

Our Stories, Our Lives

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Jarrell "J." McNutt interviewed by Stephanie Irvin

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IRVIN: Hello. My name is Stephanie Irvin, and I'm going to have a conversation with Jarrett "J." McNutt for "Our Stories: Our Lives," an oral history project with the Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services. It is November 29, 2018, and this is being recorded at the Columbia Library in Evans, Georgia. Thank you Mr. McNutt for being here today.

MCNUTT: Well it is a pleasure to be here. My great-grandfather, George Hanover McNutt moved to Tishomingo County, Mississippi, in 1847. He died before my grandfather Billy McNutt was born. And my grandfather Billy was a nine-year-old boy in the schoolyard when he saw the Confederate troops marching into the Battle of Shiloh. He said the soldiers were--some of them were barefooted, some were crying, but he said the others of them were singing. And then my father was Thomas Nebraska McNutt. And my mother had a fourth-grade education, and my father was a farmer and logger. And my oldest sister, her name was Vera, and she spent her life helping raise the rest of us McNutt boys. There was only ten of us in the family.

Then my second sister Maud was married to Charlie [indistinct] Wilson and they lived in an adjoining county.

And then my oldest brother Paul, he went to high school and it was really expensive. It was a boarding school and the cost for tuition, room and board was ten dollars per month. But he didn't have ten dollars, but a neighbor man loaned him ten dollars to start school. And then he graduated with honors at the high school, and then got a chemistry degree at Mississippi State University.

And then in World War II, well, he had a commission when he graduated from Mississippi State. The reason I can remember his graduation is that my mother got me dressed, cleaned up, and told me to not get dirty, and I spilled a bottle of ink on the front of shirt, and so from then on, I could tell whose shirt was whose because mine had the blue spots on it. But this brother, he was a lucky man because in 1941, thirty men by the rank of captain were scheduled to go to the Philippines to join MacArthur's army but, at the last minute, they decided to send twenty five, and my brother Paul was number twenty six. Later he served as a commander of tanks in Patton's army, but he got

injured. And then he was a chemist and worked with Wernher Von Braun in developing, well, he wrote the manual for evaluating the moon dust and moon rocks.

And then my other brother Milford McNutt was a man of many talents that spent his life in his own workshop building items. One thing that he built was a \$3,000 wall plaque that was for an automobile agency. The owner had killed a moose out west and wanted a good board, and so my brother made this fancy wall mount.

And then my next brother was Noel McNutt and he was the--he wasn't a mean fellow, but he was tough. And he worked at Reynolds Aluminum and the government froze him on his job, and would not allow him to join the military because they needed the aluminum. But he played country music. He took his band to the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. And then he ran a music show in a national armory. He never did tell us how much money he had, but I do know that he had money in eleven banks and savings associations. But he was a good man.

Then my next brother was Ershell McNutt. He was the one who helped my brother find another place to live. My father died, and I was born in December, and we lost the farm that we were on. And a widow woman and a bunch of boys are not very welcome on a landowner's land, but a club-footed doctor allowed us to move to his large farm in the back woods. And we moved there and made a good crop, but my mother wanted us to go to school. She had a, as I mentioned before, had a fourth-grade education, but she had a Ph.D. in determination. She was a quiet lady, but she knew how to manage boys and girls. So we moved to another farm. My eighteen-year-old brother Erschell took the mules and hauled logs to a sawmill and sawed lumber on our cousin's farm about one mile south of Tishomingo which had a good consolidated school. So we moved there, and we went to school and farmed. And I was--when I was ten years old, I was picking two hundred pounds of cotton a day. And my sister Christine was one of the--my sister that worked along with us boys, and I'll talk about here later.

Then my brother Sherben took over the leadership of the family, and we bought a team of mules that had not been broken, but we--the neighbors said, "Those mules will run away with you kids!" But we taught the mules how to pull a wagon and how to pull a plow and got along with them beautifully.

My brother Sherben and my sister Christine were in the same grade in school and they finished together. And then they graduated from high school, and my sister won a contest for writing the best paper on alcoholism. And then her paper won first place in the county among five other high schools. And the prize was to be a \$100 scholarship for her to go to college on, but the officials in the county said, "We never have given a hundred dollars, and we're not going to start with you." But my sister--I referred to as the "Unsinkable Molly Brown." She was not an obnoxious person, but she was very determined. She got the hundred dollars to go to college on, and she went to MSCW at

Columbus, Mississippi, and played the bass fiddle in the orchestra. And we picked her up in a wagon at the train station and brought her home one afternoon after her first year, and the next morning she put her bonnet on and went to the field with us and chopped cotton. I was twelve years old and my brother was fifteen--my brother Orville--when we took over the farming, but it was no big deal because we had grown up on the farm.

And then I did all right in elementary school. I was valedictorian in my eight grade class. But then we moved and my high school was very slight; I didn't go very much. I would go days when we had ballgames. And then Uncle Sam called me to go the Army, and I reported over here to Camp Gordon here in Augusta and took the infantry training, served overseas, and then came home, and I was going to be a minister. I decided I was going to be a minister when I was sixteen years old, but I didn't know where to go to school. But I got enough information that I found out that I needed to get a college degree before I went to seminary. But in the hill country, the most education that we ever had over a minister was that his hound dogs treed a rabbit in a vacant school. That sounds ridiculous, but we just did not have educated ministers that I grew up with. But I went to Mississippi College, and didn't take me four years; it took me a little over two and a half. But it then I went to this seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and picked up another degree after three years. Then I took an additional year of training at the Winston-Salem Hospital. And then my first job was at the 3,100-patient mental hospital in Pineville, Louisiana, and we lived there nine years.

And then I moved to Missouri. A psychiatrist that worked with us, I worked with in Louisiana, became the principal, the head doctor, at a hospital in Missouri, so I moved up there, and I was there for about ten years.

I am a certified supervisor in the Clinical Pastoral Care Organization. This organization is designed to educate ministers so that they can be more effective in their churches. And I might say that it is somewhat like what you do in the medical field when a medical student gets a college degree, then four years of med school, then he takes an internship. We follow that same pattern in theological education. For example, my interns had to have a four-year college degree, a three-year graduate degree, plus experience, and pass the "McNutt Test." And the McNutt Test was very simple: Do you want to get in and work and study and make your reports and respond to the situation? Or, do you want to sit around drinking coffee and bat the breeze? And if they wanted to drink coffee and bat the breeze, I did not and would not have them as students. And it was a rare privilege to walk along with young men and women who devoted their lives to Christian ministry--I and Jewish rabbis, Catholic priests, Catholic theologians. I'm Southern Baptist, myself. But what I did, I did not grant degrees; their seminaries are the ones that gave them their degrees, but I could provide the training.

This is a broader step in theological education. It's simply taking a person who has read a lot of books and has a lot knowledge but, then, how does he apply to the people, real people? How does he get along with them? How does he relate to them? That's--and many pastors are very effective and never had a day of CPE in their lives. They don't need it because they know how to meet people; they know how to greet them; they know how to share what we call the gospel, or the good will, of the Bible. But it does help young ministers learn how to be more effective quicker. And so that's been my career in theological education. It's been a pleasure to walk along with men and women of different denominations. They didn't try to convert me, and I didn't try to convert them to be a Baptist. But it was a delight to see how many different people have so much in common. And this has been a wonderful career, and I've enjoyed it thoroughly. It's hard work but very rewarding.

While in graduate school in Louisville, Kentucky, one of my friends was bragging about a pretty little nurse that he had discovered. And I thought he was just bragging; you know, boys do brag about their girlfriends. But sure enough, I found out he was telling the truth. And so I found out that he was an honest fellow. And so we started dating, and we got married after a short courtship of three and one half years, and we moved to Louisiana, and our daughter was born about a year later. And then a year later than that, the second daughter was born. And when the second daughter was five months old, my wife was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was hospitalized. And she was hospitalized for a period of eight months and would have been longer, but they made arrangements so that she could be followed by a physician at our own hospital, which she did. And this physician was excellent and helped her along real well.

The thing that I discovered that there's a lot of work involved in taking care of children. I was accustomed doing heavy labor back on the farm and could do that and did do it. But when you make bottles of milk and fold diapers and do a dozen other things taking care of babies, you wind up at about 10:30 at night exhausted, and you'd get up the next morning and fix breakfast and go to work and so forth so forth.

But we found a babysitter who was a large lady from Texas. And she and her daughter needed a place to live while the daughter finished at college which was nearby. And this lady came into the household and took over, but she never one time gave me advice as to how to raise my babies. And she was a lady of quality and stayed with us even a month or two after Vera came home to make sure Vera was well taken care of and that we made it all right. And one time, when I tried to find--I travel 45 miles to find a lady who needed a job desperately. And finally she said, "If your mother was living with you, I would come and live with you."

We lived in a big house, and there was a separate apartment in his house where a lady or a family had lived and work for by--work for--taking care of the babies and providing meals for me. And this lady from Texas, if she ran short of food for the evening meal,

she'd go to a neighbor's house and borrow something. She was a delight. And one time, when he had visited a lady who needed a job, and she said--she's the one that said, "If your mother was living with you, I'm come and live with him."

Anyway, when this daughter was, I guess she was about three years old, and the younger baby was asleep--I had already put her to bed--and then this daughter spoke up and said, "Daddy, we do not need a lady." And that made me feel good. But we did need a lady to run the household and take care of things. But I thank my wife, she made a splendid recovery and, later, we had about a bouncing baby boy. And he's now and engineer in Kentucky, and his company had built a factory in China.

And our second daughter was the WMU, or the Women's Missionary Union of the Association of Churches in Mobile. There's 146 Baptist churches in Mobile. And the women's organization, she was president of it for several years, and he works as a nurse. She's a registered nurse and retired last year, but she's continuing to work. And this daughter is a teacher and she takes care of Vera and I now and she and her husband and her two sons. And she has--she won't tell you about it, but she has five-months-old great-grandsons; they're twins. And they have an older sister who is almost three years old now. So we had a wonderful time Thanksgiving. I told them that Vera and I had won the jackpot. And I said proof of it is these little ones and my daughters and my son and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I want to say that I'm only ninety two years old, and the Veterans Administration considers me legally blind. And I do take shots in the eyes once a month to maintain what little vision I have. And I am being treated also so for a lung deficiency. And I walk with a walking stick. And the V.A. is planning to give me a wheelchair, but I resist using a wheelchair, but I do need one when I stir around very much. But I'm fine that life can go on in spite of our difficulties.

And fortunately, my daughter and her husband and her two sons and one of her grandsons is ten years old and the other one is four years old and they are a delight. And the ten-year-old assists me everywhere I go; he'll open doors for me and help me stand up and he'll run and get my walking stick for me. He does things without me asking. He's a pleasure to be around. He does well in his school work. He's the son of her second son. And she has two sons. And the other son manages a restaurant for a living and he's a delight, and he's the one that has twin boys and the little girl that's about three years old, and they live here in the area.

So my wife and I do indeed feel blessed. And we think what--we thank the GLASS organization for their splendid cooperation with me. All I have to do is call in what books I want and they come within a day or two. And I usually have more books than I can read at one time. But I read them and put them in the mail box. And it's a blessing indeed, and I deeply appreciate.

And I find that Vera and I are not accustomed to being waited upon. But now, at this stage in our lives, we have to be waited upon. And it's a different lifestyle, but we appreciate it very much. And she and her family does unbelievable things for us, and our neighbors do the same thing, and it makes life enjoyable, and helps us tremendously.

So I want to say that if anyone has had difficulty with handicap, their injuries, or whatever, that life can go on. So I am very thankful for what the Veterans Administration and other organizations are doing to assist me and my wife in living more comfortably.