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## Interview no. 862

Lee Maisie

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1994

**INTERVIEWEE/ADDRESS:** Maisie Lee, P.O. Box 264, Marathon, Tx., 79842. Phone: 915-386-4295.

**INTERVIEW BY:** John R. Moore

**DATE:** March 23, 1994

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW/LANGUAGE:** 40 minutes/English

**SUMMARY:** Lee was born in Australia. She immigrated with her parents to the United States at a young age (she declined to reveal her age, although at the time of the interview she probably was in her early 70s). Her family settled in El Paso in 1929 when they were stranded by the Great Depression while on a cross-country trip from Florida to California.

She met and married Guy Lee, a long-time resident of the Marathon area. She and her husband lived two years (she recalled about 1957-59, but her husband clarified in a later interview that it was about 1946-48) at Hot Springs where her husband was employed by the State of Texas as a river rider to prevent Mexican livestock from entering the park. She and her family lived in the structure located on the knoll above the Hot Springs store and motel. She recalls her acquaintance with Maggie Smith, the concessionaire who operated the Hot Springs store, post office and mineral baths. She relates the difficulties of living and raising children in the desert environment without amenities.

A self-taught artist, Lee painted the murals in the Hot Springs motel rooms. Maggie Smith requested the murals after she saw a mural Lee painted in her home at Hot Springs. She was acquainted with Ross Maxwell and offers several anecdotes about life in the park, contact with tourists and relations with the Park Service. At the time of the interview, she was Marathon's librarian and part-time employee at the Gage Hotel's Marathon Emporium gift shop.

Big Bend National Park Oral History Project

Maisie Lee  
By John Moore

March 23, 1994

[This is a] Big Bend Oral History Project interview with Mrs. Maisie Lee, March 23, 1994 at Marathon, Texas at the Marathon Emporium where Mrs. Lee is an employee.

M: Mrs. Lee, tell me about how you came to Marathon and the Big Bend area.

L: Well, I came here because my brother was a cattle buyer for the Peyton Packing Company in El Paso, [Texas] and he married a local girl. And I would come down here with her to visit. And there was lots of cowboys down here on the front street walking around. Anyway, I married one of them and ended up here.

M: I believe you're originally from Australia?

L: Yes.

M: Would you tell me how you got to the United States?

L: Well, we lived in.... I was born in Mildura, Australia. It's close to Melbourne. And my father was a, I guess, he was an adventurer because he was born in Ireland, he met my mother in England, they lived in Australia, and then he brought us over

here. He had been in the Boer War, he had been a Canadian Mountie, [a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police], and, I guess, he just wouldn't stay anywhere. So when the depression hit, well, this is where we ended up.

M: And you mentioned you ended up in El Paso...

L: Yes.

M: ...in route from Florida to California.

L: Yes.

M: Would you explain how that happened?

L: Well, the depression hit at that time. And my brother and I and my parents were on our way to California to visit some kinfolks and the bank closed down. There was a big crash and the bank closed down in Orlando, Florida. And all of our money was in the bank. There was a run on the bank, but there was no way to reach my parents (clears throat) at that time because, I guess, there weren't many telephones or anything and all the roads were not paved. And.... You'd better turn that off a minute. (pause in tape)

M: Okay.

L: Where was I?

M: We're talking about coming from Florida.

L: Oh, okay. Well, the crash of, I guess, in the - I don't know what year it was - in the '20s sometime or other.

M: 1929 about.

L: I think so. Okay. Well, anyway, the bank closed with all of our money. So when we went back to Florida.... Is it

working? Okay. We went back to Florida and we started back to California with the whole family. And we broke down in El Paso and ended up there. And all of the family had to work, except me. I was too young. But my brother was a cattle buyer for Peyton Packing. Did I say that?

M: Yes ma'am, that's right.

L: Okay. And, anyway, that's how I ended up down here.

M: Would you tell me your father's name and what he did in El Paso?

L: His name was Frederick Kane, K-A-N-E.

M: K-A-N-E.

L: And in El Paso, I think, his health broke because he just had a filling station at that time, but in Australia we owned a vineyard and we were pretty well off until the crash.

M: Uh-huh.

L: And that was kind of a big come down after that.

M: You still owned the vineyard in Australia after you came to the United States?

L: No. We sold the vineyard and came to the United States. And we came by ship. It took us a month by ship to come. I don't know how long it takes now, but it took a month then.

M: What year were you born, Mrs. Lee?

L: I'm not going to tell you that! (laughter)

M: Oh, okay. Before 1929, anyway, I guess.

L: Yes.

M: How old were you when you came from Australia?

- L: Well, I was pretty young. I think I was six or seven. Seven, probably.
- M: Tell me about meeting Mr. Lee and your experiences at Hot Springs, which is now part of Big Bend National Park.
- L: Yes. Well, it was part of the park when we were there. And we had three children. I had just a baby and two little boys. And we didn't have much money. My husband worked here, there, and yonder. In fact, we owed a year's rent at seven dollars a month and we couldn't pay it. But, anyway, he took the job with the...
- M: Was that in Marathon?
- L: Yes, right here in Marathon - two rooms and an outdoor privy out the back. (chuckles) Anyway, we moved to Hot Springs because he got a job as a river rider. And Maggie Smith had a store there. And the post master came down once a week, brought the mail, picked up the mail, and went back. And he had a little truck. And what else do you want to know about Hot Springs?
- M: Tell me about what a river rider was, the job Mr. Lee took. [For a more detailed description of Guy Lee's experiences as a river rider for the State of Texas, refer to his interview in the Big Bend Oral History Project collection.]
- L: Okay. The river riders had several miles from where they were stationed to ride horseback and turn around and come back. Each river rider would meet at a certain place and then go back to their destination. And they were to keep all of the

cattle, horses, chickens, [and] anything from coming over from Mexico - because the spread of the hoof and mouth disease would be bad on the cattle over here.

But then, I thought it was quite strange because after dark when the river riders all got home, the river was open and people could bring things across. And there was one Mexican man that had, I think, he had two cows on the Mexican side and the cows kept coming over here. And my husband kept telling him, "Don't let the cattle come over here. I'll have to kill them." And he wouldn't listen. And there was one cow that kept coming over. And, finally, they had to kill this man's cow, which was terrible because that was the man's living. But, anyway, they had to burn the cattle. They had to kill her on the American side and then they had to burn her so that they'd get rid of all the disease. And.... I don't know what else.

M: As a river rider, did Mr. Lee work for the state or the county?

L: It was the government.

M: For the federal government?

L: Uh-huh. And it paid real well. He had two horses and he'd ride one one day and then one the next day. And we lived in the house up on the hill. And I painted murals on the walls of the house, so the lady at the grocery store, Maggie Smith, asked me if I would paint murals in all the cabins, which I did. She baby-sat and I painted. And the Mexican people all

came to her grocery store to buy provisions, to get their mail, or catch a ride on the... (train passes, taping stopped and started again)

M: We were talking about Hot Springs. You said you've lived in the house on the hill...

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...above the motel. Would you describe that house as it was when you lived in it?

L: Well, it was a rock house. It was.... The side of the hill was dug out and the house was put right up against the rocks in the hill. And it was one long building. One end had a fireplace and the rest of it was open. It had cement floor. It had a front door and a back door, but the back door opened about two feet from the bluff so it was just a small space there. And it had no bathroom - we had an outside privy - and no running water, no electricity, no air conditioning, no.... Nothing, really. We had a wood stove and it was so hot that I couldn't tell whether the wood stove was burning or not. It really was hot. We, finally, did get a butane stove later on. And we had our beds at one end of the room and our kitchen at the other end. And the children and I would go down to the creek, which was down below the house. And the children stayed in the water most of the time, but we'd bring buckets of water up and throw all over the floor, get our clothes wet and wet everything there, and in about five minutes it was dry. And when you sat down, the perspiration ran down the hot



back of your legs and dripped on the floor. (chuckles) It was terrible.

M: Do you recall what the hottest temperature was that you...

L: No, I don't. At that time, I had kids and I wasn't worrying anything about [except] trying to be comfortable, but every day the first year, I think, [I said], "We can't stand another day. We've got to leave." But the second year wasn't so bad. We were used to it so...

M: And what year did you move to Hot Springs?

L: I can't remember the year. It was in the '50s, probably. Maybe '57. [According to interviewee's spouse, Guy Lee, the family moved to Hot Springs in 1948. For additional information, refer to Guy Lee's interview in the Big Bend National Park Oral History Project collection.] I'm not sure, but I had three children- two little boys and a baby girl. Well, she was about a year old by then. And I taught my oldest son the first and second grade there. And when we came to town, I would go to the school and get the books from the first grade teacher. And then when I came back the next time, she would go through everything to see if I was doing everything right. And now, he's been a helicopter pilot and he's the manger of a ranch so, I guess, I did okay. (chuckles) But...

M: You mentioned that you lived in the house on the hill and that you...

L: Yes.

M: ...you painted a mural on your wall.

L: Yes, I did.

M: Could you tell me about that?

L: Well, when you're artistic it always comes out some way or other. So I painted a mural on the wall. It was a cowboy roping a calf. And when Mrs. Smith that had the grocery store saw that, she asked me if I'd paint murals in the cabins, which I did. She baby-sat for me and I painted the murals with just plain house paint. And, I think, they're still there. I'm not sure, but they were.

And there was also a dug well there where we could get our drinking water. And a lot of people - campers - were there. And the kids would, invariably, lean over the well and spit in the well. (chuckles) So Mrs. Smith asked me if I would paint a sign on the well [lettered] Please Do Not Spit In The Well, (chuckles) which stayed there for a long time.

M: Where was that well located from your house?

L: It was close to the grocery store. It was between the store and the river. And when the river came up, sometimes it would come up clear to the well.

M: The paintings in the motel rooms are still there. Would you tell me about - they're different scenes in each room.

L: Yes.

M: Tell me about how you picked those scenes and why.

L: I think she wanted something western. And I had seen some pictures in one of the children's books. And, I think, most

of them, I got the idea from that. The rest, I just took out of my mind and painted them.

M: As I recall, there is a Mexican fellow with his burro.

L: Uh-huh.

M: In one [room, there is] a cowboy. On another....

L: And...

M: Do you recall...

L: Three horses' heads.

M: Three horses' heads?

L: Yes. I didn't do a mural in the very last cabin because Mrs. Smith's son and wife were living at that one and I wouldn't go in their house while they were gone.

M: Tell me about Mrs. Smith. She ran the store after the Langford family left the area. Could you tell me what you know about the history of...

L: Of Mrs...

M: ...the store in Hot Springs?

L: Well, I don't know a whole lot about it, except that she ran the grocery store then and she kept a lot of things that the Mexican people would need. And, in fact, she also would go across the river if they needed a doctor. She went one time over there, which she told me about, and a woman was having difficulty having her baby. And they asked her if she would come and help, which she did. And she said when she got there, they had this girl hung by her arms with a rope and then they had a rope around her stomach. And they would

tighten the rope around her stomach. So Mrs. Smith, finally, persuaded them to lay the girl down and they brought the baby [into the world] okay. And she went to weddings over there and helped with the weddings.

The one time I distinctly remember, which was pretty bad, it was a man rode up on a horse and he had a little boy behind him. And the little boy had jumped off of a little bluff and had run a piece of wood through his foot, a stab of some kind. And he asked Mrs. Smith if she would take this piece of wood out of the little boy's foot. And she said no, she just couldn't. It was too bad, so she suggested that they go to town to the doctor. And he said no. So he bought razor blades and said he was going to go home and take it out himself. And I felt really sorry for that little boy, but it was pretty primitive at that time.

And Maggie Smith bought the candelia wax from across the river. They had a lot of places where they made the wax all up and down the river. And she would buy it from them and then she would come to town and sell it. And she made quite a bit of money that way. And, sometimes, when these people.... They would have what they call a wax camp - you've probably heard how they make the candelia wax - and, sometimes, the soldiers would come and they would tear up their wax-making outfit and take all their money. And if there were some girls there they wanted, they took them also.

M: These are Mexican soldiers you're referring to?

L: Mexican soldiers, yes, uh-huh.

M: And, again, we're talking in the 1950s.

L: Yes.

M: Is that correct?

L: Uh-huh.

M: When did you leave Hot Springs? Do you recall the year?

L: We were there two years, which wasn't very long. Well, it seemed like a long time.

M: And that was what year that you left there? Do you recall, exactly?

L: Well, maybe '59.

M: '59?

L: I'm not sure.

M: '57, '58, '59?

L: I'd have to go back and look and... [According to interviewee's spouse, the family left Hot Springs sometime between 1948 and 1950. For additional information, refer to Guy Lee's interview in the Big Bend National Park Oral History Project collection.]

M: Right. Okay.

L: ...see.

M: What do you know about Mrs. Smith's background, how she got to Hot Springs?

L: She had had a grocery store somewhere in the park before that and, I think, she sold groceries and, I think, they made barbecue. And she moved from there to Hot Springs. And she

lived there many years after we were there. I don't know too much about her. She had, let's see, she had two boys and two girls, I believe.

M: And they lived at Hot Springs...

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...as well?

L: Yes.

M: All of her children were there?

L: Let's see, the oldest boy married and brought his wife there.

M: Do you recall his name?

L: Thorn. And then there was another one - I can't remember - the youngest one. I can't remember that. The only thing I remember about him was when my husband would leave sometimes in the morning on a horse, my oldest son would want to ride the other horse that we had. And he was a real small horse. They called him [inaudible] because one ear, it was cut off. And so when my husband wasn't there, I'd let Jerry ride this horse. And I wouldn't let him have a saddle until he could learn to ride bareback. And one day he was riding - and he told me many years later - that he put on some spurs (chuckles) and he spurred this little horse and the little horse took off running straight towards the river. And he was screaming and the horse was flying down there. And Mrs. Maggie Smith's son heard him and he ran out the door. And, I guess, he stopped the horse, but he was going to jump in the river and save my son. But that really scared us.

M: What activities occurred at the store during the two years you were there? I assume Mrs. Smith lived in the store?

L: Yes, she lived in the store. Well, people came there to take the baths at Hot Springs. And there was a bathhouse and it had, I guess, four or five bathtubs and they were all made out of cement and the hot water was piped in. And you went into the bathhouse and took, I think, you stayed in the water twenty minutes. You had to gradually work up to twenty minutes. And then when you got out, you wrapped yourself in a blanket and you sweated for so many minutes. And if you didn't sort of work up to this, you were so weak when you came out you could hardly walk. But people came there for rheumatism and all different types of illnesses.

And I never did believe in the water - I thought, you know, "That's [an] old wives' tale" - but I saw people come there and they would [be cured]. One lady, in particular, they would put her on a chair sort of like this (demonstrates) and a man would get on each side and they would carry her down the trail to the bathhouse. And when they left there that lady was walking. And I saw many people that things like that happened to them.

And one man came - and he was an elderly man - and he had some kind of a sore close to his ear that wouldn't heal. And he'd been going to doctors and doctors and it wouldn't heal. So he came there and he would take the baths and wash his sore place with the hot water. And, then, he would get some moss

that was around the water and put it on his face. And it cured it up, so I became a believer.

And I smoked when we went there. And it was so hot, I didn't want to strike a match. (chuckles) And, I think, maybe [by] taking the baths and drinking the water, maybe I sweated it out because I didn't have any trouble stopping [smoking].

M: So you took the baths yourself, eventually?

L: Oh, that's the only place we could take a bath, unless we wanted to get in the creek, of course. But... (display falls from gift shop wall)

M: What did Mrs. Smith charge people to take a bath and to stay at the motel?

L: I don't remember what she charged, but you were supposed to take twenty-one baths. So people would come down there with tents. And, sometimes, they stayed in the rooms and, sometimes, they just set up a tent and they'd take the baths for twenty-one days. And it really did help a lot of people.

And one - I guess you've been down the trail to Hot Springs [and seen] how it goes around and around. It's real narrow. Well, one time this family came down. And they had a truck and they brought their refrigerator, which was butane, and they had a big tent. And when they were coming down the trail, the refrigerator fell down. And they had to go back and pick it up later on. But they set their refrigerator up inside their tent so they had.... I guess everything was nice and cool.



And another thing that happened - I'd forgotten about this - but one day when my husband went to ride the river, his horse fell with him and fell on top of him. And, I guess, I don't know whether it caused him to have appendicitis. He'd always had trouble with his appendix, but he was in a lot of pain. And it happened that there was a doctor there at the springs. He was a plastic surgeon, but he was a doctor. So he said he would come up and examine my husband. So he did examine him and he said that his appendix was real bad and he must go to the doctor in El Paso as soon as possible. When I asked him how much I could pay him for the examination, he said, "Well, I saw your children running around here with ice cream cones. And if you'd give me some ice cream cones for pay, that's what I'll take." So I gave him six ice cream cones - three in each hand - and paid for the examination. (chuckles)

M: And where did you get the ice cream cones at?

L: Well, I made the ice cream and I would buy the cones. And I'd make out a long list once a month, about two pages, and send it in to town by the post master and then...

M: And town was Marathon?

L: Marathon. And he would bring the groceries back. And that's how we got all of our things.

M: There was still a post office at Hot Springs at that time?

L: Well, Maggie Smith's grocery store was the post office, also, so.... And then another thing that happened that was real

strange was there was a woman, a Mexican woman, a young woman, and the men brought her across from [Mexico] to Maggie Smith's store. She was in a tub - these big metal tubs - and there was one on each side and they brought her across the river. And I saw the lady and she was doubled over in pain. And, so, they brought her so that she could come to the doctor in Alpine with the post master, with the one that delivered the mail. So they took her to the doctor and said he couldn't find anything wrong with her. And they brought her back and she was still in pain. And they told Mrs. Smith that she was bewitched, that there was a woman that wanted her husband and she had bewitched this girl. And I heard later on that she died. So strange things happened.

M: You mentioned that the post master delivered your groceries to you.

L: Yes.

M: Do you recall his name?

L: Ed Hancock.

M: Ed Hancock?

L: Uh-huh.

M: How often did he deliver the mail to Hot Springs?

L: He delivered it once a week. He would spend the night. He had a little cabin there. He'd bring the mail down, spend the night, and go back the next day.

M: And what type of supplies would you order through him?

L: Well, in my cookbook I have there was an article that was

written and, I think, it had a list of my groceries. But I ordered all kinds of groceries: canned goods, flour, yeast, canned milk - everything that you needed to live on. And, also, I had to have glue for a doll's head once. And if I needed anything for the children - coloring books or anything like that - I ordered all of those sort of things. And, also, my husband would order feed for the horses. And one time close to Christmas, I ordered a tricycle. And my children thought that the post master was Santa Claus because they thought he'd brought the tricycle to them. And just a long list - two pages.

M: Did Mr. Hancock and the Postal Service charge you to deliver groceries?

L: I can't remember. I don't think so. I don't believe so, because it was government.

M: Tell me - we're talking in the late 1950s and the National Park was in operation at that time...

L: Uh-huh. Yes.

M: Why was Mrs. Smith allowed to continue operating the store when others had been...

L: Well, she...

M: ...particularly ranchers...

L: Yes.

M: ...had been removed from the park?

L: Well, she leased from the Big Bend park. And I can't remember the name of the superintendent at that time, but he would come

down, maybe, once a month and just check things out.

M: Would that be Ross Maxwell?

L: Yes, it was. Uh-huh. Very nice person. And we weren't allowed to have cats or dogs in the park at that time. So my brother brought us a puppy. And whenever Ross Maxwell or any of the rangers or anything were there, we'd tell the puppy to hide under the stove. And he did. (chuckles) I'm sure they knew we had him, but they didn't enforce it.

M: Did a lot of tourists come to Hot Springs...

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...and the area in the 1950s?

L: A lot of tourists. We met all kinds of people from all over the world.

M: The people that came to take the baths, were they from all over the country?

L: Uh-huh. Yes, they were. It was pretty famous for the baths.

M: The Langfords had advertised the hot springs...

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...for a number of years before. And did Mrs. Smith advertise?

L: I don't think she did. I don't think so. Just word of mouth evidently. And there is a book written about Mr. Langford. You probably read that.

M: Right.

L: Okay. I'm the librarian here. And we have those books at the library. (chuckles)

M: You've mentioned several stories about people in Boquillas, [Mexico], I presume. Did...

L: No. Across from Hot Springs.

M: What was the village across from Hot Springs?

L: Well, there really wasn't a village. They just lived across from there.

M: Did you, yourself, and your family go into Mexico occasionally and...

L: No.

M: ...have any relationship with...

L: No, we didn't. And I've always regretted that we didn't, because I think it would have been interesting, but my husband was never interested in that. I have a friend now that she and I go into Mexico quite a lot and enjoy it.

M: Life was still pretty primitive, I assume, across the river.

L: Well, I thought it was, yes, uh-huh. We did go across one time at Boquillas and we went, I guess, we went to the beer joint because my husband drank beer. And there were a lot of people there - it must have been Sunday - and I remember that there was no doors. There was openings, but no doors and there were chickens walking in and out of the beer joint. And one man was laying right in the doorway passed out and we had to step over him (chuckles) to get out of there!

And we walked around a little bit. And there were several houses and some of the houses didn't have roofs. They were just open. And one lady was sitting in one sewing on a

pedal sewing machine and no roof up above her. It had a dirt floor.

M: And no electricity or running water in Boquillas?

L: No electricity or running water, no, but the people were nice.

M: How did you get across the river at that time?

L: Well, the Mexican people had an old truck and they would drive us across. You had to keep your feet up because the water came right up to your feet. But they'd drive you across and you'd give them a certain amount of money and then they would drive you back.

M: Was that kind of access to Mexico possible all year around or just...

L: Uh-huh, yeah.

M: ...when the river was low?

L: Except when the river came up. And when the river was up, well, you didn't fool with that river. It was pretty violent.

M: Can you tell me about any experiences your husband has related to you as a river rider, [such as] his dealings with people in the park or in Mexico?

L: Well, I told you about the cow that he had to kill. And he never had any problems with the people. In fact, he spoke Spanish and he got along with them very well. And they made home brew - or at least they made some kind of whiskey or something - and they would bring us whiskey across. And, I know, anytime we threw tin cans or anything like that away, they would gather them up and take them home and, I guess,

make things out of them or use them. So....

M: Can you tell me about other people that either lived in Hot Springs or in the immediate area, if there were any, besides your family and Mrs. Smith?

L: No, there was no one else living there. It was a tourist place and we had lots of tourists coming in and out, but no one else lived there. There was some little houses across the river that we could see, but other than that we were it.

M: Did your family socialize with any of the park personnel up in the [Chisos] Basin?

L: No, not really. My children played with whatever children were there. There was one little boy that used to come over and help Mrs. Smith a lot and he played with my children. He was from Mexico. And, other than that, they just played with themselves.

M: Tell me about some of the changes that have occurred [in] Hot Springs and the park area that you are aware of today compared to the 1950s.

L: Electricity, (chuckles) that was the main thing. And, I suppose, that they have - well, they do have rest rooms everywhere now, which, I thought, the first time we moved into a house with a bathroom, I thought, "We're staying." (chuckles) But - and we did stay twenty-four years, too - I guess, the road is still the same, evidently.

M: Was the road paved into the park...

L: No.

M: ...in the 1950s?

L: No, it wasn't paved because I can remember driving Mrs. Smith to town and back and it was not paved from where we turned off to Hot Springs. It was gravel. It was pretty, pretty rough.

M: Was Panther Junction at its present location...

L: Uh-huh.

M: ...in the 1950s?

L: Yes, it was.

M: And a number of park service people lived there?

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: Tell me about.... Did you visit other areas of the park during the two years you were there?

L: No, no. We did drive up and down the river sometimes. If we had company, we would take them up and down the river, but we didn't go into the park or anything.

M: You've mentioned the heat was something that you put up with all the time. Any other thing about the climate or environment that comes to mind?

L: Well, yes. The wind blew a lot in the wintertime and it was very cold. Of course, we had a fireplace. And one time we had a tornado. And we could see it coming down through the pass and so we all stood in the doorway because we had this rock house. And as it went by, it twisted the windmill all the way around and it took the tin off of Mrs. Smith's store. But, other than that, there was a lot of wind that we.... And when it rained, sometimes it would rain across the river and



it wouldn't come across. We could see the rain over there, but it didn't come across the water.

M: You mentioned that your husband had two horses for his work...

L: Yes.

M: ...but no dogs and cats were allowed. Were any other livestock allowed?

L: No, no.

M: That was a Park Service policy?

L: Uh-huh.

M: Do you know why that was the case?

L: No, I don't know. I don't know why.

M: Mrs. Lee, I'm going to switch sides of the tape.

L: Okay.

End of Side A

Beginning of Side B

M: You've mentioned that you were at Hot Springs 1957 to [19]59, approximately. What changed with your family situation that you left Hot Springs? And where did you go?

L: Well, we moved back to Marathon. My husband was offered a job on the Gage Ranch - well, it was called the Gage Ranch at that time - and it was about two miles out of town. And we lived there twenty-four years until he retired from that.

M: Tell me a little bit...

L: [We had] our first bathroom! (chuckles)

M: Tell me a little about your husband's background and what got him to this part of the country.

L: He wasn't born here, but he was raised here. I think he was about two or three years old and his mother died. And his father raised him the best way he could. And he'd stay with, first, one family and then another to go to school. In fact, I think he went to school way down the country somewhere in a little one-room schoolhouse. He can tell you more about that than I can. If you want to interview him, you can come down to the house and talk to him.

M: I'll do that. Tell me about Marathon. You've lived, you said, two miles south of town...

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...for twenty-four years?

L: Uh-huh.

M: And you currently live in Marathon?

L: Yes, uh-huh.

M: What changes have occurred in that time period in Marathon?

L: In Marathon? Well, it's pretty much the same as it was. We have two schools - a high school and elementary school - and the children that have graduated from here have gone to the university in El Paso, [University of Texas at El Paso]. They've gone to Sul Ross [State University at Alpine, Texas]. My son went to Texas A and M [University at College Station,

Texas], and he's a veterinarian. And you could get the education here that you could anywhere else.

M: Another long-time area resident, Tom Leary in Alpine...

L: Uh-huh.

M: ...mentioned to me recently that, at one time, Marathon had several grocery stores and an ice plant.

L: Yes. And he had a drug store at that one time. And when I came here there was a drug store on the front street here. This was a beer joint. And there was a little squeezed-in place next door that sold hamburgers and at the end was a, I think, that was also a grocery store. And then we had the large Frenchie Store, which was [well-stocked]. It had everything. And across the tracks in that old building over there was Richie's [?]. And it was a large grocery store. And they had a little ice plant here where they made ice. And at one time they had a cleaning establishment and two beauty shops. And that's about it.

M: Was the population of Marathon larger?

L: About the same.

M: About the same?

L: About six hundred.

M: What affect has the Gage Hotel and its revitalization done for the community?

L: It's done wonders because Marathon was going downhill a lot. And the Gage Hotel has employed a lot of people, brought in lots and lots of tourists, and, I think, the people in

Marathon are really proud of it.

M: What can you tell me about the Gage Hotel?

L: I really don't know much about it, to tell you the truth, except that it was always just a hotel for the cattlemen, the ranchers. And, in fact, my brother stayed there when he would come down here and meet with the ranchers to buy. And, I guess, that was what it was for.

M: I believe it's operated by Bill and Lorrie Stevens. How long have they been in charge of its operation?

L: I don't know. Four or five years, I guess. And J.P. Bryan [?] from Houston is the one that bought the hotel and had gotten it started. And then they built the new addition next door, which is beautiful. It's like being in another world.

M: This is in the addition across the street...

L: Uh-huh, yes.

M: ...from the existing hotel?

L: Uh-huh.

M: What relationship do people of Marathon have with the Park Service and park employees today? Are you acquainted? Is there much interaction?

L: Some. Not a whole lot. They have their place and we have ours. I'm the librarian and some of them come in and check books out, but they bring them back. And I'm sure that they use the hotel a lot. I would think they did.

M: Do you return to Hot Springs occasionally?

L: Once in a while. Not very often. It's away in the past.

(chuckles)

M: Are your memories fond of Hot Springs?

L: Oh, yes, uh-huh.

M: Those two years you were there?

L: It was an experience that.... I don't want to do it again,  
(chuckles) but it was something different.

M: You mentioned earlier that you're originally from Australia.

L: Yes.

M: Have you returned to your homeland?

L: No. No, I haven't. I hope to, but I haven't. My sister has  
been back twice, but I haven't.

M: Mrs. Lee, you were telling me something about a meteorite.

L: Yes. Years ago, one fell on a ranch outside of town. And it  
fell in a little lake. And it's a very unusual one because  
it's white. And Dr. [Donald] Rathbun, a friend of ours from  
El Paso, came down and we went out there at....We just showed  
him the place where it fell. But, I think, it's in the  
Smithsonian right now and it has a name. I don't know what  
the name is. And, also, when the Langfords lived at Hot  
Springs one went over Hot Springs.

M: A meteor?

L: Uh-huh. And he was interested in finding it that it fell  
somewhere in the park. And he's had permission to go into the  
park and look for it. And he's been trying to find out  
exactly where it fell.

M: Is he associated with the University of Texas at El Paso?

L: I don't know. You should call him. He's up on Pill Hill.  
And it's Donald Rathbun and...

M: He's a medical doctor?

L: Yeah, he's a neurologist.

M: And meteorites are his..

L: Oh, he loves them.

M: ...hobby, I guess?

L: He loves them. He came to Sul Ross and gave a talk a few years ago and it was very interesting.

M: Any other stories that you recall? You mentioned the meteorite and the story about witchcraft across...

L: Oh, yeah.

M: ...the river. Any other tales of that type?

L: Offhand, I can't think of any.

M: Okay.

L: Probably, it'll come to me sometime, (chuckles) but right now I can't think of it.

M: Well, Mrs. Lee, if there's nothing further, then we'll conclude...

L: Okay.

M: ...this interview. Thank you.

End of Interview