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Interview no. 785

Louis B. McKee

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Louis B. McKee
INTERVIEWER: Becky Craver
PROJECT: El Paso Family Owned Businesses
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 12, 1992
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO: 785
TRANSCRIPT NO: 785
TRANSCRIBER: Kevin Rowan

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born July 11, 1933; Childhood address was 2630 Richmond; attended Crockett and Austin High School; received BS in Civil Engineering from University of New Mexico 1955; U.S. Marine Corps 1955-57; went to work for dad's company, R. E. McKee Construction, Inc.; in 1957 and remained with the company even after merger into Santa Fe Industries until retirement in 1982.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Childhood memories; declares reasons for his father's success; discusses father's early career; quotes his father as saying his job was to "keep the opera singers singing." Speaks of his father as an innovator in offering employee benefits such as stock shares; compliments father as having a good relationship with employees; explains reasons for the company going public in 1971 and the procedures to register the company with the American Stock Exchange in 1971; discusses merger of Robert E. McKee, Inc and the Zia Company, into Santa Fe Industries in 1973.

Length of Interview: 45 minutes Length of Transcript 19 pages

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Name of person interviewed Louis B. McKee
Name of interviewer Becky Craver
Date(s) of interview October 12, 1992
Length of interview 45 minutes

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF PERSON INTERVIEWED

Born July 11, 1933 in El Paso; childhood address was 2630 Richmond;
attended Crockett and Austin High School; received BS in Civil Engineering
from University of New Mexico 1955; U.S. Marine Corps 1955-57; went to
work for his dad's company, Robert E. McKee Construction, Inc., in 1957
and remained with the company even after merger into Santa Fe Industries
until retirement in 1982.

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the opera singers singing." Speaks of his father as an innovator in
offering employee benefits such as stock shares; compliments father as
having a good relationship with employees; explains reasons for the
company going public in 1971 and the procedures to register the company
with the American Stock Exchange in 1971; discusses merger of Robert E.
McKee, Inc. and the Zia Company of Los Alamos which was also owned and
managed by the McKee Company, into Santa Fe Industries in 1973.

LOUIS BERNARD McKEE
725 Country Club Road
El Paso, Texas 79932
(915) 584-0896

Registered Professional Civil Engineer (Texas)

OBJECTIVE

To obtain a managerial or administrative position with an organization in construction, a related or other field whereby my experience and educational background could be of assistance in operational or diversification efforts.

EXPERIENCE

June 1988 - ROBERT E. & EVELYN MCKEE FOUNDATION
Present El Paso, Texas
President, Treasurer & Trustee

Administration and management of investments for the purpose of providing assistance and support to tax exempt charitable organizations primarily in El Paso, but also in other cities of the Southwest.

Feb. 1983 - L. B. McKEE - DEALER IN FINE ART
Present El Paso, Texas
(Part time)

Provided representation, marketing and sales services on a commission basis for living southwestern artists and owners of valuable southwestern and indian art and artifacts by personal contact with clients and through the utilization of descriptive and pictorial brochures. Also, arranged for and assisted in the presentation of art shows for the public.

1950 - 1982 ROBERT E. MCKEE, INC.
(As follows) El Paso, Texas

A major general contractor, subsidiary of SANTA FE INDUSTRIES, INC., that operated principally in the Pacific Coast, Southwestern, Southern, and Southeastern areas of the United States. The company was primarily engaged in a wide variety of construction for public and private clients. The company also owned and operated various real properties and investments in marketable securities. Executive offices were located in El Paso, Texas. Division offices were maintained in El Paso, Dallas and Los Angeles. An office was also located in Houston.

June 1982 - Executive Vice President & Director
Jan. 1970

Assisted the President in the direction and supervision of corporate operations and administrative functions relating to marketing, planning, investments, finance, budget control, personnel, public relations, acquisitions, diversification efforts, etc. Chairman of Robert E. McKee, Inc. Profit Sharing and Retirement Plan Advisory Committee. President & Director of B & C GENERAL AGENCY, a wholly owned insurance agency subsidiary. Vice President & Director of THE ZIA COMPANY an affiliate operations and maintenance organization that operated principally at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, Los Alamos, NM. Vice President & Director of SECURITY GUARD SERVICE, INC. Director of SANTA FE INDUSTRIES FOUNDATION.

June 1982 - Executive Vice President & Director (Cont'd.)

Jan. 1970

Special Assignments - Responsible for initiation and implementation of:
Purchase and expansion of SECURITY GUARD SERVICE, INC. - 1973
Merger of ROBERT E. MCKEE, INC. and THE ZIA COMPANY into SANTA FE INDUSTRIES, INC. - 1973
Registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission of ROBERT E. MCKEE, INC. stock. - 1971.
Exempt Compensation Study and Incentive Compensation Plan - 1969/1970.

Jan. 1970 - Division Construction Operations Manager, Vice President & Director

Jan. 1961

Responsible for all construction operations assigned to the El Paso Division Office. Directed, supervised & inspected numerous projects. Provided assistance to the Division Chief Estimator in that same capacity when overloaded.

Jan. 1961 - Supervisory Engineer (or Construction Manager)

July 1958

Administered engineering and construction, reviewed plans and specifications for architectural or structural errors or omissions, processed contract modifications, analyzed construction costs, estimated construction costs, made quantity take offs, designed concrete formwork and other construction media, provided interpretations for contract documents, represented the corporation in person or by correspondence, expedited the delivery of materials and the prosecution of the work and settled contractual disputes.

July 1957 - Assistant Superintendent & Field Engineer

July 1958

Provided supervision to our own labor forces and subcontractors, expedited materials deliveries, provided and checked engineering layouts, checked shop drawings for materials, designed concrete formwork, made quantity take offs, carried out quality control engineering tests, etc.

1950 - 1955 Engineers Assistant (Part time summer work)

Provided engineers assistance for the layout of various construction projects.

MILITARY SERVICE

Jan. 1956 - UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
July 1957 MARINE CORPS AIR STATION
El Toro (Santa Ana), California
Second & First Lieutenant

Served under assigned Engineering Military Occupational Specialty with Marine Air Base Squadron 37, Marine Wing Service Group 37, 3rd Marine Air Wing, Fleet Marine Force Pacific. Assignments included primary duties as Camp Maintenance Officer, as well as Building & Grounds Officer and Guard Officer.

July 1955 - MARINE CORPS SCHOOLS
Jan. 1956 Quantico, Virginia
Second Lieutenant

Attended Officers Basic School

EDUCATION

1951 - 1955 UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
 Albuquerque, New Mexico
Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering (June 9, 1955)
Honorary Societies, Etc.
 Phi Kappa Phi (Scholastic)
 Sigma Tau (Engineering)
 Chi Epsilon (Civil Engineering)
 Kappa Mu Epsilon (Mathematics)
Scholarship Index at U.N.M. - 2.5 (3.0 Base)
Rank in Class - 32 in class of 450
N.R.O.T.C. - Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U. S. Marine Corps

1946 - 1951 Graduated, AUSTIN HIGH SCHOOL (May 24, 1951)
 El Paso, Texas

1939 - 1946 CROCKETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
 El Paso, Texas

BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

1963 - 1992 Professional Engineer - Registered in the State of Texas
1963 - 1991 National Society of Professional Engineers - Past Member
 Associated General Contractors of America - El Paso Chapter (Past President)
 First City National Bank of El Paso (Past Director)

CHARITABLE & CIVIC AFFILIATIONS

El Paso Cancer Treatment Center (Director & Past President)
El Paso Community Foundation (Advisory Trustee)
El Paso Shelter for Battered Women (Advisory Board Member)
Development Board of The University of Texas at El Paso (Past Member)
El Paso Art Museum Association (Past Trustee)
El Paso Boy's Club (Past Director)
Hospice El Paso (Past Board Member)
United Way of El Paso (Past Director & 1977 Campaign Chairman)
YWCA (Past Member of Advisory Panel)

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Social Security Number _____ 459-50-1361
Birth Date _____ July 11, 1933
Citizenship _____ United States
Marital Status _____ Divorced
Children _____ 4 (All over 21)
Foreign Language Proficiency _____ Spanish

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS, ACTIVITIES & INTERESTS

Personal Computers:

Utilization of software applications for bookkeeping & accounting, word processing, spreadsheets, graphics, desktop publishing and monitoring of marketable securities. Proficiency with MS DOS, MS Windows Environment, DOS & Windows utilities, system configurations, additions of peripherals and hardware internal modifications.

Owner & Breeder of Quarter Racing Horses (20 Years Experience)

Photography:

All photography for book entitled "Early El Paso Artists" by the Texas Western Press of The University of Texas at El Paso in 1983.
Advertising photography for art and horses.

Biographical Sketch for The Handbook of Texas
on
Robert E. McKee

McKee, Robert Eugene (Gene). Robert Eugene McKee was born in Lake View (Chicago), Illinois, on June 15, 1889. He was the youngest son of Alice Elizabeth (Cleve) and James David McKee.

His family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when he was very young where he received his education at the Manual Training School of Washington University. He left St. Louis as a young man to live on his Uncle "Bud" Cleve's ranch at Elk, New Mexico. After a short stay at the ranch, he moved to El Paso, Texas, in 1910 at the age of 21 years and began his illustrious career in the engineering and construction field.

Robert Eugene McKee and Gladys Evelyn (Evie) Woods were married on September 20, 1911. They had eight children, six sons and two daughters.

After working as a draftsman and engineer for the El Paso Milling Co. and the Engineering Department of the City of El Paso, he began his own construction company in 1913 and soon became one of America's most important contractors. McKee's unique personal talents and keen knowledge of the construction industry enabled him to expand his company quickly into one of the nation's largest and most successful operations. By 1935 he had built the Naval Docks and the Marine Hospital at the naval base in San Diego. In Hawaii, he had just completed various military facilities to include the power plant at Pearl Harbor, the Air Corps Double Hangars and 3,200 man barracks at Hickam Field. He was also constructing officers' quarters, warehouses, Air Corps machine shops and an engine test facility at Hickam Field; all of which were substantially complete when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

His organization was well known for its ability to do the unique, the difficult, the different. During World War II, McKee built the largest military center in Texas - Camp Bowie near Brownwood - in a record time of only ten months. He constructed large military installations in the Panama Canal Zone and in the Territory of Hawaii. During one year he had hired 42,000 workers on his payroll. In the 1950's he constructed the Cadet Quarters Complex, the Air Force Chapel and several other large facilities at the United States Air Force Academy. In 1959 he was the major contractor for the new Los Angeles International Airport. Building a variety of major projects in 35 of the 50 states, his headquarters and home, however, were always in El Paso, Texas, with branch offices in Dallas, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Hawaii and the Panama Canal Zone.

Known for his unsurpassed organizational and management skills, he was chosen to be solely responsible for the timely construction of the facilities for the Los Alamos Atomic Energy Project in New Mexico during World War II. He was among a select group of people responsible for the successful development of the atomic bomb, building most of the laboratories, testing sites, dormitories and houses at Los Alamos, in utmost

secrecy under the mysterious Manhattan Project. He drove himself and his men to build structures that were unique in design and construction, while not knowing the purpose of these installations, he had them ready in record time. He was honored for this accomplishment by Major General Leslie R. Groves, Officer in Charge of the Atomic Bomb Project, who awarded McKee the Army-Navy "E" for high achievement in October 1945.

El Paso's skyline could almost be labeled "made by McKee." His company built a large percentage of El Paso's major structures, to include offices, hospitals, banks, schools, churches, military installations and facilities at UTEP. Two of his pet projects were the Austin High School stadium named for him, and the Southwestern Children's Home. He was a liberal donor to many projects.

McKee became one of the largest individually owned contracting firms in the United States, when in 1950 he incorporated his construction operations. His growth and success were directly related to his philosophy of giving his personal attention to detail, his high regard for employees as individuals, and a demand for work of the highest quality that produced the finest quality of buildings.

Because the Southwest had always been of great interest and fascination to McKee, he chose El Paso, Texas, to be his home and headquarters for his business. His interest in the art and crafts of southwestern Indian tribes brought him to Taos, Santa Fe and other art colonies where he became acquainted with many of the native artists and their art works. He and his wife visited many of these artists in their homes and corresponded with them regularly over the years. As a result of these visits, they acquired an outstanding collection of Southwestern and Indian art. This collection was later established as the McKee Collection of Paintings.

Mr. and Mrs. McKee's keen interest in the El Paso community and in the El Paso Museum of Art had a great deal to do with the development of the Museum. McKee had established a firm acquaintance and friendship with Mr. Rush Kress and became instrumental in the acquisition of part of the Samuel H. Kress Collection of paintings for permanent display in El Paso.

He never ran for an elected office, but was appointed City alderman to the City Council of El Paso in 1928. He was a vestry man at St. Clement's Episcopal Church. McKee was a thirty-second degree Scottish Rite Mason and Active in El Maida Shrine. He was a board member of the El Paso Museum of Art and Southwestern Children's Home.

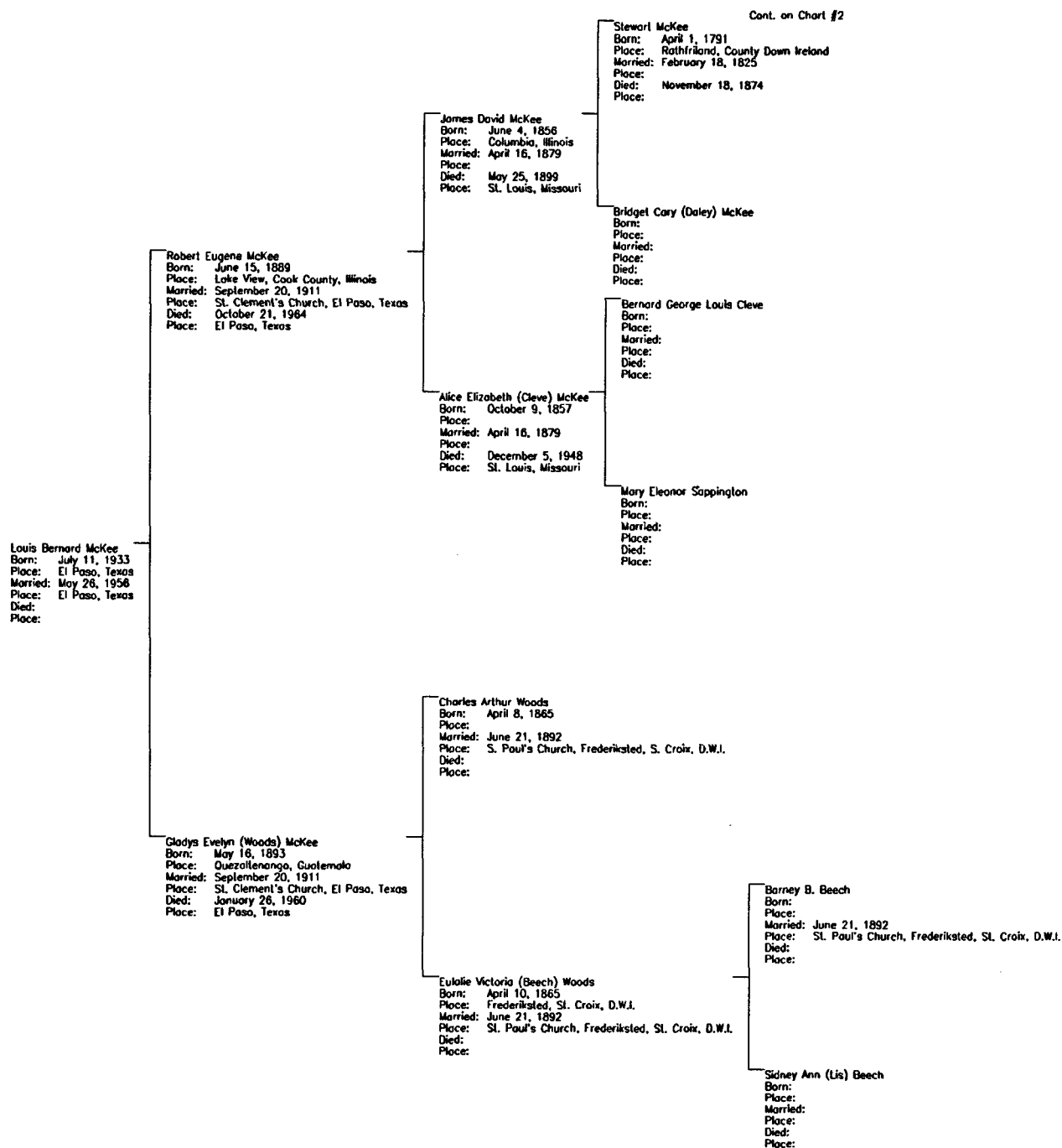
He was appointed Colonel, aide-de-camp to the Governor of the State of New Mexico in 1947. The City of El Paso honored him as "Conquistador" in 1960 and he was inducted into the El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor in 1967. He was a champion of the underprivileged and used his influence and generosity in achieving many charitable, civic, religious, medical and educational goals that are today a monument of a

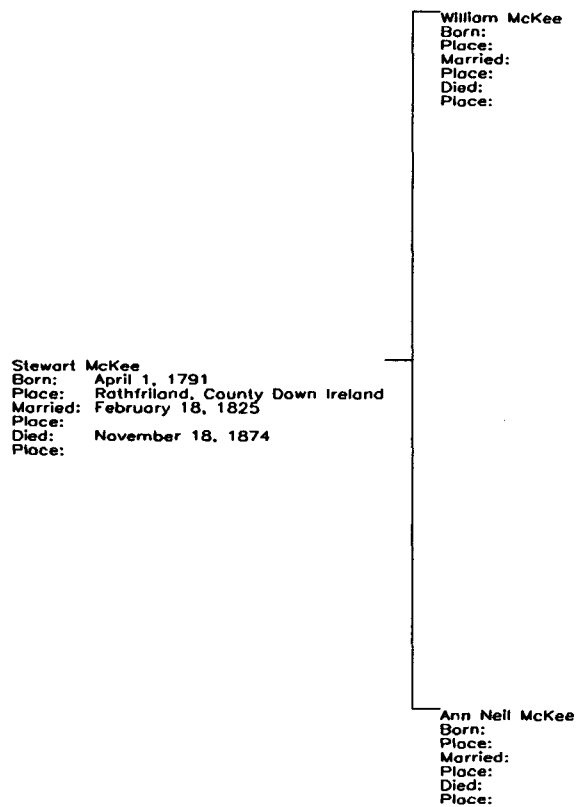
part of his life's ambition. In 1952 he established the Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation, a non-profit, charitable corporation for the continuation of his charitable goals within the United States.

Robert E. McKee died on October 21, 1964, in El Paso, Texas, at the age of 75, active as Chairman of the Board of Robert E. McKee, General Contractor, Inc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Mr. McKee's children were the source for all factual, personal data; Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation-The McKee Collection of Paintings, published by the El Paso Museum of Art, 1968; Phoenix Art Museum-Paintings from the McKee Foundation, published by the Western Art Associates, 1976; El Paso Times-various news articles published between March 8, 1935 and October 22, 1964; Program of Presentation-Army-Navy "E" Award to employees of Robert E. McKee General Contractor, Los Alamos, N.M., October 16, 1945; Certificate of Appointment-Governor of New Mexico-to Robert E. McKee as Colonel, aide-de-camp, February 19, 1947; Certificate of Honor-City of El Paso-Robert E. McKee awarded title of Conquistador, December 10, 1960; El Paso Herald Post-"Side-Bar Remarks" by E.M. Pooley, Editor, January 29, 1962; Irene and Duffy Stanley-Personal recollections of experiences as a practicing Architect with Mr. McKee's unique capabilities in achieving outstanding buildings.

Irene and Duffy Stanley





Notes about Robert E. and Evelyn McKee

Robert (known to family and friends as Gene or Eugene) born June 15, 1889 in Chicago. Raised in St. Louis. Father died in an accident when he was 10 years old. Education at Manual Training School of Washington University. Moved to Elk, New Mexico to his Uncle "Bud" Cleve's ranch. Then to El Paso.

1913 - General Contractor. Construction Business built installations in the Panama Canal Zone, Hawaii, Los Alamos A Bomb Project.

Died 1964

Evelyn (known as Evie) born May 16, 1893 in Quezaltenango, Guatemala. Her father was employed as an electrical power plant operator until the plant was destroyed by a devastating earthquake. Then he became manager of a coffee plantation. Finally family evacuated and fled to San Francisco.

Then San Francisco earthquake and fire hit, and the Woods family left San Francisco for Chihuahua, Mexico. Lived there for a short time, then came to El Paso.

Evie and Gene met at Mother Woods' boarding house. Married Sept. 20 1911.

8 children, six sons and two daughter.

27 grandchildren.

"Mother of the Year" 1942; member of St. Clement's Episcopal Church; board of trustees for YWCA.

Died 1960

The Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation was chartered in 1952.

Children:

C. David
John S. McKee
Mrs. Margaret McKee Lund
Mrs. Frances McKee Hays
Philip S. McKee
Louis B. McKee
Robert E. McKee III

Interview with Louis B. McKee
October 12, 1992
by Rebecca Craver

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Today is October 12, 1992. This is an interview with Louis McKee by Becky Craver.

C: O.K. Let's just start out, and tell me when you were born, Louis.

M: I was born in 1933 in El Paso, Texas.

C: And, what day?

M: Huh?

C: What's your birthday?

M: I don't have any idea.

C: No?

M: Oh...

C: What day?

M: I don't know.

C: Were you born at home or in a hospital?

M: I was born in the old Masonic Hospital at Five Points. I even have a photograph of it right here in my files.

C: All right. What schools did you go to?

M: I went to Crockett Grade School and Austin High School and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

C: Tell me, what was your address of your home when you were born?

M: 2630 Richmond Street, and I lived there all my life.

C: Can you tell me 1 or 2 memories you have of your childhood that stand out in your mind?

M: I remember that I had the very finest parents that anybody could have in the world.

C: You had a lot of freedom?

M: Not too much. I mean, I had enough, you know. My parents were pretty, uh, strict. I mean they gave us freedom, but they wanted us to have good values and respect other people, and all of the things that people should do today that they're not doing.

C: Who were your best friends?

M: Well, in grade school I had several of them. Some of them are still around El Paso. Leighton Green, he's a lawyer here in El Paso, and Don Henry, he's an architect. And, Hans McKinny, he's a..., what is it? Oh, I don't know. Why, I can't even think of what you call it.

C: What did you all play? All these guys, when you were in elementary school? Did you play up and down the alleys?

M: Oh yeah, uh, we had all kinds of things we did to keep busy. When we were little kids, we used to, like at night, play kick the can, and, you know, different games, and it was really fun, you know. Everybody kept pretty busy. We got into mischief, too, once in a while.

C: Do you remember any...

M: Like everybody else. (Chuckles)

C: Do you remember some times like that?

M: No, not too...

C: Where did you go on family vacations?

M: Actually, we never got to go on regular vacations, so to speak. We did make a lot of trips, most of which... My dad had to travel a lot, and we always tried to, you know... He tried to take us on those trips whenever it was possible. Just like, uh, when he was building things in Panama and Hawaii, well he took us kids. I think when we went to both places I was 6 and 7 years [old] at one time or the other. And I remember when we went to Panama, well, all of my brothers and sisters went except my oldest brother, I think. I don't even remember how many there were. And my aunt was there, too. But, I do remember that, I think, my dad said there were like 8, uh, no, I think there were 4 or 5 steamer trunks and 26 baggages that he had to keep track of. (Chuckles)

C: My goodness.

M: And we stopped in all kinds of places, like, you know, all the Central American countries before we got to Panama. And that was when he was doing work on the Canal Zone in the locks. And he had several jobs down there for the Corps of Engineers, whatever it was at the time. But, anyway, I do have photographs of me standing by the Panama Canal with my dad when I was 6 years old.

C: Really?

M: Yeah. Still do.

C: So, you were the baby of the family?

M: Uh hum. Yeah, I contend I was the mistake or something like that.

C: Uh huh. (Chuckles) O.K. Why do you think your father was so successful?

M: I tell you, probably because he grew up in [a] family [that] was pretty much in need of somebody working and supporting his family, as his father passed away when he was 10 years old. And I think he did everything imaginable when he was a young boy trying to earn enough for his family. He was always a person that wanted to support everybody, help anybody he could who was in need. I know he helped all of his brothers and sisters and everybody else's brother and sister, whoever else it might be. And it not only went to family, but it went to employees of the firm and their families. So, it was just one of the things that he felt he was obligated to do. But he was a very dedicated person. He was willing to sacrifice almost anything to get where he wanted to go. And his desires weren't necessarily to make money but just to support his family or whoever was in need and then to accomplish something he wanted to do. I mean, he usually set his mind to [do] something, or someone asked him to do something, and he was bound and determined to do it. And that's probably why he was successful; he wasn't really wanting to, you know, where money was the most important criteria.

C: How many brothers and sisters did he have?

M: He had 2 brothers and a sister, and they were all older than him. He was the youngest in the family, and...

C: He went to school in St. Louis?

M: Yeah, he went to Manual Training School at Washington University, and I've just had his, uh, diploma framed and a picture of his graduating class sent. It's right there.

C: Oh, that would be good.

M: It was in 1906, I think.

C: And he came to this part of the country, to the Southwest to go to his uncle's ranch.

M: Yes, in Elk, New Mexico.

C: And why did he come down there, and how old was he?

M: I think he was 17 years old when he came down there. And then he came to El Paso and worked for the El Paso Milling Company, or I think they called it the Box-Madero, Box-Madero Lumber Company, or something like that, and also the city engineering department for El Paso. And he worked for them as a draftsman and an engineer for several years, I don't know. And then he started his own business in 1913.

C: Was he married at that time?

M: No, I think he got married in 1922, if I'm not mistaken, something like that. I'll have to look. ...No, 1911. September 20, 1911.

C: So he married and then started the business.

M: Yeah, two years before.

C: What were some of his early projects, jobs that he worked?

M: Well, as I understand it, which I don't know because I was born 20 something years after that, but, I think he originally began to build residential homes. A lot of them, I know, he built in the Highland Park area, and that's in the area in which we lived. But he did build a lot [of houses] all in there and around Crockett school and all that area.

C: Did he build the house on Richmond that you lived in?

M: Uh huh. He also built the house that was just west of our house, which was one block to the west. And it was torn down when my dad built the new house.

C: I see.

M: But, he built both of them. In fact, uh, I have a photograph of the old house and there's a project number on there, project 11 or something like that, I don't know what it is.

C: Can you describe an evening at home with your mom and dad, sort of the typical evening when you were maybe in junior high

or high school?

M: Yeah. I sure can. You know, I can remember coming home, and we'd, you know, we had regular dinners at home. My mother, she believed in cooking dinners at home, and everybody eating at the table, all at one time, you know. And it was kind of a regimented type of thing, but it was all home-cooking and great. And after that, you know, of course, I always had to study, and I remember going and working on the dining room table, and that's where I'd study. And when I was studying, my dad and my mother would be in the living room; and my mom, she'd probably be sewing on a needlepoint deal, and my dad, he'd be playing solitaire, thinking about something he was going to do tomorrow. And, then, of course, my dad, he was a person that liked to walk a lot, or maybe he got used to it when he was first starting out in business in order to save carfare. As I understand it, he used to walk from Richmond Street to Texas Street and back every day to save carfare. Well, I think he got in the habit, and he used to walk every day on the mountain before work. And sometimes he'd take us kids walking. And when I was real small and Philip, too, Philip was a year and a half older than I was, and we'd get tired. And my dad couldn't carry us both at one time, so he'd alternate: one of us he'd carry for a while, and then he'd carry the other one. And sometimes we'd walk clear to the top of Scenic Drive and back and sometimes even straight up the mountain. And we did a lot of that walking, probably more walking than anybody would ever imagine today, and I guess maybe that's why I survived my Marine Corps stay so well (Chuckles); I was used to walking. But he loved to walk. And my mom, at one time she used to paint, and most of us have a little bit of ability in the art field. And I painted a little bit one time. My sisters painted, and my daughter paints, and... But, my mom, she probably was as good an artist as there was in the family, and she was too busy raising kids to paint. And, oh, my brother, my oldest brother, he did some, he used to paint too. He had a painting that he painted of the janitor at El Paso High School. I think it's still there.

C: Is that right?

M: Yeah, uh huh. And I don't know, just...anyway, all of that's come rattling off. I don't know why I said it.

C: Can you describe the way the children felt toward your father?

M: Well, I know one thing: all of us respected him. And sometimes he was pretty tough on us, but nevertheless, looking back on it, I think it was probably good. And, I know in looking through our archives and what not, I remember that there's a thing that he had written in the Church of Saint

Clements. It had something to the effect that he promised to be better to his kids and not be so harsh on them, and I don't know what else. But, anyway, and then there's an envelope that says "Do Not Open Until Instructed" or something. I have that in there, and it's pretty interesting. But he had made himself a promise. And, then one of the other promises was to look after, I forget what it was, uh, homeless children, or children who were orphaned. Related to that was probably his interest in the children's home that he was so interested in for many, many years: Southwestern Children's Home.

C: Uh huh.

M: But, uh, it's, I just ran across this thing. It's pretty amazing but apparently he kept his promise, you know?

C: Yeah. Did he spank you all?

M: Oh, yeah. When we were bad (Chuckles). Sure did.

C: Would you say that your mother was the main disciplinarian or your dad?

M: Oh, I think they were both, uh, pretty much in unison. When we were wrong, you know, they both got after us. My mother was probably, uh, the most easy going, or I don't know how you'd describe it, [the most easy going] person I ever saw in my life. She had to be, [what] with raising 8 kids, you know.

C: Do you think she mellowed by the time she had you and Philip, though?

M: No. I don't think [so]. You know, I think she just had a tremendous disposition and ability to handle stress, and, you know, things like that. Otherwise, she would have never survived.

C: Yeah, really. Isn't that the truth.

M: But I do remember that about her. She was really good at that.

C: Tell me, again, why you decided to go to the University of New Mexico.

M: Uh, well, I don't know. I got the idea that I wanted to be a naval officer in the United States Navy. I decided that, you know, at that time the only way to go there was to get an appointment through one of the Congressmen and Senators. And, my dad happened to know a couple of them at that time in New Mexico: Senator Anderson and Dennis Chavez. And, so in order for me to be able to obtain an appointment through them, I had

to be a resident of the State of New Mexico. And in order to do that I went to college at the University of New Mexico and qualified for my residency there. And, at that time, then, I got an appointment, but I had decided that I liked the naval ROTC program they had there all right, and I began to enjoy my civil engineering curriculum. And, about that time my dad, you know, he had talked to me a lot about going to work for him, and I decided, well, maybe that's what I should do. So, I turned down the appointment, and the alternates were able to go to Annapolis, where I was able to continue there at New Mexico and finish my engineering education. And after that, then I went to the Marine Corps and served my time, and then went to work for my dad. And I worked there ever since until the time I retired.

C: Tell me about your Marine Corps days. When did you graduate with your commission?

M: I graduated in 1956, and, uh, I guess it was 1956. And I got married in 1956, I think. And, well, uh, now, I guess I graduated, let's see, [19]55, I graduated in 1955. And, I went to Quantico Marine, I mean Quantico Basic School. And I was there for 6 or 7 months, getting my training for... I was a commissioned officer, but I was getting officers' basic training. And, then after that, I was transferred to El Toro, California. And, I was there about several months, and then I got married. And my wife and I moved to California. I lived at the Wheary housing project there in the base. And my oldest son, he was born out there; he's a what you'd call a prune-picker from Orange County, California. (Chuckles) And I stayed out there for, I think, a year and a half or so. And, about that time, you know, they [Marine Corps] really didn't need all of their reserve officers, which I was, and so they let me out. And, I started working for my dad. I had worked for the company even prior to that in the summer times, you know, even when I was going to high school.

C: And did you work here at home, live at home, or did you work at other sites?

M: No, I usually in the summer time I worked here. We had a lot of work going on at Fort Bliss and various places. Uh, one of the first jobs I worked on, I think, I was an engineer's helper at the, uh, 31 barracks at Fort Bliss. And, then, I don't know, I worked on Browslen Motor Freight Lines and several other things. Browslen Motor Freight is not even there; it's near where the Coors distributorship is at.

C: Which of the other brothers were working at the same time for the company?

M: Well, there were altogether 4 of us that worked in the

company. Bob, he was in Dallas. And Dave, he was in Los Alamos, and he worked for the Zia Company, which was a subsidiary, or not a subsidiary actually, a separate company but a company which my dad owned, and eventually the family owned. And, John, he worked here in El Paso. John, he was handling all of the real estate department. We had several things. We had shopping centers and things like that. He looked after them. And that's about it, you know.

C: When did you get out of the Marines?

M: Here, I'll...(Noises, Laughter) I got, I got all this stuff written up. I don't remember for sure.

C: Was it four years you were in there?

M: No. I was in there a little over 2 years.

C: Two years. O.K.

M: And, I was in the Marine Corps from 1956 to 1957 or [195]8, I don't know, somewhere in..., anyway, I was there 2 years. Oh, [finding documentation] I was in there from 1955 to 1957.

C: O.K. Then you came back to El Paso?

M: [Yes.]

C: And started working for the company?

M: Yeah.

C: What was your job for the company? I mean, what basically...

M: O.K. I can tell you exactly. In 1950 to 1955 I was an engineer's assistant in part [time], summer time work. I provided engineers assistance for the layout of various construction projects.

C: Like, which ones?

M: Oh,...

C: Out there at Fort Bliss?

M: Yeah, Fort Bliss. And, then I worked on the, uh, POL facilities at Biggs Field, which is the fueling facilities out there. And, uh, I worked for, like, Brownsen Motor Freight Lines, E & M Supply Company, and then, when I got out of school, I first started, my first job was being as an engineer on the Chelmont Shopping Center [Project].

C: Is that right?

M: And, uh, I even have photographs they took of me when I was, uh, out there in my engineer's clothes with my transit. (Chuckles)

C: So, did you do design work or was it just supervising construction?

M: Supervision of construction, engineering layout and supervision. I didn't do any design work at that time. Most of it was just, uh, building construction. But I did a lot of that, and it's over a period of years, I worked for the company 27 years, so...

C: Well, how did your dad handle...? I mean, it would seem to me having sons work for you could be not just rewarding but present some problems?

M: Yeah. It did present problems, and I...

C: Can you elaborate on some of that?

M: Uh, it, it,...well, it, it,...I mean, they, uh, you know, a lot of my brothers, they were older than me, they felt like, you know, they were at the point where the, uh, they wanted to be able to do things, which he let them do. Like I say, he assigned certain responsibilities to each of them. Dave was in Los Alamos. And John, he was in charge of our real estate department. And, uh, I wasn't at that point, you know, in the time of my life because I was a lot younger. I was just working as an engineer, estimator, and doing the things that, uh, what do you call it, an educational program in the construction business.

C: Right.

M: But, uh, he did his best to try to allocate responsibilities to them. And sometimes they came up with ideas that, uh, they felt were better than his, but, uh..., and sometimes he would agree with them, sometimes not. But, anyway, they all recognized he was the boss. (Chuckles)

C: Uh huh.

M: So, it didn't [matter], and nobody even argued about that.

C: Did you guys [ever] get together and say, "Well, now we need to tell Dad this. Now, who's going to," you know,...?

M: No.

C: No?

M: No.

C: Why, it sounds like it was a fairly peaceful relationship.

M: It was, uh, you know, when my dad [was] around, he was the mediator. My dad had a saying that says, ... Well, people used to ask him, "Well, what do you do?" He says, "I just keep the opera singers singing." (Laughter) And that's what he used to say. That's what his job was, you know. They wanted him to say something really outstanding or bizarre, whatever, but, no, it was just keeping everybody working right. That's all. And I guess that's really what a boss' job is, you know?

C: Right.

M: [The boss' job] Is to just keep everybody working and happy and all that. But he was good at that. He probably was an innovator in his time with respect to what they call perks today in business, you know. He started stock plans and whatever. They weren't actually in writing, you know. When somebody did a good job, and he [i.e. dad, Mr. McKee] owned all the stock, he just gave them some, so many shares of stock in addition to their salary. And eventually, prior to the time that we went public, we had something like over 300 shareholders in our company, most of which were employees, or past employees, or whatever. And some of our employees did very well with the number of shares that they held that were either given to them or earned by them or whatever way you want to put it, you know? But anyway, he did a lot of things like that and people didn't think about it in those days. And he always treated his employees real well. He was a person that was not biased about, uh, religions or nationalities or colors or anything else. He got along very well with all his employees, Mexicans or whatever. He worked, probably, with more Mexican people than anybody I know of. We had better results from them, really, than most anybody else. We probably... And, according to our records, we made a study at one time, and we had better production rates here in El Paso than any other place in the country. And, production rates means the amount of work done per hour regardless of whatever the pay was, you know. The only thing is, you know, even though he got along very well with the Mexican people, he always butchered the Mexican language, or Spanish language, you know. And, I think the reason was that, because, you know, my mother being born in Guatemala, naturally growing up speaking Spanish, anytime he needed an interpreter, well, she was always there. And (Chuckles) I guess he just never felt it was necessary to learn how to speak Spanish. But most of us kids, we learned to speak Spanish right off the bat. In fact, I think I learned Spanish before I did English, because

we had a couple of maids that helped take care of the kids, you know, and helped take care of the housework with my mother, whatever. But, uh, anyway, uh, my dad, he just did not have an affinity for Spanish. (Chuckles)

C: But, all the kids could speak pretty good Spanish.

M: Well, pretty much so. I think my brother just a year and a half older than I am and myself probably learned to speak Spanish better than the rest of them. Now, I don't know why, but we just did. I still speak fairly decent Spanish today; could speak it better, but...

C: That's very interesting. Well, looking back, what did you say, 27 years with the company?

M: Uh huh.

C: What were your major work projects? What are you the most proud of?

M: Oh, well, I don't know. A lot of it is very interesting. I, I did a little bit of everything. I kind of went up through the ranks just like my dad would expect anyone to do. And, I started out, like I said, as an engineer's assistant, working for other people, actually what it was was a bag man for the engineer, carrying stakes, and pulling, you know, the other end of the chain, and holding the dummy rod and whatever, you know. And, uh, then after I got out of school, where, of course, I had my engineering degree, and I was the field engineer and assistant superintendent and did stuff like that. And then I became a supervisory engineer, a construction manager in the office, and supervised projects throughout the Southwest: in El Paso, Phoenix, Tucson, Albuquerque, all different places. And, then, uh, I got to where I was a division construction operations manager, vice president and director in El Paso, and I ran the El Paso operations of the construction part.

C: What buildings were built during that time here in El Paso?

M: Oh, gosh, let's see. Well, the Temple Mount Sinai, the International Airport. I'm trying to think of a different one. I've got it: El Paso Museum of Art, Texas Commerce Bank, which [was] El Paso National Bank. We worked on the Civic Center,...you know, a lot of different projects. I just can't remember them all right now. I'd have to look through my books.

C: Who were your major competitors?

M: Oh, around in El Paso our major competitors were some very

reputable contractors, which are not prevalent today in El Paso. We had J. E. Morgan and Company and the Ponsford Brothers, and, I forget who all, but several other companies. They were very capable, which they're not even around anymore. In fact, I don't think that there's one firm in El Paso that's capable of building a multi-million dollar project here. And, uh, I just don't know, you know, the major problem was the unions, but, anyway, that's the problem.

C: It is? You want to elaborate on that?

M: Uh, yeah, I can elaborate on it. I don't, uh, I don't think I'll be telling anything that everybody else doesn't know. I spent about 10 to 12 years as the chief negotiator for the Associated General Contractors of America, West Texas Chapter. And, the primary reason that there are no reputable, qualified contractors in El Paso anymore is because the unions actually priced themselves out of work. And I tried to tell them about it for many, many years, and, of course, the unions, uh, I don't really have anything against unions. In fact I think unions are very good. The biggest problem with unions is the people running the unions. Most of them are either undesirable people or selfish people that have their own interests, and they're in there for, you know, they want to make money. And, a lot of them, uh, try to make a continuance of negotiations far beyond what is really necessary or reasonable for their own benefit to prove their usefulness. And that went on and on forever, and I kept telling them, I said, "You're going to kill the goose that laid the golden egg." And sure enough, they did. But I had a lot of problems with some of the international union people. I didn't think they were really very reliable or, you know, anything like that. They were just as I described previously. But that's primarily the reason that El Paso is in the shape that it's in as far as construction work. Oh, I forgot, C.H. Leavell, they were one of our biggest competitors. And, we not only competed with them here but in other parts of the country.

C: Right.

M: Which we competed with companies that are too innumerable for me to outline to you, you know, because they were different companies in all the areas where we worked, and I think we worked in, like, 26 states or something like that. So, it was competition that was some of it localized, some of it national contractors, which we ran into head-to-head regardless of where we went to, you know, depending on the size of work that we had.

C: Right. Did you help with the bids?

M: Oh yeah, I did a lot of bidding, too. And in fact, I did a

little bit of everything from time to time. I, you know, supervised construction; did, you know, bidding, estimating. I started out doing take-offs, you know, monitoring take-offs; learned the estimating from our chief estimators that we had at the time when I was learning, and we had some of the best in the world at that time. One of them we had what I consider as good as anybody: Frank Cordero. And he's a Hispanic person that was just as qualified as anybody I ever saw in my life, and a nice person. I see him once in a while now.

C: Right. Who were your other employees that you remember as being very helpful to the company?

M: Oh, well, we had so many of them. We had a lot of employees...

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BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

M: ...family, you know, he'd take care of us kids when my dad was on a trip or whatever. And he'd go on a trip with my dad, and, you know, he just seemed like one of our family.

C: Nation? N..A..T..I..O..N?

M: Dan Nation, yes. He passed away some time ago. But there were a lot of employees that he had which were extremely qualified and loyal people, you know. A lot of whom eventually became either competitors or started their own businesses or whatever, probably not only from their experience with the company, but also with the assistance that he gave them in bonuses and whatever stock and what-not...

C: When did the company go public?

M: Well, let's see. I have to look at my little notes here because I handled all that. (Chuckles) O.K. O.K. I have here that the registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Robert E. McKee Incorporated stock took place in 1971. And, I handled all of that for the company. That was one of my assignments. And I also handled the merger of Robert E. McKee Inc. and the Zia Company into Santa Fe Industries, Inc., and that was in 1973. And,...

C: Tell me the procedure. How long did it take you to, uh, handle all that?

M: The registration?

C: Yeah and all that.

M: The registration of a company, which ours was with the American Stock Exchange, takes a lot of time. I mean, uh, probably, I think it was 6 to 9 months, if I'm not correct in my thinking, and I don't know. But, what you have to do, you have to first of all, in complying with all the rules and regulations of the Securities and Exchange Commission, you have to research all of your financial history, all of the things that they require and do diligent meetings and what-not, which really reveals everything about the company and reveals any insider transactions or self-dealing or anything of that nature. And, I do remember this: when we went public, the chairman of the American Stock Exchange told me, he said that our company was one of the cleanest companies he'd ever seen registered in the history of the American Stock Exchange. He said we had no self-dealing, no anything. I mean, it was all...everything was up and above board.

C: Had you all talked about going public before your dad died?

M: No, we hadn't. And, of course, one of the reasons that we did go public is because we had so many shareholders and so many family members that were of the age in which they wanted to be able to utilize the funds that they had invested in the company which were not disposable or liquid or whatever you might call them. So, because of that, we only had several options, you know, to be able to satisfy all of the people that... I mean there were sons of mine, sons and daughters of my brothers and sisters and employees and sons of theirs and whatever. I forgot to tell you that besides having people that worked for our company for 30, 50 years or whatever, we had several people who had several generations of family that worked for our company. Like Mr. Simmons' family: his dad worked for the company, and he, Kenneth Simmons worked for the company. His 2 sons, Karl and Kenneth, Jr., worked for the company. And there were a lot people that way, where there were a lot of family members working for the company; and they owned shares in the company, too. So, anyway, we decided that the best opportunity for people to be able to divest themselves, if they wished, in the company's stock, was to be able to take it public, and because of the size of the company and what-not, the only option (well, it wasn't the only option) the best option that we had was take it public on the American Stock Exchange where we would qualify for the proper, appropriate number of shares and capitalization and everything else of that nature.

C: Why were you the one that handled that?

M: Uh, probably because I was responsible for handling some of the investments of the company: liquid assets and investments in the stock market and whatever. And I handled practically all of that for years. I handled it for not only the company,

but the company's profit-sharing plan, the Zia Company, all the other subsidiary companies, and at one time I was handling nearly \$14,000,000 in assets just in securities, which is a pretty sizeable portfolio. I mean this is back then now, and that was before, you know, some of the inflation has taken place.

C: Right.

M: It was a pretty interesting thing, but, uh, I knew more about that than anybody else, you know. I don't know why, but I just did.

C: And so it just fell naturally to you?

M: Yeah, right.

C: When was the company sold?

M: Well, the company actually was sold when we merged with Santa Fe Industries in 1973. And I handled that merger, too, with the president of Santa Fe Industries at the time. His name was John Smith. And also, [I] dealt with the chairman of the board which was John H. Reed. And, anyway, I negotiated all of the sale of the company to Santa Fe Industries. And the reason we did that [was] because it was very profitable for the shareholders of the company at that time. We were able to double the dividends that were due to the shareholders from Santa Fe Industries, as opposed to what we were able to pay. So, it was just a natural thing to do. We'd have probably been better off, at least for an interim period, to stay the way we were. But, being as how some of my brothers were getting older and felt like, you know, they, some of them, wanted to retire. They were tired of fighting the battle in the construction business, [and felt] that that might be the best opportunity. It ended up that I was the last one [of the family] working for Santa Fe Industries. I worked for them for 8 and 1/2 years.

C: Oh, really?

M: And I got a lot of experience, working for a national company, you know. I learned a lot about the top executives in the larger companies. I think that's one of the problems that we have today, that they're more interested in their own welfare than they are of the [welfare of the] company. And it's almost a standard in the larger companies that very few of the managers or officers of the companies ever own any stock in the company. Well, in my way of thinking, you know, they don't have really a personal interest in it if they don't [own stock]. But what they're interested in is how much they can get in retirement benefits and this and that and everything.

Like, I think, like, uh, oh, when I, as I recall, uh, John Smith, he was at a salary of, like, oh, \$400,000, but he was making more than that in perks that he was getting every year. And that's what's wrong with the big companies that we've got today. (Chuckles) It's even worse [today].

C: If you were going to give some advice to a company, a family-owned company with 2 or 3 generations, what would you tell them that would keep it going?

M: Well, of course, every situation is a different one. What'd you have to do is analyze each situation on its own merits and then you'd have to make a decision based on those. A lot of it has to do with how many members there are in the family, who's interested in the business, who isn't interested, what they want to do with their money or are they able to do anything with it? Or, what? There's all kinds of ramifications that have to be considered when you make a decision of that sort. Every situation is totally different. And you can't make a ballpark statement and say that this is the way it's got to be, because that isn't it.

C: Did any of Robert E. McKee's grandchildren work in the business?

M: Uh, I'm trying (Chuckles)... Well, some of them did for a short amount of time; none of them for any extended period.

C: No one was interested in, you know, perpetuating the family ownership into the third generation?

M: Well, I think at that time most of them were too young to be able to participate. I mean, some of them participated, like, in the summertime: they did summer work on jobs, you know,...

C: Right.

M: So, things like I did when I was in high school.

C: But not as engineers or...?

M: Not on a continual basis like that, you know. Part of it is timing and all that, you know?

C: Right. What became of the Zia Company?

M: Well, the Zia Company, we, you know, we sold that out to Santa Fe Industries at the same time that we actually... It was called a merger, but it was really a sell-out; we exchanged stock and whatever. [The merger], you know, is a misnomer.

C: Uh huh.

M: Ah, but the Zia Company, you know, their primary business was managing Los Alamos for many, many years. And I think because of the Santa Fe Industries' owning the company, and the fact that the McKee family was no longer in it in a big way, that the United States Government probably felt (I don't know who they were) but felt that they didn't have the obligation that they had in the past to try to continue with us [Zia Company], you know. So, they opened it up to other contractors and opened it up in such a way that it wasn't really beneficial to the Zia Company to try to compete. They did try to compete, but it wasn't, you know, any good anymore. So, eventually they lost out in that, and then, you know, of course, the Zia Company also did operations and maintenance work at Nevada Test Site, and they [Santa Fe Industries] lost that. Well, actually, they lost that prior to the time that Santa Fe lost the Zia Company's contract at Los Alamos. But I think that's really what spelled the end of the Zia Company. I don't even think it's in existence anymore. In fact, I don't even think our company [McKee Construction] is in existence anymore.

C: Really?

M: I don't think so. I don't know. Actually, when I quit, I never went back.

C: Really?

M: I didn't want to see it [McKee Construction] any different.

C: Yeah, yeah. I don't blame you. Well, I want to go back and talk about the earlier years. Your dad, when he started that business, got a lot of contracts from the Government, and worked closely with the Government for all his life. Can you tell me who he would deal with that was a representative from the Government. How was he getting all this work?

M: A lot of it he did on competitive bidding.

C: I see.

M: In fact, almost all of the work, except during the real critical war years, we got all of our work competitively. But in the critical war years, because of his competitiveness and his attention to detail and ability to complete work on time, a lot of the work they handed to him on a fee basis. I forget, you know, the different bases they [the Government] used to negotiate contracts, but that's how most of the work was done at Los Alamos because they wanted it done, had to have it done in a certain time. They knew he could do it. And so that's how he got a lot of the contracts.

C: He must have been amazing. How would you describe his personality? Was he quiet or was he boisterous or was he...?

M: I think a lot depended on his mood at the time. I think I'm a lot like him in someways. Sometimes I'm real quiet and don't say anything to anybody; and, sometimes I'm really (Chuckles) kind of goofy. But, he was like that, too, it just depended on his mood. He had a very good sense of humor; a lot of it was very dry. I remember a lot of things that he said from time to time that are very interesting and kind of funny at times, you know, but, he had a lot of these special sayings like...

C: Like what?

M: Like the one I told you, the one about the "Keep the opera singers singing."

C: Uh huh. Uh huh.

M: And all that, you know. He just had different ones. I don't think about them unless something comes up. Then I think about them, and I'll have to write them down. But he had a lot of them. A lot of them are funny, though. (Chuckles)

C: A lot of them?

M: Yeah.

C: So you all laughed a lot when you were children, huh?

M: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, pretty much. I was more serious than most of them. I was, I guess, because I was the youngest. I was what you'd call suppressed or whatever. And when I was real young, I wouldn't even answer the telephone.

C: Oh, really?

M: Yeah. The telephone scared me.

C: Were you a real good student?

M: Yeah, I was a pretty good student.

C: Did you always know you wanted to be an engineer?

M: No, I didn't. But I always wanted to be a good student. I always did pretty good.

C: Which one of your brothers and sisters was the most outgoing?

M: Well, I think John is pretty outgoing. He likes to joke a lot, and he's got a lot of funny sayings. And, my sister Margaret, she's outgoing, too. In fact, sometimes she gets on the telephone, and I can't get her off the phone.

C: So how many live in the El Paso area?

M: Well, there's Dave, John, Sis, Frankie, Bill, and myself. And Philip lives in Santa Fe.

C: And Philip lives in Santa Fe. And all the 8 are still alive, the children?

M: No. My oldest brother, he passed away about 3 years ago, I think.

C: Oh, he did? And where did he live, in Dallas?

M: [Yes.]

C: What a family.

M: Yeah, pretty amazing.

C: (Laughter) It really is. Well, I'm going to stop this for now...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW