintendent. And Reg Kelsey was my immediate superior.

**NELSON:** What were your duties?

**MAJORS:** We patrolled the aqueduct and then once a year we'd go inside of the aqueduct. They'd shut it off and do repair work and walk and inspect the whole aqueduct from Haiwee Reservoir clear to Fairmont Reservoir. You'd go in in pairs of two and we'd walk eight, ten miles a day and that was about all you wanted to in those boots and walking in water. While we were inspecting, we'd keep track on cards for each section where we found plaster broken off or cracks. We'd put it down on a card exactly where it was

from these station numbers. Then we'd go in and finish up the shutoff repair on the cracks.

**NELSON:** This was between Mojave patrolled between Haiwee and Fairmont?

**MAJORS:** Yes. That was the Mojave Division. From Power Plant One to Fairmont spillway. Also through the Elizabeth Tunnel to the Power House.

**NELSON:** What was it like being in there? What did you see in the aqueduct in this inspections? What were the conditions that you found?

**MAJORS:** Well it wasn't too bad. Sometimes you'd find something newly happened. There were some rather new cracks. We both carried Coleman lanterns as we walked along through there looking overhead for cracks and for cracks on the bottom and the sides. Sometimes you'd find a crack in the sidewall of where the sidewall joined onto the bottom. In fact, one let go up there at Nine Mile and they had a bad break. That was about 1943. Well it was a bad break. The water went right down to the highway.

**NELSON:** What was the distance between manholes? Approximately. How long would you have to walk before you came to a man hole?

**MAJORS:** About a mile, I think, between man holes.

**NELSON:** And you'd have people at both man holes, right?

**MAJORS:** Yes. We'd have a gang of people and there were two men to the gang for walking and you'd go in this man hole and somebody would take your pickup down about two miles and then you'd come out and they'd go in and you'd take their pick up way down because there were several miles to go down and you'd leave a card if you were in there and just keep overlapping. Just two people recorded each section they'd walk.

**NELSON:** Was it a little claustrophobic?

**MAJORS:** Never bothered me. I don't think it bothered anybody much. Those old boys were pretty good in the aqueduct in those days.

**NELSON:** What happened at Jawbone Siphon, for example?

**MAJORS:** I sure as heck didn't go down that because that was full of water. You walked up there very carefully. You got to where it started to slope and then you came out. There'd be a manhole right there.

**NELSON:** So no one went down Jawbone Siphon?

**MAJORS:** Not intentionally. Some guys did slip, let's see. Several men went down one of them that just mangled and hurt them

awful bad. They were working in there long before I came up in the aqueduct. The siphon was dry for repair at the time.

**NELSON:** Took one step too many.

**MAJORS:** I don't know. Somebody slipped at the top and knocked down all the guys below and they fell down and then they slid. It's pretty steep and those big rivets and everything in there just cut them and hurt them pretty bad. Nobody killed though.

**NELSON:** Were those steel sections lined at that time?

**MAJORS:** No they were painted inside. Painted with black paint.

**NELSON:** The other parts, the concrete, that was plastered you say?

**MAJORS:** Yes, they had some concrete siphons too down in Antelope Valley. The big long one though, two miles long or maybe longer than that, across Antelope Valley goes all the way. And it is pretty near all steel. There's a little concrete.

**NELSON:** So you came up to Mojave in the first year or so you were relief man? I guess that's the job of the least seniority. You relieve and when an opening is created, then you'd take a permanent assignment, permanent location?

**MAJORS:** Yes. I'd relieve the regular station, but I had a little house. Every case, we always had a little house to live in. The regular keeper had a good big house and we had a nice little house.

**TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE TWO**

**ALVIN EDGAR AND MARY MAJORS**

**NELSON:** Al, why don't you tell us a little bit about the housing up here on your assignment as aqueduct patrolman.

**MAJORS:** Well we thought the houses were pretty darn good. It was better than anybody else had around the countryside and the outlying area. Really pretty good. We'd keep them up real nice and the City would paint them and if we wanted to do a little painting inside, they would let us do it. They'd furnish the paint.

I was down at Jawbone when I first came up on the aqueduct and there was a little relief house there. I will always remember the first day I came up. It was 109 degrees in the shade and I walked into this little relief house and the guy that had been in it must have been plenty dirty because it had a big old white bedstead sitting in the middle of the room and magazines and papers scattered all over the floor. So I swept them all into a side room and got a hose in there and I just hosed down the whole inside of it and it seemed a little better then. So I worked on that relief for some time. I was only on relief about a year

before I got a regular station. First time I relieved down at Fairmont Reservoir there was an old guy in there, Pete Walker. He was one of the mule skinnners building the aqueduct. A real nice guy. He and my immediate superior were talking about girls and Reg Kelsey, my immediate superior, said something about his daughter and Pete Walker said something about that McIver girl up there at Dove Springs. She's dark haired. She's just an all around country girl. So I took that all in and didn't say anything and so when I got through with my ten working days, I went back to Jawbone and I don't know just what time exactly I decided to try to find Mary Jane. I took down the phone one day to call her up and when you called up there you got the whole aqueduct. You'd always figured somebody's listening in and I got the boss. So I said I'm not going to call her up so I went over to see her. Well she wasn't home then, but her mother called and made contact with her and then I saw her in about four days when I came back up from L.A. That wasn't very many months until we got married. We got married in May. Three months. After all here I am pretty near 32 and so we moved in to the little relief house at Little Lake and we really had it nice.

I had some real beautiful Navajo rugs, we had all new furniture and we weren't there but just seemed like a few months until the job at West Antelope, in Antelope Valley opened up. So we moved down there and I guess we were there three months. Three months until Reg Kelsey, my immediate superior, lost his job and he came back to West Antelope. He had seniority. During the shuffle I kind of figured on a little old relief house at Jawbone,

but this Reg Kelsey's brother's wife was sick and they wanted to move farther south, so I had the chance to get Little Lake station. We were up there four years.

Then the job opened at Fairmont Reservoir and we bid on it and we got it we were there all the rest of the time for 28 years. Raised a family of six kids there. All of them went to school, went to high school, junior college, one of them is in water right now. He is a Principle Engineer at Metropolitan. In fact, the boss just above his boss is Duane Georgeson, one of the finest.

**NELSON:** Metropolitan Water District?

**MAJORS:** Yes. He's over there now. Then one of our sons is Maintenance Supervisor down at San Fernando Valley Steam Generating Plant. One of our sons is an L.A. City engineer fireman and the other one is a L.A. police detective and the two girls, one is in Albany, New York and the other is in Honolulu.

**NELSON:** Sounds like a spread out family.

**MAJORS:** It is when you hit all the corners. We hit it once one year. Albany and Honolulu.

**NELSON:** Let me go back about 40 years and pick up a couple of things. You talked about relief houses. Where was that located - on Jawbone siphon? Is that near the present location?

**MAJORS:** Yes. It was just 200 or 300 feet from the main station house above the siphon and, by the way, there's one thing near Jawbone that happened. The night that I went and took Mary Jane out for the first time, we'd gone to Lancaster for dinner and a show, coming back there was heavy rain and I got her home and I headed back for Jawbone and went up Jawbone Canyon and just before you got to the house on the east side of the siphon, the road was flooded and there was a big hole in the road and I went in it. And I buried that brand new Buick, just two months old, clear up to the rocker arms. Filled with sand. That was kind of a bad evening in one way. It all came out okay though. Auto Club came and got it and they took every piece of that engine apart and washed every part with castile soap and water to get the silt out of it and put it together again. It was alright.

**NELSON:** What was the size of that relief house? How many rooms?

**MAJORS:** Well there was only a kitchen and a living room/bedroom sort of thing. It was a bedroom I guess, that's where I had the bed and there was a bathroom.

**NELSON:** Were those furnished?

**MAJORS:** No. You had to furnish your own. It had no light. You had a gasoline lantern.

**NELSON:** Where was the closest powder room?

**MAJORS:** Well there was one there off to the side. It was in there.

**NELSON:** Indoor plumbing?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Now Jawbone, it really wasn't much. It was pretty poor, that one at Jawbone, but I lived alone there. After we got married, we lived at Little Lake relief house. We really fixed that nice up at Little Lake. We thought we had the world by the tail in those days after we got into a nice house. It was a small house with a porch. Our kids were all born over at Randsburg, Red Mountain really and down at China Lake where the big naval test station is now. Dr. Drummond, wonderful doctor. The first one cost \$75, think of that! Kathy only cost \$75. The last was about \$225. Now I guess it's over \$2,000.

**NELSON:** You're an aqueduct patrolman. What was a typical day? What did you do as an aqueduct patrolman?

**MAJORS:** Well we'd get in our pick-up and every so often you'd get off and measure the water and they had PESOMETERS to read along there. They finally did. At first we didn't have those. You just rode along watching for leaks. If you came to a culvert, you had to get out and go under the culvert and crawl through and make sure there was no water leaking down. Then up at Haiwee we had a chart to change up there where the water came out of the power plant into the aqueduct. Then I'd drive back down and start in

again going south and we'd go up into the tunnel section and we'd only see an outlet here and there and we'd read weirs up there where they had a leak coming out of the tunnels. The addit went into the tunnel and there'd be some leak there and carbon dioxide gas too. One place you read the weir, if you got your head down and took a breath, it'd knock your head off.

**NELSON:** Was that up in Rose Valley?

**MAJORS:** Rose Valley is north of Little Lake which I patrolled. Soda Hill is where this carbon dioxide gas was.

**NELSON:** Where was that located?

**MAJORS:** Just south where you see the Little Lake store and service station. It's right above there. I saw a nice goat laying there dead one time. He took one breath and it killed him. Right bang. Then a whole covey of chucker had come in there for a drink and they got too close to that carbon dioxide gas and it killed them. You couldn't burn a blow torch down there, it would put it right out.

**NELSON:** You're saying one day you would drive, well maybe this is when you were at Little Lake, you would drive one day from Little Lake up to South Haiwee?

**MAJORS:** And the same day you'd come back.

**NELSON:** And then come back next day and you would run south to where?

**MAJORS:** To we called it the south end of Soda Hill tunnels and somebody else would have the next section. But I'll say during the war they put us on horses and we couldn't make both ends then on a horse. We'd ride from Little Lake Station on up to Haiwee and then back and then the next day we'd ride the tunnel section and come back on the horse. And I got thrown off once, off my horse and oh man, I lit on a hard dirt road and I'd always heard that you should get right back on him, so he wouldn't think he's got you buffaloed and that was the hardest thing I ever did, getting back on that horse. Pretty good old horse. I think I had the only mean one there was on the aqueduct. And probably had the least experience riding too. I'd never ridden a horse before.

**NELSON:** Was there any instruction given or you just got a couple of horses?

**MAJORS:** They brought horses out and built little sheds, barns for them and you just got what they brought you. I remember this old Silver they brought me came from Independence. The guy had left him and told me how to put the bridle on him. He said he's hard to put a bridle on. He said, "When he starts jerking his head, you just follow him right on up." Man! I had a heck of a time.

I finally learned how to do it. We had a semi-professional cowboy, a relief man, that was always telling us all about how to do it. I learned how to put the rope around his neck and a loop around his nose, then I'd lay the bit right up along side of his face and he'd just start jerking and I'd just wait until he quit jerking and I'd just lay it into his mouth gently. So when this guy came back in ten days to ride the horse again he came a storming down and said, "What have you done to this horse? I can't put the bridle on him." I thought here you are, a professional bucking horse man and you can't put the bridle on the horse! I was the boy that's supposed to had to be shown everything. So I showed him.

**NELSON:** Where was the house at Little Lake located?

**MAJORS:** Well it was about a mile north of the service station and then about a mile up the hill. It lays up there. All cottonwoods and it looks real nice.

**NELSON:** Does it still exist?

**MAJORS:** Yes. It's still there.

**NELSON:** But vacant now?

**MAJORS:** Oh no. They've eliminated most of the stations. Now there's only Little Lake, Freeman and Jawbone. And that's the

last one then until you get to Fairmont. The guy that patrols out of Mojave Yards goes south from there. So they've cut out better than half the stations.

**NELSON:** But the Little Lake station is still operating?

**MAJORS:** Yes. There's one thing I want to add to this horseback riding. Years ago they didn't patrol in cars. They rode on horseback. Most of them anyway. There was a guy at Pinetree station. He wasn't too dependable, but you could tell by the tracks on the road if he had been riding or not. Well he hadn't been riding, but what he'd do, he'd put a rope around three or four of the horses' necks, and lead them with the one he's riding. Lead them up over patrol and back and that put lots of tracks on the ground and they thought that he'd been riding, I guess, until they finally caught on to him. Wasn't that it? Tricks in all trades.

**NELSON:** Let's go to the war. You say that you turned in your vehicles and were given the horse, I assume, to conserve gasoline?

**MAJORS:** That was the idea, yes. I had a motorcycle too and I'd use that once in a while. In fact, I got places with that motorcycle that had been pretty hard to get on a horse I think. We had a flood up there, I mean a cloudburst and it just washed the heck out of the aqueduct and there's one section that we hadn't been over yet, nobody had been over it and I took my little

old Indian motorcycle on that run. I went down the canyon below the aqueduct and I'd find a way and I'd do a little work and I'd give her heck and I'd climb the bank and up over the side and I made a run on my little Indian that nobody had been over yet. That was in the Nine Mile section.

**NELSON:** Was Fleming still the superintendent?

**MAJORS:** Well see Bill Cahill, he'd come from Mono Basin. He'd been helping build the tunnels up there, superintendent, and they'd did a little shuffling and they put Cahill in the superintendent's job at Mojave division and Ed Fleming was the assistant. That's how that was.

**NELSON:** How often did you get to Mojave? Did you have to go back on a regular basis or were you pretty much out on your own?

**MAJORS:** Well when we were up there at Little Lake, that's where we stayed. We never, very seldom, maybe I wouldn't see Mojave once in six months. We had phones you see.

**NELSON:** Were there still remnants of the old aqueduct construction camp there at Narca, just a little south of Little Lake?

**MAJORS:** I don't think you could hardly find them any more, the old construction camps. I remember when I was at Little Lake, I'd

find a part of a blacksmith's shop and a few things and then there's a place, below Nine Mile, that I found a whole little construction site. Some cement floor and we sifted the ground with a screen to try to find buttons and things. And up on the side of the hill at Soda Hill, there's places up there where these guys lived in their little shacks. Levelled off little place. They didn't have it very nice - the original people that built the aqueduct. It was pretty tough. There was no refrigeration, electricity. They ate a lot of salt pork, I suppose. But they sure as heck had the whiskey. These Irishmen, you know. In fact, bowhunks, too they say. They advertised in Europe for men to work on the aqueduct in building it. It would be cold in the winter and blazing hot in the summer and they worked out there and they said there's a story that they told that they had three gangs. One was coming, one was going, and one was working. That's the way the turnover was.

There's still the sign of the old spoil banks where the old track shovel shoveled out the dirt and the humps along the ground there. Most of them, they've been graded down, I'll always say the aqueduct was built by Irishmen, mules and whiskey. They had some good tunnel men there between Fairmont Reservoir and the end of the tunnel south.

**NELSON:** Elizabeth tunnel?

**MAJORS:** Yes. They set a record for hard rock drilling and they drilled both ways from north to south and when those two gangs

met, they were off maybe half an inch, something like that. I've walked those tunnels down there all by myself.

**NELSON:** What about work? Did the war, other than bringing horses, was there increased security? Were you to be on the lookout for saboteurs? Did you have weapons given to you?

**MAJORS:** Yes. We were all special deputies and issued a .38 revolver and we never found a thing wrong. Nobody ever bothered the aqueduct. If you want to turn the clock back now 45 years from the time I retired, I was sitting down there at Crystal Springs hoping the boss would give me a job, and I think that that was the time that a group of farmers came down to No Name Siphon and blasted it out. I think that's the time it was. But that's the only personal damage anybody ever did to the aqueduct that I know of.

**NELSON:** Okay let's go to when did you become a reservoir keeper? That was when you went to Fairmont?

**MAJORS:** No. I went to Jawbone relief which took in four days at Jawbone, four days at West Antelope, must of been two days at Antelope Siphon. I relieved over at the reservoir there a little bit. That's when I heard about Mary Jane. I guess it was about 1940.

**NELSON:** And that's when you moved to Fairmont?

**MAJORS:** Yes, that's right. From Little Lake to Fairmont.

**NELSON:** How did you move? You had how many kids at that time?

**MAJORS:** Three. We had Kathy, Russell and Don.

**NELSON:** How did you pack up? There were no Rider trucks in those days.

**MAJORS:** No. It was a flat-rack truck with sideboards on it and we hauled, in fact, that day they moved a guy into Little Lake the same day that we moved to Fairmont and we were late getting down there -- about 8 o'clock at night before we got there.

**NELSON:** Did the Department move you?

**MAJORS:** Yes. We got down there at Fairmont, there hadn't been anybody in the house for two months and boy was it cold. It was the next evening before we got our oil heater set up and going.

**NELSON:** Did you enjoy it there at Fairmont?

**MAJORS:** Oh yes, we sure did. We raised all the kids, had all the Christmas's, 28 years, saw the kids coming from the hospital going into the crib, we saw them going out of there in Corvettes and cars and through college and some working for the Department.

**NELSON:** What does the reservoir keeper do? Or what did you do?

**MAJORS:** That's what the kids asked me once. The teacher asked them what your father does and they couldn't figure it out. Really it wasn't that soft though. We did live in the house and my office was in the house, but I had some times I had to be out in the rain and snow doing things. I had to go down to the weirs to read them when it was pouring down rain and floods coming through. I never asked for much help. I'd pretty near always do everything rather than ask and I would do things myself. I had to put in pipelines and irrigation lines, 2" pipe and work on the road. Some places it was slick and hard to get through. Built a fence, be called out on the outlet tower in the middle of the night any time to find out what was wrong with it. The signal they were getting down at the power house was that the gate had closed and I had to read the meter in the morning. I'd start reading meters at 6 o'clock in the morning so that I could turn it in to the power house by 6:30.

**NELSON:** What were these meters?

**MAJORS:** It was Ventura meter and it would measure the flow of incoming water. We'd no way to measure the outflow. It went on down through the tunnel to Power House #1. Then sometimes in the snow, by golly, you couldn't get across the dam. The road was all snowed in across the dam. I couldn't get through four feet drifts on there so I had to dig out a path down to the boat and take the

boat across the lake and walk a half a mile through knee-deep snow to get to it.

We read the weather gauges for the Water and Power and the U.S. Weather Bureau. We read the high and low temperature, the evaporation, measured the rain and snow. We melted the snow to get the water content out of it, read the anemometer, and took the direction of the wind, observed the sky for cloudy, part cloudy, and clear. In fact, the weather bureau gave me a nice pin and a nice honor one time there for putting in 25 years for them.

**NELSON:** What did you do about vacations? Were you relieved then?

**MAJORS:** Yes, somebody would come and relieve you and they had a relief house that they lived in and that was kind of nice in a way because you always had somebody to feed the cat while you were gone, see. The work they did around there, we didn't think too much of that. I really tried to work good for people myself. I'd been doing gardening work for the city down there for Murietta around pumping plants and reservoirs and I knew pretty well what to do on that. I maintain I was a good faithful employee. Nobody could contradict me on that.

I remember one time I, well when I started building the house up here, I was doing something that I had never done before and I worked so many hours so hard that I was physically and mentally exhausted and I got a thing called ... I was mentally exhausted. I got to where I couldn't work and so the boss said, "Well do we have to have a doctor's word that he's hurt?" The superintendent

said, "No. Absolutely not. I know he's sick." I got over it. Plain and simply by when they finally put me on a treadmill and they proved to me it was not my heart, when I walked out of that hospital, I felt better and I just healed right up. Emotion, that's what they said I had. Emotion.

**NELSON:** Who was your supervisor at that time in Fairmont?

**MAJORS:** That was Glen Wallace.

**NELSON:** Through the entire time?

**MAJORS:** No. We had, let's see, there was Cahill and then Bob Wills and then Wallace. Those were the three while I was there. I'd see them about once a week usually. Call in my reports twice a day to Mojave.

**NELSON:** How are the roads out in that area?

**MAJORS:** Sometimes they were impassable along the aqueduct. It was a good idea in bad weather to take some boards with you and a jack and shovel because you might have to jack up the car and put the boards under it to get out, I've done that.

**NELSON:** Where did you shop at Fairmont? Did you go into Lancaster?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Lancaster was the town.

**NELSON:** The wide spot in the road?

**MAJORS:** No. At that time it was a pretty good town in 1945. Now when we were at Little Lake we shopped at Lone Pine and there were two grocery stores there then. I think there's only one now.

**NELSON:** What kind of car were you driving?

**MAJORS:** We were a first class act. We had a nice Buick. I went back to the factory and got a nice Buick before almost when I first come up on the aqueduct.

**NELSON:** This was the same Buick that you got buried?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Then we got a 1950 Buick and later a couple of Chevrolets.

**NELSON:** City employees always travel in style.

**MAJORS:** Yes, until you start figuring on retirement then you start saving up to build a new house. We always were very careful with our money. We did all right.

**NELSON:** When did you buy the place up here at Onyx?

**MAJORS:** 1967.

**NELSON:** Was this with the idea of retiring here?

**MAJORS:** Yes. Mary Jane's folks lived down at Mountain Mesa at the time. They finally moved to Onyx. They got to where they couldn't do anything for themselves and so we looked after them.

**TAPE NUMBER: 2, SIDE ONE**

**ALVIN EDGAR AND MARY MAJORS**

**NELSON:** Mary we are going to pass on to you here for a few minutes and why don't you tell us where you were born, when and your early years.

**MARY:** I was born in Los Angeles, June 2, 1920. My father homesteaded and had a dry land wheat farm 18 miles west of Lancaster. He went to work for the Department in late 1923 at Fairmont as a patrolman. In February 1924 we moved to Dove Springs Aqueduct Station.

**NELSON:** What was his name?

**MARY:** Murdo McIver.

**NELSON:** Where is Dove Springs?

**MARY:** It's about three miles from Ricardo where the ranger station is in Red Rock Canyon.

**NELSON:** Does it exist today?

**MARY:** No. Nothing's left.

**NELSON:** How old were you?

**MARY:** I was three.

**NELSON:** How long did he stay there?

**MARY:** He stayed there 24 years then he left in 1947 and I think he spent about ten years as labor foreman in the Mojave Division. When we moved there, of course we didn't have electricity, we had a telephone, party-line telephone, but we had no refrigeration. We had a desert cooler which consisted of a large screened box with shelves and burlap on the outside and the water ran over the burlap and kept things cool. We had a swimming pool and that's where my brother and I stayed all summer long.

**NELSON:** That was a natural swimming pool?

**MARY:** No, someone had built it before my father moved there.

**NELSON:** The water came from Dove Springs?

**MARY:** From the aqueduct. The actual springs was seven miles above the aqueduct station. So any water we had was aqueduct water.

**NELSON:** What do you remember of that house?

**MARY:** It was very nice. In fact, as they built new patrol houses, they built on the same pattern as Dove Springs. They all looked alike. Big porches all around, huge cottonwood trees -- an oasis in the desert.

**NELSON:** Was that home originally built by the Department specifically for that purpose?

**MARY:** Yes, by the Department.

**NELSON:** So it was relatively new when you folks move in probably, or within ten years or so.

**MARY:** Yes, I would say so. We had indoor plumbing, but of course, we used kerosene for light and we didn't feel like we were being deprived. As we got to school age, my father had to drive us ten miles to Red Rock school at Cantil and had to do a lot of driving until my brother could drive a car and then he took us.

**NELSON:** How many rooms were in the home?

**MARY:** It was a large home. I'll show you a picture of it. A big kitchen, a large living room/dining room combination, two bedrooms and a porch that went around three sides, screened in.

**NELSON:** That was for the four of you?

**MARY:** Yes and, of course, there was a bathroom in there too.

**NELSON:** Was there a relief house there too?

**MARY:** No. The way they worked it in those days, when the relief man came, he lived in your house. Sometimes it wasn't too happy a time, but that's the way it was. They had to come in.

**NELSON:** And that policy was changed a little later?

**MARY:** Yes, later they had a little house, but in the early days they had to come in, they didn't have any other place to stay. They had to come in and cook and use your home. My mother used to cook for them because it was just easier.

**NELSON:** She would cook for them?

**MARY:** When we had our meals, she would say, "Come in and eat with us," because it was easier than to have them come in and try to cook their meal after we were finished.

**NELSON:** Where would they be staying?

**MARY:** In your house.

**NELSON:** They'd be sleeping on the floor, or on the couch or commandeer a bedroom?

**MARY:** No. They had cots. They didn't sleep in our bedrooms, but they sometimes slept on the couch in the living room or they had the City cots from the camp and they'd sleep on the porch.

**NELSON:** What is the largest number of people that you have accommodated?

**MARY:** Just the one relief man. When they came to relieve for your vacation, sometimes they brought their family and lived in your house, that wasn't great. When they finally got the relief houses, it was much better. When they replaced the siphon at Dove Springs in 1940 and south and north Jawbone, my mother cooked for, I think, about twenty men and ten surveyors and bosses would come in at noon and you'd fix box lunches for the regular men. I was in on that too. I might add, my mother baked pies every day and did it all on a wood stove.

**NELSON:** I suspected so.

**MARY:** That was for about five weeks, I think.

**NELSON:** Where did they stay?

**MARY:** As I recall, most of them stayed in Mojave. Not around Dove Springs. There were no camps there.

**NELSON:** You went to the Cantil School?

**MARY:** Yes. Red Rock School.

**NELSON:** You didn't, by any chance, have a Mrs. Rogers did you?

**MARY:** Knew her very well. They used to come to my parent's home in the 1920's because in those days you made your own recreation and folks would take all the furniture out of the living room, roll up the rug and people from far and near would come to dances. Sometimes they would stay all night and have a big breakfast and then go home the next day. Yes, I knew Ruby very well. And Ross Rogers, her husband, is still alive.

**NELSON:** I know in the past, her classes used to go out and maintain that aqueduct cemetery.

**MARY:** In Jawbone Canyon? Yes. I don't know if anyone does now.

**NELSON:** Were you ever involved in that?

**MARY:** No, I wasn't. That came many years later. My teacher in Red Rock School, Mary Briody, boarded at Ruby and Ross' place and I still see her. In fact, we're going to go to Red Rock school

this spring and have a little reunion there with the teacher who is now there. Mary Briody later married Elmer Hunts who worked for 42 years at Receiving Station C in Wilmington for the Power Department.

**NELSON:** In going to school, you say that was about a ten mile trek daily?

**MARY:** Yes. One way. My dad had to drive a good many miles a day, but my brother learned to drive a Model T Ford at a very young age and we made it to school that way.

**NELSON:** How young?

**MARY:** I think he was only about ten years old at that time. There wasn't any traffic on the road or on the old highway. It was taking a chance, but it saved a lot of gas.

**NELSON:** How many kids were in that school? Was it a one grade school?

**MARY:** All eight grades. Maybe ten or twelve Students. My brother went to Red Rock school all eight years and I went there for six. When he graduated there wasn't any high school near by so we went back to my dad's ranch and he went to high school and I went on to Fairmont school.

**NELSON:** Were these ten kids, two of them were DWP or more?

**MARY:** There were three McDonald kids from Jawbone. Their dad's name was Bill McDonald.

**NELSON:** He was the patrolman at Jawbone?

**MARY:** Yes, and there was one girl that came from Pine Tree.

**NELSON:** Where did your mom or the family do your shopping?

**MARY:** Mojave. Once in a while they would get to Lancaster, but at that time in the 1920's it wasn't a paved road and it was washboard. In about 1928 I think, they started to ...

**NELSON:** In the later part of the 1920's they started paving that.

**MARY:** Yes, my folks had a cow, chickens, some pigs, turkeys, and sheep. It was a small farm and we used to sell milk to the camp where the construction men were paving the highway.

**NELSON:** Where was that camp?

**MARY:** At the mouth of Red Rock Canyon. I don't know if you remember the Red Rock Tavern years ago.

**NELSON:** I've seen pictures.

**MARY:** Well it was across the road from that. I don't know how many years it took to pave the road, but it seemed like several years, a couple years they were there anyway.

**NELSON:** What did you eat? At Dove Springs did you have your own chickens and things like that?

**MARY:** Yes. We had our own chickens, but we also had a general store at Cantil where you could buy fresh meat and bread. They would go to Mojave and get a supply, but in the meantime they'd go to Cantil.

**NELSON:** How often was the train running up and down the valley at that time? Do you remember that?

**MARY:** I think it went through every day. We used to see it all the time.

**NELSON:** Did that bring supplies? Did that do anything on the store, local supplies?

**MARY:** I'm not sure. I would imagine that it did, but I'm not sure. It did bring our first new furniture and my father picked it up at Cantil with the mule team and wagon.

**NELSON:** How about clothes and food and things like that? Was a lot of catalog pursuing, perusing? Sears and Roebuck?

**MARY:** Yes, a lot of that. Folks had to wait for food sometimes too. Non perishables.

**NELSON:** As a young girl up there, how did you occupy ... did you have girlfriends, as such or you were a cowgirl?

**MARY:** Just a tomboy I guess. But I had friends at Jawbone. We used to go to their place and stay over night and they'd come to our house and stay over night.

**NELSON:** What is the mileage, roughly, between Jawbone and Dove?

**MARY:** About twelve miles. My dad rode south almost to the cliffs above Jawbone and then north half way to Freeman.

**NELSON:** Now when he started, he did not have a vehicle, did he?

**MARY:** No, he rode horseback and he had a team of mules and a wagon. He used that for work around the yard and he patrolled on horseback, but they called it "riding the ditch" in those days. I remember one horse he had named "Pat" that sometimes bucked him off. It was a frightening time for my brother and me when that would happen, but he was determined to get back on the horse and ride the ditch. When the patrolmen were given cars, Pat was sold to a rodeo circuit for a bucking bronco.

**NELSON:** Did you, on occasion, get to "ride the ditch" with them?

**MARY:** We went when he took the mules and the wagon and after he got a pickup, that's how I learned to drive, where it didn't matter if I ran off the road a few times.

**NELSON:** What about snakes and animals? Were there those around?

**MARY:** I can recall lots of coyotes because our chicken house was quite a ways from the station and we'd look out there and see a coyote running off with a chicken and my dad was a good shot and he'd stand on the porch and aim in on that coyote and get it almost every time. We had rattle snakes, bobcats. My dad trapped in the winter time. He did everything he could to make extra money. I think most of the patrolmen did.

**NELSON:** Do you recall what kind of money he was making during those years?

**MARY:** Not very much, but we thought we were in heaven. We had the house, we didn't pay rent for it.

**NELSON:** Zero? No rent?

**MARY:** No rent. Never.

**NELSON:** And you think he was making \$3.50 to \$4.00 a day, something like that?

**MARY:** \$3.50.

**NELSON:** You went to the Cantil School until the eighth grade?

**MARY:** Sixth. I finished the sixth grade and that year my brother graduated so we had to move back to the ranch, so to speak. My mother stayed at the ranch, but we all went home to Dove Springs on the weekends.

**NELSON:** Where was the ranch?

**MARY:** Fairmont. The homestead.

**NELSON:** So your dad stayed down at Dove Springs?

**MARY:** Oh yes.

**NELSON:** And the three of you went back to Fairmont? So basically, you and your brother could attend school.

**MARY:** Yes, during the school year then we were home during the summer.

**NELSON:** So during the school year then, your dad would come up on the weekends or whenever he had time off, days off?

**MARY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** Did you have a vehicle at that time?

**MARY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** You had two vehicles or he had the Department vehicle?

**MARY:** Yes, we had a truck. He had a Department truck and his own car, but we had the truck because we had a few head of cattle and things that we needed a truck for.

**NELSON:** Where was that ranch located?

**MARY:** Eighteen miles west of Lancaster.

**NELSON:** Today how would you find it?

**MARY:** It's on Lancaster Road. It's where the poppy preserve is. The homestead is right below the poppy preserve.

**NELSON:** Is it still in the family?

**MARY:** No. They sold it.

**NELSON:** Did your mom drive?

**MARY:** No.

**NELSON:** So your brother was the driver? Then you became the driver?

**MARY:** Yes, I got a driver's license when I was fourteen.

**NELSON:** You laugh about your mom not driving. Was there any incidences associated?

**MARY:** She had a few lessons from my father and she said, "That's it, you drive the car." She couldn't drive it. She just couldn't get the knack of it. So that's why we learned to drive young because of that.

**NELSON:** Then where did you graduate from the eighth grade?

**MARY:** Fairmont School and it isn't there any more.

**NELSON:** And then high school?

**MARY:** Lancaster/Antelope Valley High School.

**NELSON:** That was a little bit of a commute?

**MARY:** Yes, went by bus. The bus started at Gorman and picked up all the kids all the way in to Lancaster. There was a huge bus system there.

**NELSON:** When did your dad transfer from Dove Springs? From Dove he went to?

**MARY:** He took a labor foreman job in Mojave, but he moved back to his homestead at Fairmont. He lived there for twelve years before they moved to Lancaster.

**NELSON:** And when they moved to Lancaster, he was still working for the Department?

**MARY:** No, he was retired.

**NELSON:** When did he retire?

**MARY:** January, 1958.

**NELSON:** Was that at 65?

**MARY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** What had he done before he worked for the Department?

**MARY:** He homesteaded in Antelope Valley and raised wheat.

**NELSON:** Was he a native?

**MARY:** No, he lived in Glendale. He was born in North Dakota and then the family lived in Trehern, Manitoba and moved to Glendale when he was sixteen and said, "If you ever want to know what cold is, go to Trehern." It was cold in the winter time. And then he homesteaded out there west of Lancaster. His father helped him build a house and a barn. Wheat farming was a very hard way to make a living and he just about went broke. He was in debt when he went to work for the City. But he held on to the ranch for years and years. So that's how we had a place to stay to go to school.

**NELSON:** What size? How many acres?

**MARY:** 160.

**NELSON:** And then you met Al. We kind of heard that story. Do you have a slightly different story to tell? Had you heard about him?

**MARY:** Yes. My father had told me about this nice young fellow who had come up on the aqueduct.

**NELSON:** Okay, so you got some testimonials.

**MARY:** Yes. I had heard about him. When he came to the door the first time I ever saw him and we were going to go to Lancaster, it was raining, of course. He told you about getting the car in the

flood. He leaned over to clean his shoes off real good before he came into the house and I noticed that he had kind of a thin spot on the top of his head. You can see today, he still has hair. He didn't get completely bald.

**NELSON:** He's doing pretty good.

**MARY:** We just knew each other three months and we were married. It will be fifty years in May.

**NELSON:** I guess it's going to work then.

**MARY:** I think it will last.

**NELSON:** Do you have any reminiscences about your dad? Any experiences of working that he might have related that might come to mind?

**MARY:** I can think of one time. He used to have to go to the south end of the siphon and take a water measurement every day. He called me from up on the hill and said, "Come on up here, Mary Jane, I have some chocolate candy for you." Well that sounded good to me, so I ran as fast as I could go up to the top of the hill and he handed me a plug of tobacco. He was full of fun. I was disappointed.

We had happy days at Dove Springs, that's all I know. Happy childhood.

**NELSON:** Well okay then. I want to thank both of you for taking the time to talk with us. I think this is going to be a good addition to our archives. Filling in a few blank spots and adding to some detail that we have, but you can't beat the personal recollections of people who were actually there. They add the flesh to the skeleton, so to speak. I want to thank you very much.

**MARY:** Okay, you're welcome.