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## Interview no. 849

Jane H. Bright

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1994

**INTERVIEWEE/ADDRESS:** Jane H. Bright, 3308 Bosham Dr., El Paso, Tx. 79925.

**INTERVIEW BY:** John R. Moore

**DATE:** July 4, 1994

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:** 1 hour, 10 minutes/English

**SUMMARY:** Jane Henderson Bright was born and raised in the Maravillas Creek area, north of what is now Big Bend National Park. She is related to the Roy and Hallie Stillwell family. She resided in the Big Bend/Black Gap area from 1918 until World War II.

Bright offers perspective on family life and hardships in the Big Bend area. Her family once owned 14 sections of ranch land and controlled an additional 14 sections of Texas school land in the Maravillas Creek and Black Gap area. Her father was a victim of the Spanish influenza epidemic that killed many Americans in 1919-20. She relates her knowledge of her mother's struggle, as a widow, to raise seven children and maintain the family ranching operation.

Bright provides a child's perspective on growing up in the area, particularly during the difficult economic times of the Great Depression. She discusses living in Marathon and Alpine. She recalls her mother's recollections of life in the Big Bend during the Mexican Revolution, and she laments the depression-era purchase and slaughter, by the U.S. government, of her family's few remaining cattle.

Bright acknowledges a social segregation between the area's Anglo and Hispanic communities. She describes in detail her family home and her parents' earlier cow-camp residence in the Rosillos Mountains.

Bright was the first female to earn an aircraft pilot's certification at Sul Ross State College. She enlisted, in the early stages of World War II, in the Women's Air Service Project (WASPs), washed out, and transferred to the Women Army Corps. She

has been a widow since 1957. She is a retired El Paso school teacher.

NOTE:

Bright's interview contains sensitive comments concerning her family and its kinship with the Stillwell family. She suspects brands on her family's cattle were changed to the Stillwell brand, and she alleges Roy Stillwell took advantage of her mother's poverty in the purchase of eight sections of Henderson family land.

She also questions the veracity of Hall Stillwell's published claims to having homesteaded the area around today's Stillwell store. Bright says the Stillwell store is located on a portion of the Henderson family's former ranch property.

Despite her criticisms, Bright still maintains close relations with the Stillwell family.

Big Bend National Park  
Oral History Project

Jane H. Bright  
By John R. Moore

July 4, 1994

M: [This is a] Big Bend Oral History Project interview with Mrs. Jane Bright of El Paso, Texas by John Moore [on] July 4, 1994. Mrs. Bright, you're a native of the Big Bend area. I'd like you to begin by telling us about where you were born and when and about your family and your recollections of growing up in the Big Bend area.

B: Well, my family lived on the Maravillas [Creek] and we had fourteen sections. The land in that part of the country, I guess in all over Texas, is checkerboarded with school land or railroad land. We owned fourteen sections and we managed fourteen sections, which was twenty-eight sections, a good spread. But, anyway, I'd like to tell you a little bit about my mother and father. My father's people were from Tennessee. He was the only son of a merchant and he had three sisters.

M: His name was?

B: John Sanford Henderson. And when he came to west Texas he decided that he wanted to learn the ranching business. He did not want to take up the store business that his father was in. His father had a partner and the partner, I think, murdered my grandfather and then married his widow. I think that's the

way it worked, but, anyway, Papa came to west Texas and he became a cowboy and then he got a job with W.T. Henderson managing or being the foreman of one of W.T. Henderson's ranches down in the Rosillos.

Now, my mother and her family lived in Beeville. And I don't know what business her father was in. He was a real staunch church-goer, but he was also a playboy. He and Granny had three daughters. He was my grandmother's second husband. My grandmother was Roy Stillwell's sister. Lizzie Stillwell was her name. That's Camellia's mother. Now, Lizzie and Mr. Boyce got a divorce when my mother was nine. She was the eldest of three girls. And my mother had tuberculosis. Well, when she got a divorce W.T. Henderson and his wife, Alice, who is also a sister of Roy Stillwell, Alice Stillwell, one of the older children, they didn't have any children at that time, so they asked Lizzie to send Camellia to them. And they sent her on the train on a stretcher.

M: And Camellia is your mother?

B: My mother. They sent her on the train on a stretcher to W.T. Henderson and Aunt Alice. Aunt Alice had taken up Christian Science from visiting in a home near a penitentiary. One of Roy Stillwell's brothers stole a horse and skipped the country. Somebody had to take the rap for it, so W.T. Henderson, who had several ranches, said he would take the rap. So he was sent to the penitentiary for two years.

M: Did this horse stealing occur in the Big Bend area?

B: Big Bend area.

M: In Marathon or...

B: I don't know exactly where. I never knew the details. I was quite young when I was told this. But, anyway, when Aunt Alice went to visit W.T. Henderson while he was in the penitentiary, she stayed at a boarding house and she noticed the harmony and the loveliness of the atmosphere and got acquainted with the hostess and found out the hostess was a member of the Christian Science Society or Foundation. It was in the beginning of the Christian Science religion. And so Aunt Alice took up Christian Science. That was before my mother went out to live with them. Well...

M: This would have been, Mrs. Bright, approximately what years?

B: I would say that it was before 1885 because my mother was born in 1885, so it would be between 1885 and 1896. Right. Okay, so then they raised Mother and they sent her to school in San Antonio to Incarnate Word. And she met Papa when she was home on vacation. I guess he'd come to town for some business. He was the foreman now on the Rosillo Ranch.

M: Excuse me. Mr. W.T. Henderson's ranch was in the Rosillos?

B: Yes, one of them was. And one of them was in the Fort Davis Mountains. And then he had a farm up here in the valley, in El Paso valley.

M: As well. Of course, the Rosillos are in the northern part of what is now Big Bend National Park.

B: Big Bend. Yes, that's right. Quite a ways by wagon to the

railroad.

M: At Marathon?

B: At Marathon. I mean, it seems to me like it took five days. And, of course, the roads had to be cattle trails, you know. But, anyway, Papa and Mother were married in Jim Wilson's house there in Alpine. She was seventeen and he was about twelve years older, I think. And he took her down in the Rosillos to a cow camp. They had to cook on a camp fire and their only shelter was an arbor. An arbor is four poles stuck in the ground with some *lechuguilla* stalks laid across and some debris on top of the *lechuguilla* stalks. That was her home.

Well, Mother rode with Papa. She didn't know anything about childbirth, birth control, and so she told me that her first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage out in the field while she had to get down off of a horse and have this miscarriage. And so, I guess, after that she had four more miscarriages and then Papa decided that the best thing for her to do would be stay in cow camp.

M: What year were they married?

B: Stop the thing and I'll have to figure. (taping stopped and started again) They were married in 1902. Camellia and John, they had seven living children: Jean, who was christened Johnny, but she changed her name to Jean, was born in 1904, and then the next girl was Camellia and she was born in 1905, and then Tom Henderson was born in 1908, and Jim was born in

1911, and then Dolly, 1914, and Stanley, 1916, and Jane, 1918.

M: Let me clarify. We're talking about W.T. Henderson, who raised your mother for a number of years, and his wife. And your father's name was also Henderson?

B: A coincidence.

M: No relation?

B: No relation, but they were very, very good friends and Papa learned a lot from W.T.

M: You were talking about living in the arbor or having only arbor...did your parents eventually obtain a home?

B: Well, they had two rock rooms and the dog run between them. And one was for cooking and eating and the other one was for sleeping. That was built in the Rosillos and it's still there. So that was their first home.

M: How long did they live in the Rosillos?

B: I don't know.

M: Quite a while?

B: Quite a while. And the Buttrills' were their closest neighbors.

M: The Buttrills' would be...

B: Lucius Buttrill and Margaret Buttrill.

M: Who'd be the grandparents of Tom Leary of Alpine today?

B: Of Tom Leary. And then after Papa and Camellia moved- Camellia was my mother. After they moved away from there I think Papa bought a ranch up near Twenty-Mile [Wind]mill and then they eventually sold it to Combs and then Papa moved down



to the Maravillas. He bought a ranch from George Miller.

M: And that's where you were born?

B: Yes. And, I think, the last three kids were born there: Dolly, Stanley, and I.

M: Tell me about your earliest recollections of your home and where it was located on the Maravillas.

B: Well, Papa died when I was eighteen months old and Mother moved the three little kids to San Antonio and put us in an orphanage and the four older kids scattered. Lizzy, Grandmother, took two of them. One got a job and one just ran wild, I guess. He was considered the black sheep of the family while he was in his...

M: Your oldest brother?

B: Yeah.

M: Did your father die of natural causes or accidental?

B: No. He was taking a herd of cattle, driving a herd of cattle, to Marathon to ship and it was during the Spanish influenza epidemic. He got sick on the trail and somebody carried him into the Chambers Hotel in Marathon. And Doctor Worthington didn't know how to do anything except prescribe aspirin. So somebody came and told Mother that Papa was sick and they took her to town. And we had a Mexican family there that took care of the family and the ranch while she was gone and he died within a couple of days. But during that time the Spanish influenza touched everybody in Marathon; it left the majority of the town with one parent.

M: That would have been during World War I at that time?

B: Yes.

M: You were born in what year, Mrs. Bright?

B: It was right after World War I.

M: 1918, 19...

B: Well, I was eighteen months old, so it must have been in 1920 or between 1919 and 1920. Is that right?

M: Yes, that would be correct.

B: Or [19]21. Right in there someplace.

M: So there were a lot of deaths in Marathon from the Spanish influenza?

B: Yes, yes. And Uncle Roy was even sick. Aunt Hallie took Uncle Roy to the Buttrills'. They were living up where Tom Leary's ranch is now.

M: That's about fifteen miles south of Marathon.

B: Marathon, uh-huh. I think she had one child then, Roy, and she took Roy, Sr. to the Buttrills' and they nursed him back to health. Aunt Hallie tells me that they didn't even tell Uncle Roy that Papa had died.

Now when we moved to the Maravillas, when Papa moved the family to the Maravillas, our ranch headquarters was four miles or five miles from Roy Stillwell's headquarters. He ranched in the Black Gap area and in Dove Mountain area and we ranched right around there. Where Hallie has her trailer park and store was our land. That was our horse pasture. And it stopped just before you go through Dog Canyon and then twenty-

eight sections north and east.

Let's go back to W.T. for a minute. After we stayed in San Antonio in the orphanage for a couple of years Mother moved back to Marathon and we lived in town during the school year and then at the ranch during the summer. And you asked me to give my earliest recollection of our ranch. Alright, the earliest recollection I can remember is- I must have been about six years old, five or six- we would move to the ranch and then we would move back to town in September. And we always rented. We never owned a home. And that went on. Being at the ranch, I'll tell you, summer at the ranch was heaven. Stanley and Dolly and I were so closely knit. It was like we were the only people in the family. And the four oldest kids never lived with us, ever, but they would stay with us. Jim would live at the ranch, so he was there during the summer, but the three older ones than him, they never lived with us again as a family. They would come and visit, but it was like a stranger visiting in our family. There was a wall that never was penetrated between the four older and the three younger kids. They resented us and we didn't know why. It was a sad situation. To this day it never was healed. And only one of the four older kids is still living. The other three are gone. But, anyway, we would play paper dolls, ride stick horses, go skinny dipping, ride horses, we would visit with the Stillwell kids, and they would visit with us. It was three good meals of beans a day. (chuckles) We

didn't know the difference. We thought that was good. And we carried our water, and we had an outdoor outhouse, and we fed the chickens, and gathered the eggs, and washed on a rub board. We didn't think that was hard work. We all had our chores and we would have lots of company. We had a salt house behind our house. And we could look out across the hill and see a trail of dust coming down the road and we would say, "Mamma! Yonder comes a car!" (chuckles) And that was great. That was great entertainment because it would be so seldom that we would see other people, except Charlie Green, who lived up the road, and the Stillwell kids.

So we did this going back and forth until I was in high school. Dolly had graduated from Marathon in 1932 and I was ready to go into high school, so we moved to Alpine and we got a rooming house so Mother could take in roomers and boarders. And Dolly went to college and I went to high school and Stanley did, [also]. And, eventually, the Depression really came on really, really bad. We still didn't know we were poor as dirt. I mean, the kids didn't. I never heard Camellia say, "No. You can't have that. We can't afford it." It was always, "We'll wait and see." Very optimistic, very resourceful, and made us feel secure, which was good. Well, eventually, Stanley dropped out of high school and joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. He was in the very ground work of the Indian Lodge at Fort Davis.

M: Now Stanley is an older or younger brother?

B: Stanley is between Dolly and me. He's the second to the baby. After the emergency was over, well, Stanley came back and graduated from high school. Mother left us at one point and, I think, right after I graduated from high school- I was sixteen- and she said, "Now, Jane, you can either go to college or you can support yourself." And I had gone to high school, summer and winter, for three years. And it wasn't an enjoyable period of my life, so I said, "I'll support myself." So I got a job as a waitress working for fifty cents a day and my lunch for Ed Neville in Alpine. Well, Mother put us in a little fifteen dollar a month rent house, the three of us: Stanley, Dolly, and I. Stanley's out of high school now and he has a job in a bar, Copeland's Bar, and Dolly's going to college. She doesn't have a job. And I'm working as a file clerk at the court house. And I rent one bedroom to three college boys that pay our rent. And we get a hundred-pound sack of flour from the WPA office. And Papa Borland in Marathon, who was the Post Master, gave us a great big can of- what do you call this? Twenty-five gallon?

M: Probably.

B: Honey, honey. Stanley got his meals at Copeland's Bar and Dolly and I lived on waffles and honey. Dolly, I guess, developed malnutrition. Dolly and I were the readers of the Christian Science Society in Alpine. She was the first reader and I was the second reader. We would take turns reading citations from the textbook and the Bible. And Dolly started

fainting while we were having service. And I would just step over in her place and she would be out on the floor. (chuckles) Some of the ladies would be bringing her to and I would keep reading her part and mine. Well, Uncle Billy, Uncle W.T. Henderson, realized that there was a need, so he established a charge account at Don Adam's Mercantile for us. That helped Dolly a lot.

M: You were able to buy food.

B: We were able to buy more than just waffles. And Dolly started perking up (chuckles) and stopped fainting on us during the church service. We had about ten in our congregation. I don't know why they asked us to read; the rest of the congregation was adults and they could have done a much better job, but we must have read for three years.

M: So, obviously, your association with Christian Science originated from your Aunt Alice?

B: That's right, through Mother. And I'm still a Christian Scientist. I try to abide by the basics. Well, Uncle Billy realized that I was in a no-win situation. So Dolly graduated from college.

M: At Sul Ross?

B: Yes. And she sent with her meager, meager salary- she got a job in Ysleta- she sent Stanley to Durham Business College in San Antonio.

M: And she was teaching at Ysleta?

B: At Ysleta. And Stanley was working at a job and going to

business college, Durham- I believe it was Durham Business College- and Uncle Billy put me in a rooming house in El Paso and put me in business school, Mrs. Davenport's School of Experience for Stenographers. (laughs) What a title!

M: Where was that located in El Paso?

B: It was in the National Building.

M: Downtown?

B: Uh-huh, on Oregon, downtown. And after I went to the Business College for six months I got a job for a Dr. Ault and I took a room with the owner of the Business College. She lived right off of Rim Road in El Paso. She had sold the Business College and she was a public stenographer in the Hilton Hotel downtown in El Paso. I paid her twenty-five dollars a month, half of my salary, for that room and my breakfast and a ride downtown. My lunch cost fifteen cents: it was a nickel for a hot dog and a nickel for a glass of milk and a nickel for a scoop of ice cream. And that was my lunch everyday. And then my boyfriend took me out to dinner every night. I worked for Dr. Ault for a year and I was able to save eighty dollars. And I asked Dr. Ault for a raise. I called him at the end of the year and I asked him for a raise and he said, "No, Jane. I can't afford to give you a raise." And I said, "Then I'm sending my keys down by Blanche, my landlady, in the morning. I'm getting on the train tonight and I'm going back to Alpine to go to school." Because working for fifty dollars a month for Dr. Ault it didn't seem like a win situation either, so I

called Uncle Billy and I told him I was coming back to Alpine to go to college.

I lived at the ranch and kept the payroll for Uncle Billy that summer and went to summer school. That was in [19]39. And then in the fall Uncle Billy put me in Lawrence Hall there at Sul Ross and I lived up in the same room, in the corner room, up on the third floor for three years summer and winter. That was my home vacation time and all. He told the college, "Now, I want you to send me one bill a semester for tuition and room and board." "Oh, but we don't do it that way. You have to make out three different checks." "No. I want one bill a semester." And so I got a job and that's the way it worked out. And that dear man sent me through college. And I got a job there in Lawrence Hall in the office for seven dollars a month working in the office and I took in sewing there in dormitory. Incidentally, I'm an expert seamstress now.

Well, I graduated from college and then my life started as a secretary and a pilot. The Civilian Pilot's Training Course was offered in Sul Ross at that time and I was the only girl at Sul Ross that got a private pilot's license there. A lot of the girls took Ground School to help their stupid boyfriends pass the test, but none of them took flying. And Mr. Casparis- this is the highlight of my college stay- Mr. Casparis was the flight instructor.

M: Can you spell his name? Do you recall?

B: C-A-S-P-A-R-I-S, I think. That'll do.



M: That's close enough.

B: John Casparis. He didn't think the field was any place for women and he resented my being there. He did everything that he could think of to discourage me. Every flight we made was, "Jane, you'll never make a pilot. You might as well drop out." And my response was always, "Mr. Casparis, I'm thinking about it. Just one more lesson and then I'll let you know what I decide." And the next lesson it would be the same thing- well, I soloed before any of the nine boys soloed- because he thought it would scare me and I would drop out. But I soloed and I did a perfect job of take-off and landing, so that didn't work. And my flight was always the early morning flight, which meant I was picked up before daylight, serviced the plane, checked it out, and then I took my flight. By the time I got through with that it was daylight and I would take my flight. Well...

M: May I interrupt? Was this during the early years of World War II?

B: Yes. Well, it was in preparation for World War II.

M: So it would have been in 1939 or [19]40...

B: It was [19]41, I believe.

M: Early [19]41.

B: Uh-huh. And the class had been going on for about three semesters when I decided, "Okay, I will." And when Mr. Casparis talked to me he said, "Now, Jane. There are times when I don't even want you out here. If you've got a cold

women's equilibrium is off anyway. And if you've got a cold or the flu or anything like that don't come out here. If it's during your period don't come out here because of shaky equilibrium." "Okay, Mr. Casparis." Well, (chuckles) one of the male pilot students and I would go out there. We would go over to the Toltec beer joint and drink beer and then we would go out there just to aggravate Mr. Casparis because he wouldn't let us even touch a plane if he could smell beer on us. Well, anyway, one- you're about to change?

M: Let me change sides of the tape.

B: Okay.

#### **End of Tape One**

#### **Side A**

#### **Beginning of Tape One**

#### **Side B**

M: We'll continue now.

B: One of the mornings when Mr. Casparis picked me up we were having an unusually strong spring wind. And we went out there and we went through our routine of gassing the plane and checking it out and everything and he said, "Now, Jane..." I had about two hours of solo time at this time and it was mostly take-offs and landings and climbing turns. Well, this one morning he said, "Jane, I want you to go up and I want you

to do your climbing turns to 3,000 feet and level off, and do a one-turn spin to the right and level off at 2,000, and do a one-turn spin to the left and level off at 1,000, and come over the field and do a 7-20 power-off let-down right over the field, and make a landing." Well, hey, climbing turns would have been an assignment enough at that point. But I did my climbing turns and I did my one-turn spins and I came in to do my 7-20 spiral let-down over the field. And you do that with the throttle back. In other words, the plane is idling. Well, when I got the bank of the plane the wind took the wing down. And it wasn't turning. I couldn't turn. The instruments were helpless, I mean, useless. The pedals and the stick were absolutely useless. Nothing worked. And after I used the pedals as much as I could and used the stick back and forth I saw that nothing worked and that I was getting closer and closer to the ground with one wing low. And so I took my feet off the pedal, off of the rudders, and I took my hands off of the stick, and I pushed the throttle full forward, and put my hands in my lap and said, "God, I'm yours." And the plane lifted its nose up and cleared the telephone wires. And I came around and did a landing. Now, that was a touchy situation. Kasner, the mechanic, was standing out there and the next student was standing out there and Mr. Casparis. And when Mr. Casparis saw that I was in trouble he ran to the office and put his head down on his desk with one hand on the phone to call the fire department and an

ambulance. And then he heard me land. Before I could turn the airplane motor off he was there at the door opening it and he grabbed me and said, "Henderson, that was a good recovery." (chuckles) So that was the highlight of my college career.

M: As a pilot, have you flown over the Big Bend area a lot since 1941?

B: No. It became too expensive and I pursued...my first teaching assignment was in Marathon in 1945 and 1946 and Bill Hardis was there. I flew with him a little bit and then I ferried a plane for him once from Hobbs, [New Mexico]. And that was the extent of my flying. Well, I did join the WASPs. And I washed out of that after primary and secondary. That sort of changed my thinking about flying and...

M: Of course, the WASPs were...

B: Women's Air Force Service Pilots.

M: You used to ferry aircraft?

B: They towed targets, too. Their motto was "I aim to please. You aim, too, please." And that was in Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas.

But W.T. Henderson was the nearest that I've ever known of a father. And while there was not a lot of communication between us I always felt like if I ever needed him he was there.

M: His ranch being in the Rosillos, did Mr. Henderson sell to Big Bend National Park?

B: No, he sold that ranch way, way before...I guess, when Papa

moved maybe he sold it then. I don't know. Let's talk about Roy Stillwell.

M: Hallie Stillwell's husband?

B: Hallie Stillwell's husband. (points to photograph) This is Hallie Stillwell in 1957. And that's W.T. Henderson between the two ladies. And the other lady is W.T. Henderson's third wife. She's an Espy.

M: E-S-P-Y?

B: Uh-huh, from Fort Davis. And this is Uncle Billy's second wife. That's Bell, Aunt Bell Black. She was Aunt Alice's Christian Science practitioner when Aunt Alice passed on. And Uncle Billy and Aunt Bell married after that.

But, you know, we must have stopped going to the ranch when I was about nine or ten. And even though our ranch was five miles from Uncle Roy's ranch I can never, ever, remember Uncle Roy coming over and saying, "Camellia, is there anything I can do to help you?" Now, my mother used to tell us kids about Papa coming in from riding the range and saying, "Well, Camellia, I saw another Cross L cow nursing a 4L calf." Now, a running iron is something that is a piece of iron about this long (demonstrates dimensions) and it's got a curve on one end, so...

M: About twelve or eighteen inches long?

B: Right. So anyone's that's real gifted can rope a calf on the range, build a fire, and brand that sucker with any brand that he wants to make. That's why Papa would say, "I saw a Cross

L cow nursing a 4L calf."

M: And Cross L was your father's brand?

B: Was my daddy's brand. And 4L eventually became Roy's brand. I went to the court house and looked this up. I thought, "You know, that's strange. That's real strange." I found out that Mettie Stillwell, one of Uncle Roy's sister-in-laws, in 1897 had the Cross L. Well, Mettie didn't keep...that's about the time when Papa started ranching for himself. Mettie didn't stay in that country very long, so apparently she must have sold some cattle to Papa and Papa registered the brand, but during that time Uncle Roy's brand was a slash, a 4, and a slash. But the same year he registered 4L. Now, I don't know how long he'd been using 4L before Papa started, you know. I just don't know, but anyway, this is what I found in the court house in Alpine. But, you know, I think, now any cowboy could carry a running iron. Papa never carried one. He carried a whiskey flask, but Camellia said he never carried a running iron. But, you know, it makes you wonder.

M: The Big Bend area and the Maravillas Creek, the Stillwell crossing area, was a very wild area, few people...

B: Open, open.

M: How would you characterize those people- your family, the Stillwells, and others- very independent, very strong-willed?

B: Well, you see, I didn't have an opportunity to know Papa, but our rancher to the north was Charlie Green. He was a bachelor. And during our growing up years he was like a

father to us. He didn't have any children or any relatives. Uncle Tom Green, his brother, lived with him for awhile and then he passed on. Incidentally, (points to shelf) these glasses up here were Uncle Tom Green's glasses. But I used to spend a lot of time...all three of us kids would take turns spending time with Uncle Charlie Green. And I would ask him questions about Papa. And he said that Papa was one of the only men in that country that when they would be on a train taking a load of cattle to market that Papa would not associate with prostitutes or get in a gambling game. And he said he was the only one of the ranchers that he could remember that stayed true to my mother, to their wives, so apparently... I know Camellia said that Papa always called men by their Mr. surname and he expected them to do the same with him. And he always talked to his Hispanic hired hands in Spanish and he wanted them to speak to him in Spanish.

M: Apparently, then, was it your father and mother's belief that Roy Stillwell was taking advantage of their cattle...

B: It would appear that way.

M: Based on the registration of...

B: Of the brands. Now, eventually, Camellia couldn't pay the taxes on our ranch. During Roosevelt's first term when the Depression was so bad he would send people out to the ranches like ours, which was dry. We were having a drought then and we couldn't get money for feed and the cattle were poor and sick and dying. So these government men would go out to the

ranch and round up the cattle and shoot them and burn them and give us seven dollars a head, which was better than having a corpse, you know, on your hands. So we had a ranch that was without stock and no way of income; no one wanted to lease it because there wasn't any grass on it. And so, eventually, we lost the ranch from taxes. But in looking over the records in the court house, it wasn't only taxes. Apparently, a couple of sections were taken for taxes and then Roy and Hallie bought the rest for two hundred and sixty-five dollars a year for ten years.

M: Bought that from your mother?

B: From my mother. Now, that doesn't add up to very much money, but I've heard Aunt Hallie say in one of her speeches, "My husband and I homesteaded all of this land." Well, I don't know who they bought the Dove Mountain Ranch from, but they bought (counting on fingers) one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight sections from Camellia. Now, six hundred and forty acres times eight is a good piece of land. Plus, they've got control of the checkerboard sections in between that were school lands. And \$265 for ten years would be \$2,560. Now, this is my mother's uncle that's doing this, so it seems sort of strange that an uncle would do that to a niece. I don't understand it. Now, when Mother realized that this was going to come about she got us kids in 1939- and I think he bought it in 1940- she got us to deed our part of the ranch to her.

M: In addition to these eight sections?



B: These are the sections.

M: Okay, including those.

B: Yeah. So the kids couldn't come out and say anything, "Yea" or "Nay." I mean, we had no right after we signed the deed. So, I just, you know, I wish I had been older and more aware of the situation.

M: The times, the Depression, right before World War II, people had to do desperate things, I guess, to survive and people took advantage of others who were more desperate than they, perhaps. Would you agree?

B: I certainly would agree. I can't understand what would motivate someone to do that to their own relatives, especially since they knew Camellia from the time she was born until this happened. But, you know, John, I can't say that this is what happened because I was too young and too unaware to know.

M: But in looking back to the records and knowing what you do know raises lots of questions about motivations and, maybe, even your mother's thinking.

B: Yes, I'm quite sure a lot of that was her influence because it was heresay as far as I'm concerned. I didn't know any of this that was going on.

M: Did these eight sections include the Double Wells...

B: No, it didn't. Those eighty acres were off to themselves and they were surrounded by Pope and Green and those people. Combs...I don't know if Combs had any land there.

M: So your mother retained ownership of the Double Wells?

B: Of the Double Wells. And after the family got down to three daughters and a son, well, they were black-topping that stretch of road from Marathon to Persimmon Gap. And this road construction company wanted to lease water or buy and we sold.

M: Sold that eighty acres with the wells?

B: Uh-huh.

M: So today your family owns no property?

B: No property down there. I've taken my trailer and I've gone down to Datie's numerous times and I would say, "Datie, please sell me..." First I started out with one section, then ten acres, then five acres, and then one acre. "No, Jane, no." The answer was always, "No." But Son and I, we rode a jeep down the Maravillas, across the flat, and up the Maravillas as far as we could, and then we walked over to where our ranch house stood. Our ranch house consisted of a front porch, two adobe walls, and then two rooms built on the back of the adobe walls; one was a kitchen and one was a bedroom and then behind that was a big adobe room. And we called that the Salt House.

M: What type of roof?

B: I believe it was corrugated tin.

M: Flat or peaked?

B: No, peaked.

M: Is that house still standing?

B: No. Love owns that property now. Ben Love that ranches right outside of Persimmon Gap towards Marathon owns that property now. And he had all of the structures taken down, except for

the pen. What remains of the pens are still standing.

M: Are they rock pens?

B: No, wooden pens. But that's the only thing. And a trough there, which is dry, and then we had a big cement tank eight-feet deep and fifteen-feet across. And that's still standing.

M: Is that supplied by a windmill?

B: Yes, but I don't know if the windmill's working. I don't believe it's in operation.

M: The summers you spent there and your visits as you grew older...did you ever go down in to what is now Big Bend Park much?

B: Oh, yes.

M: Tell me about some of your early recollections of the Chisos Basin or Castolon or Boquillas.

B: We would throw a couple of skilletts and a coffee pot and two or three bed rolls in the car and we would take off and we would go down in there. And then many summers we would go down to Langford's Hot Springs and Mother would take the baths down there. (leaves interview area to retrieve memorabilia) These are my canisters. (points) We would go down there and take the baths. There are the four older kids. Aren't they beautiful? They got to wear white starched clothes down at the ranch.

M: So you camped a lot at Hot Springs?

B: Well, we didn't camp there. We rented one of those rooms and that was like camping.

M: Right.

B: (points to photograph) That's my mother. And my mother would take the baths.

M: She obviously believed that the hot springs were curative?

B: I think she went down there just to get away from the house. This is Papa and Mother on horseback. (points to photograph)

M: At the time you went to Hot Springs, was Maggie Smith running the store and post office there or was Langford still there?

B: Langford was there.

M: What do you recall about Mr. Langford?

B: He was entertaining. He was an educated gentleman and his wife was lovely. And the two young boys, Leroy and- oh, I can't think of the youngest one. Leroy was next to the youngest and then there was an albino child after Leroy. And we would play together.

M: An albino child?

B: Uh-huh. He was very, very white and had pink eyes and had to stay out of the sun. This is Papa (points to photograph) and I'm on old Prince crying and the horse is neighing and Papa's laughing. And that's the only picture I have of me with Papa. Here's another picture of Papa and Mother.

M: Do you recall at Hot Springs...were there a number of people there at the time that you visited?

B: Oh, yeah. It was always full.

M: Were they mostly local people or travelers?

B: Yes, mostly local...Alpine and Marathon people. Well, mostly

Alpine.

M: And they would come down and spend days?

B: The twenty-one days.

M: Twenty-one days.

B: That was the course. And you would go in there and you would fill the tub, it was a cement tub, and you'd fill the tub with water and you would stay in the water X number of minutes and then you would roll up in a wool army blanket and sweat. (chuckles) And all this time you were supposed to drinking that water. They liked that. I guess it cleaned out their system. I don't know what it did. (laughter) It made them sweat, anyway.

M: Did people socialize a lot there at Hot Springs?

B: Oh, yes. We would have fish fries and, yes, we would share food and sit out under the arbor and talk. The kids were always out of the way playing and fishing and swimming. It was fun.

M: Any recollections of Boquillas, Texas?

B: Oh, yes...Chata and Juan Saba. We would go in the car just to go down there and eat sometimes. Not often, maybe once a summer. And Chata was always glad to see Mother.

M: She ran a small restaurant?

B: Yes, she did. One of her girls...I think she adopted a lot of children and raised them. And one of her daughters would prepare the food for us.

M: What type of food?

B: Mexican food.

M: What, specifically, do you remember?

B: Enchiladas and beans and tacos and things like that.

M: They were exceptionally good food?

B: Oh, yes. The real flavor. Sometimes we would dance there. And after Juan died, well, we couldn't play the player piano or have any kind of entertainment.

M: This was Juan and Chata Salada you said?

B: Uh-huh.

M: S-A-L-A-D-A?

B: Juan Sada. Juan and Chata Sada, S-A-D-A.

M: S-A-D-A, okay.

B: Sada. "D" is [pronounced] as "th." And Camel Barker had a house down there and then the Johnsons' were near there. And the Daniels' and the Greens' lived at Dugout, so the Greens' would come down and we would visit. Sometimes we would have a dance at Dugout.

M: Dugout. Do you recall there were structures there?

B: Yes, there was a school house there. And Pap and Mollie Green lived there and they had lots of children: Jack and Wayne and Ruby and Willie and Lilly and Aaron and (chuckles) I don't know how many others.

M: Most of the people, except the Sadas' that you mentioned, are Anglo. What was your relation, or your family, or other people's relations with the Mexican-American community or the Mexicans from south of the river?

B: Well, we were certainly segregated. Chata accepted my mother. My mother was always willing to help anyone who needed help as far as taking them to a doctor or letting them stay at our house in town while they recuperated from something or like that. But we were certainly segregated. There was no inter-racial communication going on at that time.

M: In talking with others and asking them about their recollections of Boquillas or Castolon, many tell me that they seldom went there, so they really didn't have much connection. Would that be a fair assessment in relation to the segregation...you just didn't go to the Mexican communities often or most people didn't?

B: Well, Mother and Chata were very, very good friends. As I recall, one of the daughters was pregnant and she was having a real bad hard time with her pregnancy and, I think, she stayed at our house for a while.

M: In Marathon or Alpine?

B: In Marathon. Now, that's a vague recollection, but I know that Mother did help one of her daughters.

M: So that may have been a little bit atypical, not a normal situation?

B: Uh-huh.

M: Did you ever go up into the Chisos Basin area, now, what is the focal point of Big Bend Park?

B: No.

M: There was no access there until...

B: Whitie T. Burnam, I think, owned that. And Uncle Charlie owned Wade Canyon and the country around Wade Canyon. I think he bought it from Bob Serner, Uncle Charlie Green. And my sister and I went down there and spent Christmas holidays one year.

M: At the Greens'?

B: At the Greens.

M: At Dugout?

B: No, no. No, this is a different family of Greens'. This was Charlie Green, who lived up the Maravillas. For a while he owned Wade Canyon Ranch. And we went down there and spent the Christmas vacation.

M: You were talking earlier about cattle and running irons and brands. One person told me that it was common for ranchers to shoot Mexicans and leave them laying if they were caught on their property because they were suspected of rustling.

B: I was not aware of that, but I do know that rustling went on. And Pancho Villa raided that country around the Maravillas and his army drove all the cattle back across. And Papa and the rest of the men formed a posse and went back over there to drive their cattle back. Now, this was way before my time, I think, because I think Camellia had only the four older kids. I don't think she had us yet. But, anyway...

M: Your father would have been there during the Mexican Revolution?

B: Yes.



M: And the Glen Springs Raid was in 1916...

B: Yes.

M: ...perhaps the most famous of the raids and that of Boquillas at the same time.

B: But Papa told Camellia...he gave her a 30-30. I think it was a Winchester, I don't know. But, anyway, he gave her this gun and he said, "Camellia, don't go to sleep at night. You sit up all night long. If you have to sleep all day do it, but don't go to sleep at night. If you hear anything...shoot." So one night Mother was sitting up with the gun across her lap and she heard this clop, clop, clop, clop of horse's hooves on the hill where the house was. She said, "Who's there?" And he didn't answer. She said that three times. And by that time the rider was pretty close, so then he heard her pull the hammer back and he said, "Don't shoot Mrs. Henderson! It's Mr. Penrod"- or whatever, I can't think of the name of the rancher- "Don't shoot Mrs. Henderson!" And so Camellia said, "It's a good thing you called out when you did."

M: Let me change tapes, Mrs. Bright.

**End of Tape One**

**Side B**

## Beginning of Tape Two

### Side A

M: Mrs. Bright, in relating this experience about your mother and the neighbor riding up in the dark and apparently during the time of the Mexican Revolution, that illustrates to me that your mother was a very strong-willed, independent person herself. You talked about other women in the Big Bend area in that time that you knew or that you had been told about. Were women of the era unique? Did they have to undertake some different approaches to life in order to survive?

B: Yes, I believe they were, but I think my mother was one of the most outstanding women that I've...of course, every child thinks their mother is. And it's so rewarding to me and it's such a complement to me when I go in the Marathon-Alpine area and I meet people that I haven't seen in a long time. They remind me or tell me how much I favor Camellia. And that's always such a complement to me and that's one of the things that I look forward to about going back to that place. They'll say, "Oh, you are exactly like your mother." If I could just have the character that she must have had. Of course, she didn't pass away until she was seventy-two. She passed away in [19]57, so she's been dead quite a while. But it's nice for people to tell me that.

M: She sold your ranch property in 1940 and she died in 1957. Did she reside in Alpine?

B: No, she lived in California with my oldest sister. And then my husband and I went out to California in [19]55. We went to California and I had the two little boys, pre-schoolers, and my husband worked in a jewelry store for awhile and then he bought his own and I taught school. And Mother lived with us while I taught school and then on weekends she would go to Culver City and visit my older sister for the weekend just to get away from the kids, I guess, and us. My husband got sick in 1957. It was a terminal case of cancer. And his family, there were twelve siblings in that family, his family started coming in at our house by the threes and fours at a time and Mother said that she was going to come back to El Paso and stay with my other sister and take my two little boys she said until the dust cleared. So we packed her bags and she went to Culver City and had the plane tickets and reservations and she got sick and died. I guess she had a stroke or something but, anyway, she died within two or three days. And then my husband died two and a half weeks later. That was a very trying time for me, but I survived.

M: Tell me about your husband, how you met. You mentioned he graduated from Sul Ross with a teaching certificate. Where did you meet your husband?

B: Well, I didn't marry him until after the war. I was also a WAC. After I washed out of the WASPs I went into the WAC and I was enlisted in the Womens' Army Corps. And after I was discharged from the army during the emergency of World War II

I went to Marathon and started my teaching career. And then from Marathon I went to Tornillo and taught school there. And I met my husband there on a blind date. He was from North Carolina and he had established a jewelry store in Fabens.

M: And his name?

B: Charlie Bright, B-R-I-G-H-T. People say, "Are you related to Luke Bright in Marfa?" And I say, "I wish." (chuckles)

M: I don't know Luke Bright.

B: Oh, he's one of the richest pioneer families in Presidio County. And whenever the highway patrolmen stop me in that area they say, "Now, Mrs. Bright..." I think, "Here it comes." "I know you're a member of an old pioneer family here and I'm not going to give you a ticket this time, but please slow down." (chuckles) "Okay, thank you, sir." And I go on my merry way with a warning thanks to Luke Bright's children. He has a daughter named Janie.

M: So you're sometimes confused as... . So Mr. Bright died in 1957?

B: Uh-huh. But Mr. Bright did a very wicked thing. Mr. Bright married me when he was already married and he had put his wife in the insane asylum in San Antonio. So when I found that out I was pregnant with my youngest son...seven months pregnant. When I found that out I knew that I was going to raise my two sons by myself and, I guess, nature or something just took care of the situation because one day I told him, "I'm filing suit for divorce." And three months later he was gone, so it

worked out. He left me in a very sad situation financially. Like, he gave me a \$1,500 insurance policy and about \$30,000 worth of debts, but I overcame all of that adversity and I never did remarry.

M: And you returned to El Paso?

B: I returned to El Paso eventually. Widows make drastic decisions when their husbands die. And I remember my mother shipping us off to San Antonio and sticking us in the orphanage, not for adoption, but just as a holding tank, and me, two years old. I didn't want to do that to my kids, so I made up my mind that I was going to stay right there until I felt like my head was on straight and I could think straight. And by the time I had my equilibrium my boys didn't want to leave. Now, we had a house in Fabens that was clear. I mean, I had a home to go, but they did not want to leave California, so I stayed there until the youngest was eighteen. And then I went through some very, very trying times with those kids, those two boys, during the teenage years. When John turned eighteen I said, "Adios. I'm going back to El Paso."

But one thing I want to say about the Stillwells. Of all of the people in my acquaintance I do not know a more loving family, a more closely united family, than they are. They stand by each other regardless of what they do. That's all forgotten, that's all forgiven, and you see nothing but love expressed in that family. And it's a joy for me to take my trailer down there and to be in that atmosphere.

- M: Describing your own life that you just have and that of your mother, it seems like there's a lot of parallels.
- B: Yes, there is, except my mother never owned her own home. And in my managing and paying for our debts and everything I've come out pretty... . I don't have a lot, but what I have is mine clear. And I am very, very grateful for what I have and I think of Mother often. And whenever I use that bread machine that I just loaded up and connected I think, "What Mother wouldn't have given for something like this when she had to make biscuits and cook them in a Dutch oven on a camp fire."
- M: In describing your mother, the Stillwells', and yourself, do you think the Big Bend had... . Of course, the Big Bend is the purpose of this. Was it the environment, the time, the conditions, the hardships? Can you attribute that to developing your own character and that of your mother and that of the Stillwell family in general?
- B: Well, I don't know whether it's that. I think that had a lot of contribution to my character and life, but I think it's the genes. I think my father must have been a very, very good man and I think my mother had stamina enough for more than one person. And her attitude in raising us three kids and not letting us know, whether that's good or bad, that we were dirt poor. Now, the only indication that I know that there was a difference in myself and my classmates was Frances Morelock, whose father was the president of Sul Ross, tried real hard to

develop a friendship with me and Mother discouraged it. And I never knew why then. But, outside of that she never let us know, you know, that we weren't the same and I admire her for that.

M: Mrs. Bright, is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you care to say before we wrap up this interview?

B: No, I can't think of a thing. I think it's been a pretty thorough hour and a half. (chuckles)

M: Thank you very much. And I'll turn off the tape at this point.

B: Okay.

**End of Interview**