

An Interview with

Raymond W. McCann

at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in

Columbia, Missouri

19 September 2008

interviewed by William Stolz



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri

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One-room Schoolhouse Project

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PREFACE

Raymond William McCann was born in 1927, in Cook Station, Missouri. He grew up on a large farm and attended a one-room schoolhouse known as Benton Creek School in Crawford County, Missouri. McCann describes the physical school building and discusses his education, teachers, lunches, recess, and way of life during the Depression era. McCann continued his education at Benton Creek School through the eighth grade and then he went on to high school in Steelville, Missouri. After completing high school McCann joined the Navy at the end of World War II. While in the Navy reserves McCann continued his education through the GI Bill at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. At the age of forty McCann was a senior lieutenant in the naval intelligence reserve component and helped work on POW intelligence during the Vietnam War.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [/]. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [____] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [____(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Jeff D. Corrigan.

Narrator: Raymond W. McCann
Interviewer: William Stolz
Date: September 19, 2008
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

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[Begin Interview.]

[Begin Track One.]

10

WS: Today is September 19, 2008, and this is William Stolz with the Western Historical Manuscript Collection. We're here at the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia, Missouri, interviewing individuals who attended one-room schoolhouses. So sir, if you could tell me your full name, and where and when you were born.

15

RM: My full name is Raymond William McCann. And where was I born?

WS: Yeah.

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RM: I was born in my family's house, which was located in Crawford County, Missouri, on the Merrimac River. Our address at the, on my birth certificate, it says that our address was Cooks, Missouri. But it really was Cook Station. But that was just the regional way of referring to it as Cooks. Like now I live in Jeff.

25

WS: Right. (laughs)

RM: Even though it's really Jefferson City, [Missouri].

WS: Right.

30

RM: And when was I born? July the 20th, 1927.

WS: And could you describe your home situation? What your parents did for a living, how many siblings?

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RM: We lived on a general farm. I'm not sure how many acres. I used to remember, but I don't remember anymore. Two or three hundred acres. Most of it was not farming land. I mean, you had the river bottom, on the Merrimac. But then, the bottom land was only a part of the farm. The rest of it was, I sometimes used to refer to it as rocks and stumps. (WS laughs) And this was in '27. At that time, I was the sixth, sixth child. I had, I had four older brothers and one older sister when I was born. And that was when, if you were a farmer, you weren't making big money. But that's about the time that the automobile business was starting. And the place where you went to get a job was Detroit, Michigan.

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WS: Yes.

RM: Or, as the country folks called it, Detroit. (accent on first syllable. WS laughs) So my dad knew some people that had moved to Detroit and had found jobs. And he went up there and stayed with this other family. There was a family living there, and they ran a rooming house for new people. And then he got a job at the, oh, the company that made auto bodies for Chrysler Corporation. Briggs. Briggs Auto Body. Briggs for Chrysler was like Fisher Body used to be for General Motors. So he got a job. And after he felt he was established in his job, he came back and packed up the family and we all moved to Detroit. That was in 1929. And being a student of history, you have to know what happened in 1929.

WS: Yes. Yes. Yes. The Great Depression.

RM: It was the Great Depression. Living through it, I never thought it was all that great. But, so, as soon as we got to Detroit, within a couple of months, he was unemployed, with a wife and six children. And the first thing they decided to do was to, I mean, everybody sees the cartoons of people standing on the street corner selling apples. But they never tried that. They bought the apples and made apple butter. But apparently there was a lot of competition in that. So they ended up going into horseradish. They bought bulk, you know, big sacks of horseradish and cleaned them, ground it up and bottled it. Sold it door to door. And that lasted for three years. But my father was born in the country. My mother was born in Saint Louis. She lived in Saint Louis during the World's Fair. 1904. And then her mother and stepfather, after the fair was over, they moved out into the country in Crawford County. And that's how my mother, when she came to visit her folks on the farm, met my dad, who had grown up on a neighboring farm. And I'm not sure how much time went by. But they decided to get married—

[End Track One. Begin Track Two.]

RM: But it was with the understanding that she was going to live in Saint Louis. (WS laughs) And so they did. They moved to Saint Louis. My dad got a job as a conductor on a streetcar. He didn't like it. He didn't like the job. He didn't like living in the city. So when the third child was on the way, my mother and the two children, ages two and four, went out to the country to stay with her mother, my grandmother. And they never, they never went back to live in Saint Louis again. And I think I've digressed way off of what you were asking.

WS: That's all right. So did you start school in Detroit? Or did your family move back to Missouri?

RM: No, no. At the end of three years, my father felt that he had to get back to the country. And so we went back to the farm where I was born. And there was another family living on it those three years. And that's all they were doing. They didn't do much farming. They were just, well, there was various words that were used in those days. (WS laughs) They didn't even have trailers, so they couldn't have been trailer trash.

But they were—they weren't really farmers. They were just, they just were poor country people.

5 WS: Just living on the property.

RM: Yeah. And so we moved back into the place. And after we came back, I was five years old.

10 WS: Okay. So did you start school when you arrived back in Crawford County?

RM: I didn't start until two years later.

WS: Okay.

15 RM: Because I think my mother felt I was, I think she felt I was too peaked, I don't know if that word fits into your language or not. But I guess puny, maybe, was the word that other people would use. So I stayed home. Then I started when I was seven years old.

20 WS: What was the name of the school?

RM: Benton Creek School.

WS: Bent[on] Creek.

25 RM: And I know that machine can't see pictures, but you can see pictures.

WS: Right. You have a photograph with fifteen students.

30 RM: Thirteen.

WS: Thirteen. That's right. Thirteen students.

35 RM: (laughs) Including me, the youngest, and my brother Arthur, who was the oldest, who was totally deaf. He had lost his hearing from meningitis when we got to Detroit. So he was seven years older than me. So he went to a special school for the deaf in Detroit. Learned lip reading. And then finished up in the country grade school where he had started before he went to Detroit.

40 WS: This, you're in the photo, so you would have been in first grade.

RM: I was in the first grade.

WS: Okay.

45 RM: Yeah.

WS: Were you the only first grader?

5 RM: At the time, I was the only first grader. And there were two other girls that were in the second grade. But then at the end of the year, and I got my report card, it said I had been promoted to the third grade. (WS laughs) So I don't know when it happened. You know, I never was told, "Now you're in the second grade." But so then the third year, I was in with the two other kids.

10 WS: Okay. Can you describe the school building?

RM: School building was a classic school building, like you have pictures in this little book here. It was rectangular, made out of the same kind of white, white wooden building.

15 WS: Okay. One level.

20 RM: One level. And it had a row of benches, not benches, but desks. And they were to accommodate two kids. You could sit two to a desk. We normally didn't, but you could.

WS: Right.

25 RM: And so you had two desks on the left side, and then you had an aisle in the middle, and then two on the right side. And then the teacher was up in the front on a little elevated, when you had school plays, that was the stage.

WS: Did your school have electricity?

30 RM: Oh, no. No. Of course, we weren't there at nighttime.

WS: Yeah.

35 RM: Except when we had pie suppers and ciphering matches. That would be about, well, the Christmas play. We'd have the plays. You know, we had Christmas plays.

WS: Sure.

40 RM: And they had a big wire running across the front. And the neighbor ladies would furnish the bed sheets to serve as the stage curtains. And one of the neighbors had a more powerful flashlight—

[End Track Two. Begin Track Three.]

45 RM: --than the other neighbors had, and that's what created the star in the east.

WS: Oh, fun.

- RM: And on the Christmas plays, we would always put on the plays. And one year, I was one of the shepherds.
- 5 WS: So the whole school participated in various roles.
- RM: Oh, yeah. And I remember as I got older, I'd joke about it. I said, "I could be a shepherd," because my folks had plenty of gunny sacks to make shepherd costumes out of. But if you wanted to be a wise man, you had to have a bathrobe. And we
10 didn't have bathrobes in our family. (WS laughs)
- WS: And did you have, since you didn't have electricity, did you have plumbing in the school? Or did you have an outhouse?
- 15 RM: We had two outhouses. One for boys and one for girls. Girls were up here, and boys' was out here.
- WS: And how was the building heated?
- 20 RM: Well, to use some local terminology, a heatin' stove. (WS laughs) You didn't have a heating stove, you had a heatin' stove. But then, while I was there, I think maybe when I went into the, it may have been the, it was either the upper grade, like around fifth, sixth grade. They got rid of the heating stove. As a matter of fact, my folks bought it and we had it in our living room. And then they bought a commercial type,
25 it was still heated with wood. And it was more efficient. You didn't have to get right up next to the stove to keep warm. It heated the room a little better. And we had an outside pump for water.
- WS: For water. Can you describe your teachers? Do you remember?
- 30 RM: I had four teachers. Different. Only had one at a time.
- WS: Right. One at a time. But over—
- 35 RM: My first teacher was a lady by the name of Ruth Morrison, who was, who was a member of the Morrison family that lived in the neighborhood there. And then, so I had her for my first year, which constituted my first and second grades. And then the next year, she was still the teacher, but she had gotten married, so she wasn't Ruth Morrison anymore. She was Ruth Beinlich (sp?, pronounced Bine-lick). But we still
40 called her Miss Ruth, because that's what you called your lady schoolteachers. The next year, I was in the fourth grade. And even though I had two other kids with me in the third grade, the two families moved away, then. When I got to the fourth grade, I was the only one in the fourth grade. And my brother, Leonard, was my schoolteacher.
- 45 WS: Oh, really?

5 RM: He had just graduated from high school the year before. So he was, he turned
nineteen right after school started. And that was the only year he ever taught. Fifth
and sixth grade, I had Brenda Cape. And her folks ran a service station in Steelville.
10 And she boarded with a neighboring family so she could walk to school, because
Steelville was twelve miles away. And so she would, I think her father, I think,
brought her there on Sunday night so she'd be able to get up and get to school
Monday morning. And then I think he picked her up on Friday evenings. And after
the first year she got married and she had a different name the next year, but she was
15 still Miss Brenda. Seventh and eighth grade I had a man teacher, Freeman Scott. And
one of his supplemental jobs was setting traps. So before he would get to school in
the mornings, he would go run his traps to see if he'd caught anything. And he would
bring some of his animals that he had caught in the steel traps. And hang them out in
the woodshed.

15 WS: What kind of animals was he trapping?

RM: I don't remember what it was. I really don't.

20 WS: But they were hanging outside.

RM: Yeah. The woodshed, coincidentally, was a converted outhouse.

25 WS: (laughs) What was it like to have your brother as a teacher for one year?

RM: Well, I got personalized instruction. (WS laughs) Both at school and at home. I made
pretty good grades.

[End Track Three. Begin Track Four.]

30 RM: But I don't think it was, I think he treated, well, he was a kid himself. He was
nineteen years old.

35 WS: Right. Nineteen.

RM: And of course some of the girls thought he was, you know, kind of like a rock star.
They didn't have that word in those days, but he was, here's this good looking,
nineteen year-old guy, and here you've got thirteen year-old girls that thought he was
40 pretty super.

WS: (laughs) What did he do after the year of teaching? Did he go on to another career?

45 RM: He, I think, I think he went to work for the R.E.A. That's when they were putting, the
rural electrification out in the rural areas. And he worked there for a while. Then he
went to work in a packing plant in Saint Louis. Then he became a machinist for a

machine shop of some sort in Saint Louis. Then he went in the navy. Then he went on and became a civilian.

5 WS: (laughs) So how did you get to school every day? And how far was your home from the school?

10 RM: Our, if you went in a car, if you went in a car and measured the distance, it was about three miles. But if you walked, you'd take a shortcut, which required that you climb over a couple of fences. It used to be a road, but the road was actually closed off. It was no longer a road, as such. But we'd go by this one house, and you can still drive down to that house, though very few people did. Then you kept walking through the woods about two miles. Two miles was the short cut. And just before, about a half a mile before it got to the school, was my grandmother's, my mother's mother and my step-grandfather.

15 WS: And so you walked every day then, back and forth, four to six miles in total every day, depending on—

20 RM: Well, we never walked around the road.

WS: Okay. So you always took the shortcuts.

RM: We always took the shortcuts when we walked, yeah.

25 WS: And how long did you go to school? Was it a nine-month school year? Eight month school year?

30 RM: I guess it was nine months. Started late in August, because my brother's birthday was on the nineteenth of August. And he didn't have school that day because all the rural teachers met at the county superintendent's office in Steelville. So that's what he did for his nineteenth birthday.

WS: And weather never affected school. You never had school cancellations.

35 RM: I don't recall, I don't recall ever having the weather, as a matter of fact, even in high school, I don't remember, and you know, I even rode the school bus into high school. But I don't remember the school ever being cancelled. Now a couple of times the river was up so we couldn't get there. The bus couldn't get to us, or we couldn't get to the bus. So a couple of times, my dad took me up to Hook Station and I'd catch a train. And the bridge over the river was higher for the train. So I rode into town. And then I could spend the night with some other people until the river got down.

40 WS: That's amazing. What activities do you remember from school? Class work? Outside activities?

45

RM: Well one of the interesting things about one-room school with one teacher, is that the older kids would help. And the procedure was you'd raise your hand. "May I speak? May I speak to Jim or Joe or John?" Or whoever. And that doesn't mean to go over and just talk. It meant so he can help you with some of your schoolwork, with your arithmetic or whatever. And then you'd also raise your hand saying, "May I leave the room?" I don't remember if we had to indicate why we wanted to leave the room. Because it wasn't always to go to the outhouse. Sometimes it would be because you'd want to get a drink. Because you could go out and there would be a, there was a tin cup that hung on the pump, and you could pump yourself a cup of water. But we did not, we didn't use the numbering system for going to the restrooms.

WS: Just raised your hand and—

RM: We didn't know about ones and twos.

WS: (laughs) Yeah. And when the teacher was teaching one of the other grades, were you expected to do homework? Listen?

RM: Oh, yeah. You were supposed to be reading and doing homework. Because we didn't call it homework, because you did it at school. Very seldom did you actually take home work.

WS: And did your school have any type of discipline? Was there any need for discipline?

RM: The only thing I can remember were discipline—

[End Track Four. Begin Track Five.]

RM: --was involved, I think maybe I was in the, I think it was my first year. Because well, two times. One time, I'd taken some paper wads and chewed them up and got them soggy. And spit them out across the aisle. And the teacher caught me. She came back with a ruler and said, "Now put your hands on the desk. Now which hand did you throw that paper wad with?"

I said, "I didn't throw it with my hands. I spit it out." (WS laughs)
So she was going to hit me with the ruler on the hand that threw the paper wad. But she didn't hit me on my mouth with the paper wad. She just said, "Well, don't do that anymore."

WS: Did you ever do it again? (laughs)

RM: No. No. Another disciplinary thing was regarding this girl right here. The teacher's name was Ruth Morrison. This was Alma Lee Morrison. This actually was her cousin. And, or maybe a niece. Maybe she was her niece. And she was sitting in front of me. And she had turned around a couple of times, whispering, which you weren't supposed to do. And the teacher came to her and said, "If you want with talk to him,

you can go back and sit next to him in his desk.” And that was a disciplinary measure. She didn’t whisper anymore.

5 WS: (laughs) Did you have a recess?

RM: We had recess. Morning and afternoon.

WS: And what did you do during recess?

10 RM: Well, we played softball, but we called it “scrub.” Because you certainly didn’t play on teams. You didn’t have enough to play on teams. And so whoever was closest to the door would rush out the door and proclaim what position they wanted. And the pitcher was generally the most popular. (WS laughs) And there are some people that are calling it scrub. Some people called it “move up.” So if you were the pitcher and
15 the batter made an out, you moved up and became catcher. And then, the next batter made an out, you got to bat. And beyond that was first base, second base, third base. And if you had enough kids, you could be first fielder, second fielder, third fielder.

WS: So did all the kids play together, then, at recess?

20

RM: [____?], yeah. And then we would also have other games. Like Prisoner’s Base, or Dare Base, where, I don’t remember how you play it, but you get on one side and then you go and you tempt the other people to come out and try to catch you. And if you can get back to your base and then they tag him, then he becomes a prisoner of
25 your side. Not, not very exotic. But then we also would play Anti-over, which you throw a ball, volleyball, I think. Maybe, either a volleyball or a softball. Throw it over the roof. And I don’t remember what the objective was, but I guess proving that a little kid could throw a ball over the roof. (WS laughs) And then we’d also play hide and go seek. And it was considered kind of a cute thing to do to wear an article of
30 clothing belonging to someone else. And then you could kind of peek out from around the building or around the tree or whatever, and they would see this cap or this jacket that belonged to Jimmy. And they’d go back and say, “one, two, three for Jimmy.” Well, it wasn’t Jimmy. So you’d get in free that way, because they got the wrong person.

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WS: Fun. Did you have recess outside all year round?

RM: Except when it was raining or real cold.

40

WS: Okay.

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RM: Then we would play games inside. And that was before anybody ever heard of sexual harassment, or any other such terminology. Because one of the games we played was blind man’s, we called it blindfold. But the city kids, I think, called it blind man’s buff. Or was it bluff. I’m not sure.

WS: I think it was bluff.

5 RM: Blind man's bluff. Yeah. And so you have a blindfold on. And you'd get a hold of these other kids and feel around on them to determine who they were. (WS laughs)
But that was one of the indoor activities.

WS: And after recess, for lunch, did you bring your own food?

10 RM: Yes, we brought our own—

[End Track Five. Begin Track Six.]

RM: --lunch.

15 WS: And what was a typical lunch for you?

20 RM: (laughs) Well again, this was during Depression days. My mother, you know, raised our own food in the garden and truck patch. And she baked bread and she made apple butter. And she made head cheese. And so if you were a self-sustaining family, that would be the kind of lunch you would bring, homemade bread with head cheese or whatever. Now the kids who came from families who were lucky enough to be on relief, (WS laughs) they got the public commodities from town. And they would have store-bought bread and peanut butter and bologna and all that good stuff.

25 WS: Exotic foods.

30 RM: All the good stuff. And they would also get jackets. I know a couple of years, some of the kids got jackets. And they looked, I don't know what they'd call them today, they'd be called neat, I guess. But they were made out of material that was sort of like oilcloth used to be. Because after a little while, they'd start peeling off. But they looked really neat. But if you weren't on relief, you ended up wearing hand-me-downs that you got from your older siblings or from your city cousins, or whatever.

35 WS: And also in this school, did you have chores? [Was] someone responsible for the wood for the fire? Cleaning the chalkboards?

RM: Well, cleaning, cleaning the blackboard, we always called it.

40 WS: The blackboards.

45 RM: That was a privilege. And another privilege was getting to take the erasers out and clean them. And we had a rock that was about, oh, two-and-a-half or three feet across, and stood maybe a couple of feet off high, it was a big rock. And kids would sit on it when they were playing their games, or waiting your turn to bat or whatever. And that's where you would go with your erasers and beat them on this big rock. And that big rock is the one that I got and moved it to our house.

WS: Oh, really?

5 RM: In Cahokia, Illinois. And set it behind the, behind the house. It wasn't near as big when we moved it as I had remembered it to be.

WS: (laughs) Right. How things change with age. Did you attend the same school all the way up through eighth grade?

10 RM: Mm hmm.

WS: And then you graduated from the school.

RM: I think that was the last year they had school.

15 WS: Okay.

RM: Maybe I proclaimed this already. I don't know, because I think that's when they, because I still had a sister and a brother, younger than me. But I think they first went to the little country town of Wesco. They combined a school. And then I think, that was Benton Creek and Wesco combined. Then a couple years later, both of those combined with Cook Station. So I think my, I think maybe my sister graduated from Wesco and my brother, youngest brother, graduated from Cook Station. I'm not sure.

20

25 WS: And did you go on to high school then after that?

RM: Went to high school in Steelville. Actually, I was the first one in the family to go to high school in Steelville, even though that was our district, that was our, that's where they all should have been going. But we lived on the Merrimac River. And to get to Steelville, you had to go across what we called a Hog Trough Bridge. I don't know if you ever heard of that.

30

WS: No, I have not.

35 RM: Hog Trough Bridge is like the, well, it's like when you take your car in to be serviced, and you drive it on the metal tracks and they raise you up. Well, the bridge didn't raise up, but you had these wooden tracks—

WS: That you drove.

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RM: --that you drove on. And if the river would get up, you couldn't get across it. But you could generally get across Benton Creek, which would leave you towards Saint James. So my older brothers all went to school in Saint James. And that was before they had school buses. And so my oldest brother had a pickup truck that he converted into a school bus. And actually the Saint James School gave him an allowance for transporting these other kids, and for furnishing, functioning as a school bus. But

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when it came my turn, there were school buses. And the, well, the first year, I didn't have to cross the river. The bus came from a different direction. But then after that, I had to walk across this—

5 **[End Track Six. Begin Track Seven.]**

RM: --Hog Trough Bridge--

WS: I bet that was an experience.

10

RM: --about a mile. Well, you just walked on the tracks.

WS: Yeah.

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RM: Now, if you were real brave, you could, they had cross pieces, and you could jump from one piece to another, you know, if you wanted to show off. But then I walked a mile to catch the bus, getting to town, which was another ten miles or so.

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WS: And when you got to high school, how do you feel the one-room schoolhouse prepared you for high school in a larger facility?

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RM: It was, it was a big move up. I can remember riding the school bus, not necessarily the first day. But it became kind of a traumatic thing. Because you'd get to the top of the hill and here you would look, you could see the school building. It was a new school building. They had just built the high school. I was in the first class ever to be in that high school. I was in the last class in the one-room school. (WS laughs) I was in the first class in the new high school in Steelville. But like I say, it was going, and I had to, there were four of us in the eighth grade. And out of the four, three of us went on to high school. One of the girls didn't go to high school. But it was big time.

30

WS: Do you feel that you had a great education in the one-room schoolhouse?

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RM: Well, I feel I had as good an education as the kids in school with me. But the makeup of the high school, the makeup of my classes in high school, were probably, probably the majority of them came from one-room schools.

WS: Okay.

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RM: Because they all came in from, you know, from their individual schools.

WS: Sure. Sure.

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RM: And there weren't that many people that lived there in Steelville. The banker's kids and the grocer's kids and the lawyer's kids, that's about it. There wasn't any, oh, yes. I've been coached here to take you back on why I became an educational snob. (WS laughs) When I think I was in the fifth grade, fifth or sixth grade, it was grade school,

the school board, whoever made the decision, and a teacher would recommend it and the school board would get together. My dad was on the school board most of the time. But they bought a new set of World Book encyclopedias. Which was like opening up the world.

5

WS: Yes.

10 RM: Now we did have radio. We were one of the first families that had, had radio. So, you know, you knew there was life out there. But then when you get the encyclopedias, you had access to all the knowledge in the world. Anything that you wanted to learn about, you could look it up. That was, to me, that was a mind, mind-expanding experience, however you want to say it. So that was one of the big—

15 WS: So how do you feel the one-room schoolhouse influenced your life?

20 RM: How did it influence my life? I guess, I guess it made me appreciate—I don't mean to sound like I'm running for office, because Abe Lincoln was, grew up in a log cabin, he was a log cabin president—but it makes you appreciate that you started out and went from one level up, and you grew with it. Going from, going from Benton Creek School to Steelville High School was a big thing. Not near as big as going from Steelville High School to Washington University was. But it, those were, those were two of my educational—

25 WS: Sure.

RM: --big steps.

WS: Yeah. Big milestones.

30 RM: Yeah.

WS: Well that was the last question. But before we close, is there anything you want to add?

35 RM: Oh. (rustling of papers) Well, like I say, as far as what it did, I was—

[End Track Seven. Begin Track Eight.]

40 RM: I was always interested in reading. I grew up on a farm. Like I said, my father came from a farming family. My mother came from Saint Louis. Against her will. (WS laughs) And I'm never sure, I'm not sure, I think she encouraged me to learn in school. But because one of her things that she, you know, she would say, "When you get out of school, go to a city. Don't get stuck on a farm like I did." So she encouraged the learning part. Except I guess I was guilty of participating in that kind of stuff too much. Like I would be sitting behind the heating stove in a comfortable
45 chair reading, when she had been out working in the garden or something. And one of

her expressions was, “Is that all you’ve got to do is sit there and cook brain?” If you sit behind, if you’re sitting behind the heating stove, that’s, all you’ve got to do is sit there and cook brain.

“Well, what do you want me to do?”

5 “There’s lots of things to do.” So that means I’d got out and split some wood and bring in some cook wood, bring in heating stove wood, whatever it is to do. You’re supposed to keep busy. But like I say, after I got out of high school, the war was drawing to a close. And still was going on in the Pacific. I had three brothers in service. And the one that was in the navy, who was fortunate enough to be stationed
10 at Lambert Field in Saint Louis, that was a navy base there, at Lambert Field, encouraged me strongly to join the navy. And so I did. And while I was in boot camp, the war ended. And I stayed in the reserves, then, after I got out, off of active duty. And the GI Bill sent me to college.

15 WS: At Washington University?

 RM: Yes. You could go to any college you wanted. And I was living in Saint Louis at the time. So the government paid your, all your tuition, furnished your books, and paid you an allowance on top of that. I got, the first year I went, before I was married, I got
20 a hundred dollars a month. And after I got married, in the second year, I got a hundred and twenty dollars a month for ten months. (WS laughs) So I got twelve hundred dollars a year. And you know, twelve hundred dollars did go a little farther in those days.

25 WS: Yeah.

 RM: And then my first child came along. And then after I got out of college, I was still in the reserves. And I applied for a commission. And I was commissioned in naval intelligence. And this is, by then, you know, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of
30 Pigs, that was all going on, which made you kind of nervous. Because every time, you know, they say when the whistle blows or when the bell rings or whatever, we had some anxious moments thinking—

 WS: I’m sure. I’m sure.

35 RM: Fully expecting to go. And then the Vietnam War. No, the Korean War. I got my alert notice. “You can expect to be recalled to active duty within the next” whatever it was, four to six weeks. And at that point, you were what, a year old? My daughter was a
40 year old. And my wife’s family lived in Texas. So we gave up the place we had. We rented a, we didn’t call them apartments. We rented a flat in Saint Louis. And sold the car. And my folks took us down to Texas, where I was expecting for my wife and child to spend the duration. And shortly after I got there, I got a notice from the navy that my alert notice was canceled. So I hung around there for—

45 **[End Track Eight. Begin Track Nine.]**

5 RM: -- a couple of months. I got a job as a laborer in a construction outfit. Then I went back to Saint Louis and figured well, they're not going to call me back. And they didn't. And when the Vietnam War was coming along, by that time I was probably forty years old. And I was a lieutenant, senior lieutenant, in the navy, naval intelligence reserve component. And they were asking people who were interested to take this training, what they call POW intelligence.

WS: Yeah.

10 RM: And within that was something they called SERE training, S-E-R-E. Survival, evasion, resistance, escape. So they ran us through this program. And the idea was that they were planning on using our kind of people, reserve, older reserve officers, in the intelligence field as running mates for the returning POWs. Well, after we went through our program, and we all survived. We got beat upon, and some of them got, 15 some of the, what, what's evolved into water boarding. And we all stood around watching it when we were not in our little rabbit traps, or chicken coops, whatever you call it. They kept us in a box about two-and-a-half food square. And you could sit up. You couldn't stand up.

20 WS: Sure.

RM: So that was to acquaint us with what the POWs were going through, so that we could have more empathy serving with them, bringing them back. The navy decided they, they decided not to utilize them. (laughs)

25

WS: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: But, I probably digressed way off.

30 WS: That is all right, though. We'll go ahead and wind this down. I thank you so much for coming in today and talking to us. So, thank you.

RM: Thank you.

35 **[End Interview.]**

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