

Transcript of Oral History Interview of Margaret Call

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford on June 14, 2007

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Kathy Bradford: Today is Thursday, June 14, 2007, and I'm speaking with Margaret Call at her home in Brigham City. Our main focus today will be the Bear River Bird Refuge. First I'd like to ask you where you were born, a little bit about your growing up years and how you came to be in Brigham City.

Margaret Call: Both of my parents were from Cache Valley. My mother was Margaret Budge, and my dad was Vanez Wilson. When I was just barely in grade school, my dad had the opportunity to work for the Department of Interior. He was an engineer. Water was his strong point, and at that time they were just getting the Refuge started, so he came to the Refuge as the Chief Engineer. There was a man whose name was George Mushback. At that time he was in charge of the Refuge, but not for very long. Then Dad took over as the Manager and became the Superintendent of Refuges, so he not only had Bear River, but he also oversaw Farmington Bay. I would sometimes ride with him, and we'd go out to Cutler Dam. He would regulate the amount of water that would go out to the Bird Refuge. There was not much there in those early days.

KB: Where did you live when he came here to work?

MC: Well, at first we moved to Brigham and lived down on Main Street. We lived there for about six years, and then the government built residences out at the Refuge, plus offices and a research center. They said, "Okay, now we've provided you a residence; we expect you to live there." So even though we owned our home in Brigham, we went to the Refuge to live.

KB: Did you sell your home there?

MC: No, we rented our house in Brigham and lived in the Refuge house. It was new. They had just built it. It was a nice house, and they built a couple more houses, and there was a shop, a garage, and what they called the barn. So there were quite a few buildings.

KB: Were there other families there?

MC: A couple of families that came and went from time to time.

KB: Did you ride a bus to school in Brigham?

MC: School was an interesting problem for us. It was too far to come every day. They would bring gravel trucks from the old Perry pit and put gravel down, but it was just a gravel road. In the winter, we would come in to Brigham and board with a family during the week. Mother would bring us in on Monday, and we'd stay during the week. On Friday she'd come back and get us.

KB: How many siblings did you have?

MC: Four besides me.

KB: Did all of you come at once and stay at the same house?

MC: Well, we were a lot of different ages. I was the oldest, so I was the one who got in on the most of it. We did that until I was about a junior in high school. Then Mother and Dad decided, "Okay, this is too hard to find someone who wants to board two or three kids."

So we rented an apartment in town where we stayed during the school year. We still owned our home, but someone else was living in it. We rented an apartment in Brigham. We would rent an apartment in the winter, and then we would come and go on the weekends.

KB: That would be hard to be involved in school dances and after-school activities.

MC: Yes, you had to miss a few things because it was pretty hard to have a date with a guy if he had to run to the Bird Refuge. Mother always did lots of cooking of things over the weekend for us to bring in to get us through the week. My folks actually didn't move back into Brigham until about 1940.

KB: So you pretty much grew up out there. You mentioned a research center. Was that for studying botulism?

MC: Yes. Cecil Williams was a research person. Wayne Jensen worked out there and Leo Young and Mark Nelsen. Leo and Joe Hansen from down in the Fifth Ward worked out there for Dad. There were quite a few people who worked there because they were running drag lines. They were building the dikes.

KB: So you got there before the dikes were built. What was the barn for?

MC: It really wasn't a barn in the sense that we didn't have animals, but that was where they kept some of the equipment. And they used to treat the birds for botulism to see if they could actually help them. In other words, if they could take a bird, they would inject it and various things to see if they could help those birds live. It was mostly equipment and things like that, but we called it a barn.

KB: Did you get involved with the birds at all?

MC: Well, as a kid, my next sibling was a brother who was three years younger, and we spent lots of time together. We used to have a little boat – a canoe-like boat – and we'd float down and look at the birds and the bird nests so we really had a chance to spend time outside. From time to time we had families that lived there. One was Leo Young, and they lived for several years in a house out there. There was a second residence built that was occupied most of the time and then an older residence. I don't know how it got there.

I traveled with my dad in the summer. That's when the water needed to be regulated most, so I'd just ride with him. We had a big 100-foot tower. As kids we used to run that tower to see how fast we could

get to the top.

KB: Did you have the driving tour road then?

MC: Some of them, especially the main one that they used to call Unit 2, which is the one that you would have traveled when you went out to visit. It was interesting. Of course, there were lots of birds around, and we got to fish in the river. It was mostly carp and catfish.

KB: Did your mother cook them?

MC: No! We just caught them. My mother didn't even like good fish. But at a certain time of the year the carp would come up to the spillways where the water was held up – where you crossed a bridge – and they could control that water with what they called boards. At certain times of the year the fish would come up to those boards, and the water would just be teeming with fish. Once in a while you'd see people come and fish, especially if they could get catfish. They didn't like carp very well, but they could eat catfish.

I remember there was a company from California who would bring their big trucks and collect those carp and take them to use for feed. I'm not sure what kind of animal they fed with them, but they used to do that.

KB: You mentioned that your father was the manager of all the refuges in the area. I didn't know we had other refuges in this area.

MC: Well, now they're their own little entities, but I remember him going up to Strawberry and he'd go visit other refuges. He worked out there for a lot of years. We were still in Logan when he started working there. We had what we called woodies when we were kids. They're like station wagons with wood on the sides. That's what he'd drive – a woodie. The roads weren't really in. They were just working on roads. On the news when they talk about the winter of 1933 – how cold it was – they used to drive on the river for a road because there weren't roads. So he drove that woodie on the river to get out to Corinne.

KB: You really saw a lot of changes over the years.

MC: Yes. We got a road, and it was kind of up to Dad to keep up that road. It was his personnel that worked for him that would go to Perry and get the gravel. They'd go out and get the gravel and put down the road. In the spring when the river was high, water from the river would sometimes come out and cover the road. There have been more than a few times I've held my breath as we crossed the water where the road should be.

KB: Did anyone have accidents with all that water?

MC: I don't remember any accidents on the roads, but I had a little brother who was seven at the time. He wasn't really well. He'd had something like meningitis and didn't have the total use of one arm, but he loved to play out there on a tricycle. It happened that I wasn't there because I'd graduated from Box

Elder and had gone back to St. Louis with an aunt and uncle for a few weeks. That was my treat. But he fell in the river and drowned while I was in the East. So that was not very good. My youngest brother wasn't born until we moved back into Brigham. I had one sister Joyce and those three brothers. Budge, David, and Van.

I think the interesting thing was coming in and actually living with people, boarding. We boarded with different people over the years and we were always together. Some were friends. Floyd Knudsen and his wife were friends with my folks, and their kids were getting a little older. Those were the days of the Depression, and any little bit of money people could make they were happy for. Dad worked for the government so he was actually earning money. A lot of people were doing anything for food just to get by. We lived with several different families.

KB: If you had to go to a school activity, did they drive you there?

MC: No, we walked. Everybody walked in those days – not from the Refuge, but from the place we were living or boarding.

In its heyday where the offices were, it was nice. When my dad left, there were nice buildings. The roads never have been very good out there. Even to this day, the roads aren't very good. It was interesting, and we learned to kind of be on our own because for a couple of years we had our own little apartment that I mentioned. Three of us, my brother, my sister and I lived there. My parents weren't there during the week.

KB: You were probably in charge, being the oldest sibling.

MC: Yes, that was when I was a junior and senior in high school.

KB: Did you have to do all the cooking?

MC: Yes. Mother did lots of preparation for us. It was a good experience. Then when I saw it years later, what a change! In 1983 we had that really cold and wet year with the wind and the ice and the flooding. I went back to the Refuge for the first time after that, and there was only about one building that was still standing. I thought it must be the wind. I just didn't realize that the ice would blow in sheets, and the ice just literally cut those buildings down. The tower was gone. By the time I went out, they'd done a lot of cleaning up.

KB: When did your father retire from there?

MC: He worked until he was 70 years old. We moved to Brigham in 1929, and I don't know how long he had worked there previous to that. We still lived in Logan for a little time while he was the engineer of the project, and he worked out there until 1965. He was 70 years old, and they finally sold their house on Main Street and bought a house down near us here on the corner of 6th East and 3rd North. They lived there until they passed away.

KB: When I talked to you on the phone, you said you worked out there yourself.

MC: I did. My dad was still there, and it was a little unusual because it was during World War II. You have to remember that the war happened during all this time. When I finished at Utah State, his clerk at the Refuge, although he was somewhat older, was drafted. By then they were drafting anybody and everybody, so his clerk was drafted, and neither the Research nor my dad's office had any secretarial help. I had graduated in secretarial science, so I got to go to work for them, which probably wouldn't have happened otherwise – being family-related. They don't often do that, but they were desperate times. I was working part-time for the Refuge and part-time for the Research. Horton Jensen lived here in Brigham until he died. I've forgotten his wife's name, but the Research people had an office in the old Brigham City Post Office that was on Main Street. They had an office upstairs there. So I worked some days for the Research people up in that building and some for my dad at the Refuge.

KB: Were you married then?

MC: No! There were no men! I learned some things that I wouldn't have learned any other way. During duck hunting season, everybody had to check in and they had to go through the main office. They had lots of other helpers, but sometimes I'd have to help with that, too. They could start to shoot at sunrise or daylight. We used to get up at 4:30 in the morning. I didn't have to do that very often, but sometimes. I learned how to check their guns.

KB: Were they allowed to hunt right on the Refuge?

MC: Yes, in certain areas, and they still do as far as I know. In the evenings when they were through hunting and came in, they had to check all their ducks through. They had to bring the ducks in, and we had to make a note of how many mallards they had and how many green heads they had, and had they killed a canvasback duck that they weren't supposed to? Some hunters couldn't tell swan from geese, so some would come in with swan, and they were illegal.

KB: What did you do then?

MC: Well, they wrote them up some kind of a ticket as I remember, but they could shoot the geese. They'd have a limit for them.

KB: Did you already know the differences in those ducks just from living out there as a kid?

MC: Just those that were close around our house. The house we lived in out there was a nice home for the time. It had a screened-in porch on one side, which was very close to the river, so a lot of them we knew as kids -- but you don't shoot pelicans! That's one they could tell.

KB: Did they have all the buildings and the driving tour when you worked there?

MC: Yes, it was pretty much like it was just before the flood. Where I worked it was all kind of a complex. My dad's office was up on the second floor so he could look out and see what was going on and where people were. The Research Office was over just a little way away, so there was a conglomerate of different buildings. They were all there when we moved there. That was why we had

to move out there because they built all those buildings.

My youngest brother was born, and my mother said, "Okay, I've had it! I'm not hauling this kid back and forth to school." There were 17 years between me and my youngest brother. It was quite a span, and she said, "I've got to move to Brigham."

We still had our house on Main Street, and we actually came in with our parents and rented an apartment in Brigham for at least a couple of years before the folks eventually moved back into the South Main house. By then, Dad was about ready to retire, so then they moved up here.

KB: What did he do after he retired?

MC: He was 70 by then, and he just thoroughly enjoyed his lot here. Behind his house here, there's a house now, but he had a little orchard back there.

KB: So your children had grandparents right down the street.

MC: Right, and that was nice.

KB: Who took over his position after he left?

MC: While he was out there, he trained several people for the Government to go to different refuges. One that he trained that took over at the Refuge was Lloyd Gunther. He took over after Dad.

KB: What about the duck clubs out there? I've heard they had celebrities who came. Did you meet any of them?

MC: They did have the duck clubs, and we were always interested in them. They were pretty big buildings to us as kids. They did have some famous people who came out there. Wallace Beery loved to come to the Refuge. He liked my dad. He actually built a small cabin (We'd really call that a cabin now), and he would come from California and he would stay in this funny little cabin. Of course, it was war time and we had to have ration coupons for gas. I was going over to school part of the time, and he would get me some extra gas coupons. That was kind of fun. The folks went to California one time with some friends, and he took them to the studio and visited. We have pictures that they took there of Wallace Beery and my folks, and their friends the Stratfords were there. So we had a lot of different experiences, and of course the war made a difference. My brother would have been drafted right out of high school at 18. Those 18-year-olds seemed so young, and he said to the folks, "I am not going to be a foot soldier."

So he joined the Navy, and he was in the Navy during the war. I went to Logan to the college, and I lived with my grandparents one year. I lived with an uncle one year. I loved Logan, and my mother and my dad had grown up there.

KB: When did you meet your husband?

MC: Right as the war was ending. Actually he was in the Bulge about the fourth day. They called him, and he's got it written down, and I don't remember all the details, but it was D-Day plus Four or something like that. I didn't know him well before because in the high school, senior boys aren't interested in freshmen girls. As the war was winding down, and the fellows were starting to come home, they started having parties and so forth. Right after Wayne got home, we went to some parties together. That was basically where I met him.

KB: You're still married, so that was a successful meeting.

MC: We will have been married 60 years in August. That's a long time. We have five children. Our kids all graduated from Utah State. Wayne was a graduate from the University of Utah, and I actually took a few advanced classes while he was in school because he'd been in the war. When he came home, I was long-graduated, but he was still a sophomore in school. He had the GI Bill and had to catch up. We lived in an apartment there in Salt Lake just like college kids do.

We have four boys who are all attorneys, who all graduated from Utah State and then from University of Utah Law School. Then we have one girl Ann, who lives in Smithfield. She was trained as a nurse. She went to Weber to get her nursing degree, and then she went to Logan and got her degree.

Three of our boys are still in Salt Lake, and one is in Newport Beach, California.

KB: Did you ever work after you left the Refuge?

MC: After we got married, I didn't work. Everybody works now. Back then people didn't do that very often. Single mothers – widows who lost their husbands in the war – had to do it, but most mothers just stayed home and took care of the children.

KB: Have you been to the Refuge since they built it all up again?

MC: Ann and I went after the flood, and it just kind of made me sick to see it. Al Trout had a foundation of volunteers who really helped. I wasn't into it enough to know exactly who they were. They didn't have much money to work with. It was really a volunteer effort. It was a mess. Like I said, I almost hated to go see it because there was hardly anything left but about one building and the old bridge and a few things.

KB: That's part of your heritage, your childhood and your growing up, isn't it?

MC: Yes.

KB: Have you been to the new center down there on Forest Street?

MC: I have been to the new one. Some friends worked down there for a while, and they said, "Come on. You've got to come and see." So we did. We went down one day, but I haven't been down there a lot. To me, it's in town. I remember the paper had something in it. You know what I think happens, and I'm just guessing, is that people stop, and they go to that center. They look around and see some of the

basic things, and then they're on their way.

KB: I think the road still intimidates people.

MC: It always intimidated us – it was so rocky and so rough. We had to cross the railroad tracks there on Forest Street. We'd go to the Refuge down Forest Street across the railroad tracks and on out. There were two or three homes farther out. There was one named Jensen. They used to call him Itchy or something like that. But we had to cross that railroad track, so when we'd come into school on Mondays especially, the dang train schedule was such that often we would get stuck waiting for the train. They would stop and load and unload. There was no way of getting around that railroad track. One time my brother had been in town for some school project or something, and so he headed home. He didn't come and he didn't come, and the folks worried because the road wasn't very good. There were several narrow bridges, and they worried and worried when he didn't come. Finally Dad lights out to go see where the heck this kid is, and when they got clear into the railroad tracks, the train had gone by. It had stayed a while, and he'd just curled up in the seat of the car to wait for the train and went to sleep. He'd been asleep for hours waiting. He said in his half-sleep state, "I'm waiting for the train to go by."

KB: That's a good story. You have a lot of stories, and I've enjoyed talking to you. Do you have any more stories about the Refuge.

MC: It was a great experience. It probably wouldn't have been what I'd have chosen as a high school student. We had to take all our drinking water out there. We just had the river. There was no drinking water. It was all piped into the homes, and we could use it for bathing, showering, dishes, cleaning, everything – but not to drink. We had no drinking water.

KB: Did you have electricity and telephones?

MC: Oh yes, but not drinking water. I remember that my dad took a big ten-gallon milk can, and they would bring that in. They had more than one. They would fill that can, and he had made a place in the pantry. They would set that can of water with the spigot, and that's what we used to drink. And hey, it's a long way from the store if you needed a square of butter.

The folks would always go to the old cannery in Perry in the fall and just stock up with all the canned stuff that they needed for the winter. Sometimes some men would pick us up or take us back. We often rode with the workers back and forth. We'd stop at the dairy and picked up our milk in those cute little milk cans that were about so big. We'd take our milk out in them. We had to plan ahead.

My mother was a faithful church worker. While she was living out there, she was President of the Stake Primary. Later she was in the Stake Relief Society, but I think that was after she moved back into town. But we made lots of trips.

I remember very early on when my dad was first out of college, they had to drive the river because there were no roads. One time my dad just for fun had some skis, and he let us pull him on the way, but we didn't do much in the way of winter sports. They were afraid to let us skate unless we went way out

where the water was really shallow, and we were anxious to get into Brigham where the rest of the kids were.

KB: When you look back, wasn't this a positive experience for you?

MC: Yes, I think so. You've heard of Torrey Petersen who did the bird books. He used to come to the Refuge, and he was a good friend of my dad's. One of his first books that he had published, he autographed and wrote in for my dad. I thought that was kind of special.

My youngest brother has always loved hunting and that sort of thing, and so most of those things he has. He has a son who now is a biologist, and he travels everywhere. I just talked to my brother the other day, and he said, "Oh, Dad would be so proud of Matthew!" He's up in Antarctica and down in some foreign land, and he is really a biologist. I thought, Dad would really get a kick out of that.

KB: Well, this is good information, and I appreciate your time. Thank you for talking with me.