

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the  
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy Yasecko: This is Brevard County Historical Commission Oral History Video Project. An interview with Mercer Livermore King, Brevard Hotel, Cocoa, Florida. February the 6th, 1994. Interviewer: Nancy Yasecko. Cameraman: Robert Gilbert. Camera: Sony DXC-M7. Recorder: Sony BVW-35. Copyright: Brevard County Historical Commission 1994.

[00:00:30] Tell us who you are and when you were born and where and what brought you to Florida.

Mercer L. King: Well, I'll be delighted to give you a little bit of background here. My name is Mercer Livermore King. I was born in Dothan, Alabama which is near the Florida border. But I grew up in Macon, Georgia. I moved to Brevard County the first day of July in 1946. Not too long after my husband [00:01:00] was out of the military, the war, and he had a job here with the bottle gas company. We moved here from Utica, New York, where we had lived. He'd been in business for himself then. We'd lived there for six years. All of those people were all so nice to me. Let me say right now that everybody was gracious. You've always heard that hospitality is confined to the south. It wasn't then. I don't know what it's like now, but everybody was lovely and charming.

[00:01:30] Finally, in the blizzard of 1936, I want you to know that I figured that, for the time, the snow, it covered my garage with my car in it. My husband had a business car. I want you to know that I decided that civilized man is not supposed to live in that climate. So, I announced to my husband, at that time William W. Livermore Jr. that I was moving south and that he could come or he could stay. That wasn't up to me.

But, anyway, I did. I [00:02:00] came into Panama City and stayed awhile with my family there who had retired, most of them. A large family, but pretty soon then my husband decided he'd sell out up there and he came to Florida. Well, then, of course, he went fishing and had such a good time. I finally reminded him it was time to go to work. So, he had a chance for a job here in Cocoa with the bottle gas company. I think the company, as I recall, was stationed in—was headquartered in Orlando. But we got here on the first day of July [00:02:30] in 1946. I said, "I don't care where it is, but I'm not leaving Florida. Wherever we are, that's where I'm going to be."

We stayed at what was the Cocoa ... It wasn't called a hotel. What was it called?

Nancy Yasecko: Cocoa House?

Mercer L. King: Huh? Cocoa House! That little two story hotel over there is where the parking lot is now, for the bank, there on the river. We stayed there for several weeks while I could find a place to live because he went [00:03:00] to work, you see,

immediately. I road all around the whole area and up and down the river road north and south and east and went to Merritt Island and everywhere. I said, "If I'm going to live in this place, I'm going to live on the river on this side." He said, "Oh no. We can't afford that." I said, "We will afford it because that's where I'm going to live. It's beautiful there." I found this lovely old house of 100 years old on the Rockledge Drive.

I [00:03:30] contacted the right people and I want you to know that I had to raise \$3,000 down for the bank and, at that time, federal savings and loan company was in Melbourne. There wasn't one here in the central Brevard area. I made arrangements for them to finance it. I bought it from Al Trafford, of Trafford Realty. He showed it to me. It was a great big huge lot from the river to the US route 1. As I recall, about 150 [00:04:00] feet wide, something like that. This great big old two story house and an orange grove on it and a great big old avocado tree on it. I'd never seen an avocado tree before. Great big thing as high as this building.

Well, I want you to know then that I took a trip to Atlanta, Georgia to some long time, lifetime friends of mine to ask them if they would buy the highway side of this piece of property for \$3,000. That's what the bank required for down payment. [00:04:30] They were great fishermen but they said, "Yes, they would." But they'd come down here first and see it. I went up all night on the train and they met me in Atlanta at the railroad station and so then the man had a partner and they owned an airplane together. They flew me home the following Sunday. I went up on Friday, they flew me home on Sunday to look at this property that they could buy for \$3,000 provided that I'd give them the right away [00:05:00] for a road to the river so they could build a dock and take their boats and things down there.

I said, "Yes, I'll do that." Well, I want you to know that we came back in that four place plane from Atlanta. We landed at the Cocoa airport which was out there now where the armory is. Bob Roth, who later became the tremendous music band teacher at Cocoa High School, taught both my children and helped me raise them, I'll tell you, and later his darling wife, Joyce. Bob was [00:05:30] a manager of that airport. Would you believe it? He was there. It was the first time I ever saw him was when we landed in that little plane.

From there on out I tell you that life was really interesting. But before we bought the house, I forgot to tell you this. After we left the Cocoa House here, we had to find a place to live until I could find a place that we could buy see. At that time, we rented a house from the [Skelly 00:05:55] family down on the river, that little bitty house. The [00:06:00] man whose son owns the [Liggtt's 00:06:03] pharmacy out there, David ... What's his name? My god, he'll kill me if I forget his last name. Anyway, his father and mother later bought that little house but we rented it from the senior Skellys. This was way back in 1946 honey.

Nancy Yasecko:

Was it hot when you got here?

Mercer L. King:

No, It wasn't too hot for me, hun. I never felt it was. No, I never felt it was too hot at any time. But, anyway, I [00:06:30] finally got my feet planted down yonder on the river in that old house. I started in to do something with the yard. Everything was in a mess, you know. It had been occupied by a very elderly man for a long, long time. Everything was in such a mess, mess, mess. The yard was terrible, all kinds of lovely trees and huge oak trees all around. The shade and everything. I just had visions. I'd stay awake at night and have visions of what it was going to look like [00:07:00] when I got through with it. So, that was fun and stimulating of course.

Then I knew that I had to go to work. I had to go to work to get some sort of a job. I was a college graduate with an AB degree so I ought to do something. I felt I already had a certificate to teach in high school anywhere in Florida. I had already gotten that. I knew the JV Revels family of Rockledge. He was the principal of the Cocoa High School. My oldest [00:07:30] daughter Betsy was in high school and my youngest daughter was in the elementary school here in Cocoa. I talked to Mr. Revels and Ms. Revels, they were lovely people. Went to the little Methodist church over here on Brevard Avenue. That's where I met them.

I said, "I need a job. Maybe I could do something and do some substitute teaching." He said, "Well yes indeed. I'd be delighted to have you come in and help." Sure enough, it wasn't very long before he called me in to do some substitute teaching. [00:08:00] If you think that wasn't an experience, I can imagine what the teachers are going through today. I look at them with such amazement and I think, "You've got to be from another planet. You couldn't be a human being to stand what you have to stand today." Anyway, after doing some substitute teaching in high school, boy, I made up my mind then that wasn't really for me. I can remember the Jackson boy twins, JJ Jackson's sons, Ed's one of them. Ed Jackson's one of [00:08:30] them.

Those boys sat there in one of those rooms where I was supposed to be teaching them something, history or something, and they threw spitballs across the room. I didn't know what in the world to do with those kids like that. I decided teaching wasn't for me. Eventually then at the church, Mrs. Amos [Wooten 00:08:50] had to put on a ... At that time, Cocoa, it wasn't just the church but it was the Kiwanis Club of Cocoa [00:09:00] had agreed to put on a radio program for 30 minutes once a month at WMMB in Melbourne. That was the only station in Brevard County, radio station.

I think they had opened in June. This was in the fall by this time. Mrs. Wooten, who I also knew as Amos Wooten, who I also knew at the Methodist church, her husband, they owned the Ford Motor Company at that time. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club [00:09:30] and she asked me ... Wait, I'm kinda ahead of my story.

Anyway, one day I was asked, before this happened, to talk to the young people at the Methodist church, that little church that used to be there in downtown Cocoa where the bank is now, where that commercial bank is. Asked me if I would

talk on communism and the meaning of communism, what it meant. This was early, this was 1946. I said yes I would. I guess [00:10:00] this must've been about 1947 by then. I'd be glad to. Well, I went to Orlando and I went to their library because we didn't have much of a library here. It was upstairs here on Delannoy Avenue over the building where the Cocoa Women's League had their luncheon every month.

I drove to Orlando and spent a couple of days in the library over there reading up on communism because I'd been out of school for some time and, besides, there were a lot of things going on there that I hadn't known before, earlier. [00:10:30] I read up on all that and then I gave the talk on communism to the Methodist youth group up there as Mrs. Amos Wooten had asked me to do. After that, Mr. Wooten called me up and asked me if I would do that program on WMMB Radio in Melbourne because it was time for the Kiwanis Club to present a program. Duke [Fowler 00:10:56] was a member of the Kiwanis Club and he had owned the Fowler [00:11:00] Auto Supply which is on the corner there of Brevard Avenue and ... What's that other street that comes down? I've forgotten. Where the bank used to be. Delannoy! Is it Delannoy? I guess so.

Anyway, he was right down the corner of Brevard, across from Campbell's Drugstore. The Fowler Auto Supply Company. Duke Fowler and his wife drove me down to Melbourne to do the show. When I finished up with the show then, apparently it was all right. The manager of WMMB asked me if [00:11:30] I would consider doing a radio show for the central Brevard area. I said yes I'd be glad to. It'd give me something to do. I said yes I would.

During World War II, part of that time when I was ... I spent World War II in San Antonio, Texas. This was '47. I spent World War II out there and I had been the senior hostess of the enlisted men's club for a while at that big ordnance [00:11:59] base out there, Normoyle Ordnance Base [00:12:00] in San Antonio. But I had done a good many broadcasts from there. I had a little bit of experience out there. I said yes I'd be glad to do that. Then I talked it over with the sales manager down there.

Jack [Newsome 00:12:16] was the man who opened WMMB. A man about eight feet tall and had a lovely wife who also worked there, [Maudy/Marty? 00:12:24] Newsome. She lives in Jacksonville also and we talk on the phone from time to time. I'm [00:12:30] sure [Maudy/Marty?] was one of the ones who helped Jack to ask the questions and get me started because she was so smart. Anyway, Jack died a few years ago but [Maudy's/Marty's?] still in Jacksonville. I got started and I went on the air the first day of July in 1948. I had to find out then they wanted me to get my own sponsors, which I wanted to do. 'Cause I knew I couldn't sell a sponsor if I didn't believe in that person.

[00:13:00] I knew from the beginning. I said I'd get my own sponsors, by heck. That's what I did. Among those early sponsors was of course Fowler Auto Supply and Campbell's Drugstore, and I think, not Barnett at that time. I can't remember. I'll look back in my book and see who else I had for sponsors. But in order to

promote my program now I decided that the thing to do was to salute ... I had met good many of the ladies [00:13:30] at the women's club and the garden club in the meantime because I'd been going to those meetings.

I'm not a person to sit and be idle and twiddle my thumbs and kick my toes. Anyway, then I had decided the thing to do was to create this program. I discussed it with [Maudy/Marty?] Newsome down at MMB. I said I'd like to salute a lady of the day from my area. Sure enough, I did. I interviewed dozens of the prominent women here. The presidents [00:14:00] of the clubs and all of that. Interviewed them on tape and then they gave some very interesting programs. I contacted several of them, many of them. We did this for several months. Then they talked about my show.

It was named "Cocoa Chatter" from the beginning. I can't remember who named it but I guess if I'm going to talk that's as good a name as any. Sure enough, it worked out fine. The ladies, I still have some tapes of several of the ladies. [00:14:30] Then I gave the tapes. I bought the tapes from the station and gave them to the ladies later, after they had made their broadcast. I'm sure that a lot of them are still around. A lot of these women still around. But that was fun. That got my program around, circulated around among the women, you know.

I took the top of the news for all those years, top of the national news and, of course, the local news. I made a lot of friends but I made some enemies, especially among [00:15:00] the politicians. I've been threatened with many lawsuits over the years. Nobody's been threatened with as many lawsuits as I have been. I did exposés on different institutions around, including the Wuesthoff Hospital one time, after I'd been there as a patient.

I was told later by the administrator that all of the help up there, apparently we had promoted it a couple of weeks. In the meantime I forgot to [00:15:30] tell you that I'd broadcast over at MMB for four years and then in January of '52, I was down there from '48 to '52, I commuted. I'll tell you a funny story in a minute but in January of '52, WKKO opened up out here in West Cocoa. I was able to bring my show home and that worked out fine. But I used to go zipping down that US route 1. The first car I had, it didn't have any windows in it. When it rained, my stars, you could imagine the trouble I [00:16:00] had.

Finally, I [inaudible 00:16:01] I think the first car I had here with windows in it, I think it was some sort of a used Ford or something that I got from the Ford Motor Company. [Elberta Leisure 00:16:12], the late Elberta Leisure of Rockledge who wrote the little inspiration books, she taught in Melbourne. Taught art down there in the Melbourne schools. She used to pick me up at 7 o'clock in the morning and for a whole school year from September 'til [00:16:30] June, when her school was out, I rode down with her and got off at the main street in Melbourne and walked down to the radio station.

After she wasn't teaching anymore in the summertime, then that's when I had to get a car. I finally got some wheels. Later on, one time when I was hightailing it

down the road in my own car, I think the little Studebaker was the first one I bought, not a Ford. When Studebaker first came here with the agency. Anyway, I was going down the road in my car and [00:17:00] all of a sudden there was a highway patrolman with his lights flashing behind me because I was running late and I had to be there at 10 o'clock. I never would let them change my time. I threatened them with absolute execution if they ever even thought about changing my time from 10 to 10:30 or 11. It became an hour show later, of course.

Well, anyway, I was hightailing it down the road too close to broadcast time. This highway patrolman picked me up just there in Melbourne. I kept on going. I had [00:17:30] already figured out how to get to the station, which was down on the river. I had already figured out how to get there to avoid that busy corner in downtown Melbourne that would take you across the river. I went down the alleyways. This way and that way and that way and that way. I'd go winding down, winding down the alleyways and then go swooping across to the radio station. But when the highway patrolman was behind me, that's what I did.

Boy, he was on two wheels I guess and probably standing on his head because he was still following me and the thing was shrieking [00:18:00] and I flew down there to the station and he pulled up beside me right fast and I said, "Young man. I have to be on the air in two minutes. Come in, I want to talk to you on the air. You come in and we'll talk about whatever you're going to do with me later. But you call your boss and you tell him that you are going to be on the air to talk about safety on the highways. While I start my show, and I have plenty of other things to talk about, that'll give you time to get permission." I said, "I've been planning to get in touch [00:18:30] with your boss for a long time to have one of you boys come up here and talk to me about highway safety with our listeners."

Sure enough, he did. He came in and did a great broadcast. That's just one of the funny experiences. I had all kinds of funny experiences. It's been fun, ya know. I have to say that with so many of the times I would talk about the politicians and the ones who were going to run for office, but I was sure of my [00:19:00] facts. I was very cautious and nobody intimidated me. You may be sure. But I can remember one time later on, after I'd had numerous ones at these threats the station had. My poor boss. Johnny Fox finally became my boss. Carl [Collins 00:19:20] was one, and Davis [Wilson 00:19:22] from Titusville and Emerson [Browne 00:19:25] were the three boys who opened WKKO in 1952. [00:19:30] Those were my three bosses.

Davis, I guess, still lives up there and Carl Collins still lives here in the Cocoa area. But his darling little wife died some years ago. I believe he remarried. I hope so. I plan to call him. In any case then, later on Johnny Fox who went to work with KKO, I got him that job out there as one of the announcers. He was the photographer right across the street here from Travis's. He was one of my sponsors. Anyway, [00:20:00] later on then he became my boss at KKO when it was sold later to somebody. He said to me one day when I came, and I had a line put in my home down on the river. I did most of my broadcasts in my nightgown from home, which was great. For years and years. But on anything controversial,

of course, I'd always come to town. I'd always call the station and ask them if they'd tape it to be sure that we had the actual news.

But one morning [00:20:30] I was in here broadcasting. A lot of times I came into the station to broadcast right over here on Delannoy Avenue. We were WWBC by this time. I was talking about ... I don't guess I really ought to say it. The mayor of Rockledge, Mayor Oates, is that his name? Jack Oates. I said something about him on the air. When I [00:21:00] got off the air then my boss was sitting there like this at his desk and he was as white as a sheet and he said, "Well, you've done it again."

I said, "Who this time?" He said your mayor of Rockledge. I lived in Rockledge. I lived outside the city limits at that time. Anyway, his lawyer called and he said he's suing the station and suing you. I said, "Now that's interesting. But Mr. Oates didn't call himself?" He said no. I said, [00:21:30] "Did Mr. Oates hear my show this morning?" He said, "No he didn't hear it but a friend of his did hear it and called him and told him what you said." I said, "You tell the lawyer and you tell Mr. Oates I know what I said. You can tell the lawyer that I said he can drop dead. I know what I said."

So, that takes care of that. But these funny experiences like this, it's never really ended.

Nancy Yasecko:

You've covered all kinds of [00:22:00] events, too.

Mercer L. King:

Oh, I covered everything that went on in the central Brevard area. I've covered everything. All the social things and all the community things and all the big wheels that came. All of this was one type of life and all of a sudden the Banana River Naval Base closed. Incidentally, during the time that it was closed, before the Air Force took it over, nobody knew really when or where the Air Force, if they were going to take it over, for a long time. But I do know this that one time when it was closed [00:22:30] but they had people over there, security people over there, something caught on fire and the firetrucks started to see about the fire but it gave out of gas.

That was one of the reports I put on way back then. But the rumors started flying and in the meantime we were absolutely covered and smothered with mosquitoes. Lee [Wenner 00:22:53] was the head of the mosquito program. He took me up in his helicopter one day to see the [00:23:00] central Brevard area. That was the first time I'd ever been in a helicopter. I've been since that time with NASA. Anyway, the rumors circled around that the Air Force coming in here and sure enough then it wasn't too long before the Air Force took over. This is when the space program first started.

The first missile was fired. I went on through [PIO 00:23:25] with Patrick. Called Patrick Air Force Base. They changed the name of course when the [00:23:30] Banana River Naval Base ... Anyway, I went with one of the PIO men on a jeep to

go up there and tour the place where they were going to put the missiles and things. We went up on unpaved roads and bumpity, bumpity, bumpity. I tell you it was something. Anyway, that was instant. I did get a look at everything.

When the missiles first came, the space program first came, they wouldn't let the press on the Cape so we had to make other arrangements. One time, [00:24:00] I was reminded by you I think that vanguard the big navy missile, a lot of publicity had been said all about it. That it was to be fired just across the canal up there. Some of these boys had hired a flat top truck and all of us reporters stood on that truck for hours waiting for it to go. When it finally went on there, and it was just across the way, across the water from so we could see it, all of a sudden the thing [00:24:30] fell over and caught fire.

That was one of the startling things. The best thing of course was the very first one that went up which was in July ... It was scheduled for the 24th of July in 1950 but it was scrubbed and didn't go up, as I recall, til the 26th day of July but that was the first missile that went up. That was extremely interesting, extremely interesting to see that thing go up.

Nancy Yasecko: Now, there couldn't [00:25:00] have been too many people out there watching.

Mercer L. King: No, very few reporters. Not very many lookers from the outside because not too much publicity had been put out about it. But when we went up to one of the later missiles and isn't it the truth what my memory has done? I can't remember the name of that missile. But we went up there one time to one of these big launches. Not a shuttle, this was pre-shuttle. We sat out there on a [00:25:30] dirt road and nearly fried ourselves. There were no restrooms but they did take us into the van, in the Air Force van, just a few of us of course, and they took us around Cape Canaveral to that elementary school over there at Cape Canaveral, to their outdoor toilet.

We'd come back and here we were out there sitting in the sand again and walking and expecting rattlesnakes to come at any minute and all that sort of stuff. We spent the whole day out there and [00:26:00] it was scrubbed. The next morning we had to get out there early. It was scheduled to leave, I believe, at 9 o'clock. A lot of them didn't return. But that time we had some of the big shot reporters from Miami. We'd gotten far enough along in the space program. This was one of the important ones. I can't remember which one. Anyway, we had a lot of out of town ones who came in. They didn't bother. They thought, "To heck with that."

I guess they went back home so there were not so many of us. But honey, when we got up there the next morning for that launch, [00:26:30] I want you to know that there was a Chic Sale<sup>1</sup> [00:26:33] out there on the edge of the [00:26:35] palmettos out there a ways and they had cut out a trail among the [00:26:39] palmettos so we could get to the Chic Sale [00:26:42] toilet out there, the

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<sup>1</sup> "Chic Sale" is a colloquial term referring to an outhouse. It originates from the work of comedian Charles "Chic" Sale, who wrote a popular book titled *The Specialist*, which is about selling outhouses.

restroom. They had an icebox full of Coca Colas and they had a tent with chairs and even a nurse with a cot in case anybody collapsed. It was hot in the summer time. But everything was so comfortable.

Evidently, they thought, "If we've got [00:27:00] another full day of this, there'll be no complaints at all. Everybody will be comfortable." Which is true. Bless my soul if the thing didn't go on the dot of 9 a.m. The funny things that happened up there. You couldn't believe. You just simply couldn't believe. Anyway, of course back to Cocoa, business started growing of course. Travis Hardware is the oldest store in this area, well over 100 years old now. They were sponsors of mine all the years. They're wonderful [00:27:30] people to do business with, always.

The month of July, all the stores shut down, business shut down for the month of July and I took Chatter off the air for the month of July and I went up to my family's country place on the lake in west Florida and the children and I spent that month with my family at our country place in the woods out on the lake.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us, why did everything shut down in July?

Mercer L. King: All the Yankees had gone home [00:28:00] and everybody else wasn't used to working very hard in the hot summer time, I reckon. In the meantime, I must go back a bit. I learned when I first came here that the Florida East Coast Railroad stopped in Rockledge. The end of the line was in Rockledge on Barton Avenue. During that time when the railroad had planned to come here and all during that, that's when the Indian River Hotel went up. You remember the [Hooper's 00:28:24] of the Hopper Motor Company who had that automobile agency all through the years? Gertrude Hooper, [00:28:30] she and her husband, Jim Hooper, were very close friends of ours over the years.

I had read the guest list of the first guest of the Indian River Hotel way back in 26, I think it was. Gertrude Hooper and her father were among the first guests at the Indian River Hotel. Of course, now that big condominium is there and they tore the hotel down. But where the Catholic church is now on Barton Boulevard and the nun's [00:29:00] home, that was the first location for the Rockledge Country Club, to go back into history a ways.

Nancy Yasecko: Why don't you tell us a little bit about when they first put the port in?

Mercer L. King: I will. I'd be happy to talk about the port because of course the port manager became part of my life later, as most of you know. Anyway, time was going on and this space thing had gotten circulated and was really busying up the place around [00:29:30] here. Everything was centered on space and the development. Everything was exciting. A lot of people moving in, a lot of changes and whatnot. But about that time—well, before the space activity came, let me say that the latter part of the last century, those two Englishmen came over here. Did I mention this a while ago? Before this?

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us about that.

Mercer L. King: They came over here and they looked at this promontory [00:30:00] of land out there. This was long before space. They thought, "That would be a perfect place for a port on the south side of this promontory of land." Look on your maps my dears and you'll see how we pooch out there into the ocean right there. Poochy, I call it. It never materialized. By the time I got here in 1946, 47, 48, along in there, you see, and especially after 48 when I was somewhat interested in the development here and was watching all the progress [00:30:30] and everything, then I think, as I recall, that it was Colonel Noah Butt, who was the mayor at that time, and a wonderful man.

He originally came from South Georgia. He and his lovely wife both. Young Noah Butt is the son of the colonel and his wife and there were two grandsons—I mean, stepsons. They were the two [Ackridge 00:30:53] boys. One was a doctor Ackridge, my dentist, and one was a lawyer, Bill Ackridge. I knew both [00:31:00] of them and all of them well. But Colonel Butt had been talking to a good many people around here, the officials and the important people, about there should be a port project going on over there. Really and truly then they did get busy. They started doing the groundwork and finding out all about ports and everything like that.

After they made up their mind then that they were going to build a port, they got the engineers lined up out of Jacksonville and places like that. Of course, they had to have a manager. [00:31:30] During the time they were building the port they were looking for a manager. They had to have the engineers to be in charge as the, more or less, permanent engineers of the port. They were doing all that groundwork. But in the meantime then when they were digging the port, incidentally to you all, I want to remind you that Port Canaveral is the only port in the world that was built from the inside out.

We used to go over there, the certain press people, there were two or three of us at the time, during the time [00:32:00] they were digging this big hole. All this earth was piled up out there. During the bird season, whatever kind of those little running birds up and down the beach, those little beach runners. What in the world do you call them?

Nancy Yasecko: Are those sand pipers?

Mercer L. King: Yeah, little sand pipers. They were running all over the beach. We went tramping all over that new sand dug up there to look at this great hole in the ground. This was during the construction area. The earth construction part of it.

Nancy Yasecko: When was that?

Mercer L. King: What's that?

Nancy Yasecko: What year [00:32:30] was that?

Mercer L. King: Well, let's see. It must have been about maybe around '52. It must have been around '52 or '53. In the meantime, the port district was divided. The north half of the county is the port district, not the south half. The public had to elect the commissioners. They had elected the commissioners, I guess, before they really started the construction because they had to have somebody in charge. [00:33:00] The commissioners were elected then. You can fill in later with all the names of the original commissioners. That's interesting. After the commissioners got in there and the port was well under way and it was getting close to the time when they had to have a manager and an administrator.

Well, the commissioners looked all around and then [Gee and Jensen 00:33:21] of West Palm Beach, very well known, famous engineers well known throughout Florida. Gee and Jensen was chosen then as [00:33:30] the top engineers of the port and still are. Gee and Jensen still is, although the original Gee and Jensen no longer there but they sold it. But it still goes by the name of Gee and Jensen. They were wonderful people, both Gee and Jensen. Their wives were charming and lovely and they became good friends of ours later.

But, in any case then, they decided they were looking for a manager. Gee and Jensen were. I guess everybody else was too but they had so many outside connections. They rounded up George [00:34:00] J. King of New York. He had been associated with the port business in New York for many, many years. After much red tape and interviewing and all this and that and the other, George King was named by the commissioners on the recommendation of Gee and Jensen with this very great background of his in the shipping business.

He was elected as the administrator and the director of Port Canaveral. Port Canaveral now was a real, honest to goodness port. [00:34:30] It started progressing. The wall was still up. I can't remember where they had cut out the dirt wall that separated the big hole from the ocean. I can't remember where that was cut before George was named as the manager or afterwards. But in any case, the day came when they were going to cut the wall and let the ocean in. They invited all the press to come and see, and the city commissioners, and the port commissioners [00:35:00] to come out there on this big, flat barge.

I guess George was there, too. No, the barges weren't going back and forth because the barge was still on this side. They were going to cut the wall into the ocean. It was a lovely, lovely day. At that time, Louise [Gibbons 00:35:18], the late Louise Gibbons was the chairman of the Cocoa city council. I must tell you that in those days, Louise was very well known and very well loved and liked and she [00:35:30] was very progressive and she was a right husky woman, top side you know.

She always wore these nice blouses with a low neck and dresses and things like all these girls do who have been blessed in that area. Having been the opposite of that kind, I always lamented the fact that I wasn't in that bracket. One time

when I was ... I'll come back and tell you that story in a minute. Anyway, [00:36:00] Louise Gibbons, all the county commissioners and city commissioners, I mean the Brevard district commissioners, we were all there. A whole bunch of press people came from all over central Florida and even, then, as far as Miami, to see the wall cut the day the ocean comes in.

The editor and owner of Orlando newspapers at that time, that smart thing, he decided to go and sit back in the little building with the pilot. I [00:36:30] can't even think of his name. Anderson, wasn't it? I forgot. I wrote him for so many years, you'd think I'd remember it. I knew him so well. Anyway, his name has slipped me for the moment. He went back and sat in the little tiny glassed in area where the pilot sat to drive it, you see. The rest of us were all standing. There was no place to sit. We were on this big, long, flat barge. Everybody standing and talking and looking as we passed and got into the ocean. Just before we got [00:37:00] to the edge of the ocean, honey, let me tell you something. The biggest wave you ever saw came and soaked everybody there except those in the little house, of course, the two men back there.

Everybody was soaked. The barge kept right on moving out into the ocean. We were all rubbing and getting the rain—I mean the ocean off of us and off our heads and everything. Louise Gibbons, the lady commissioner, chairman of the city commission, reached down in her neckline and lifted [00:37:30] out a little fish and threw it overboard. That's a true story. Anyway, that's the day the wall was cut to the port. I've got to get busy one of these days and write a book. I can tell more funny stories that happened over the years, honestly.

Then after that the port really got underway and started building. Mr. King, then when he was hired, and they had the port commission meetings every month and, of course, I went to the commission [00:38:00] meetings long before he was here. I met him the day he got here and reported to the commission, having been engaged for that job. I met him and worked with him publicity wise and everything. Then later, you know, he was a widower later on. His wife died. Then we became personal friends after that and, of course, we wound up five, six, seven years [00:38:30] later and were married. He was a wonderful, wonderful man. We had a wonderful marriage. He died two years ago. It was the happiest time of my life.

But he did a wonderful time for the port and he knew his way around and he got along fine and everybody respected him. He had the respect of everybody. But the port then became, of course ... He became a member of the national commission of ports authorities, which was a very high [00:39:00] honor for this Port Canaveral. You know, of course, by this time the missile business was going up into the air in great context and that helped the port a lot too. It grew, I think, very fast. Because of the missile association and nearby. They used to bring in those big, big missiles from out in California and those places, wherever they were made, at the port.

They used to do that, too. Then of course finally the day [00:39:30] came when the Titan arrived, the biggest of all the missiles. That was a big, big celebration. I can't remember. That must have come by ... I don't think that came in an airplane as I recall. Some of the historians would know that. I can't remember whether it came in a plane. I think it came through the port.

Nancy Yasecko: I know the Apollo came on a barge. But I'm not sure just where it came in from.

Mercer L. King: That's [00:40:00] right, it did too. I was just trying to think about some of these things.

Nancy Yasecko: What other kinds of things did they ship in and out of that port?

Mercer L. King: In those days? They shipped all kinds. A lot of oil and a lot of fruit, a world of citrus went through there to other places. Fish, a lot of fish. The fishermen, you see. It helped the fishing business. [00:40:30] They were very busy.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us about the people who would come to town.

Mercer L. King: I was trying to think here. Let me go back a minute, way back. The Travis Hardware store was there and there used to be a dock next to the bridge that went out parallel to the bridge. Evidently, it was owned by the city. I know that there was a fish [00:41:00] house just out there beyond Travis's on that dock. That was the Bennett fish house. Gary Bennett became the mayor of Cocoa for many years. He lived out west. I've forgotten the name of the street even. Anyway, he was the mayor later. It was his younger brother. The Bennett's were early settlers here and used to live on Peachtree Street. His brother, Emory [00:41:30] Bennett, was in the service. I guess it was Vietnam. Was killed and he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in Washington and, of course, the Bennett's went up there.

At that time, I was writing along with the broadcasting. I was always writing for some of the larger newspapers around because I couldn't make enough just broadcasting to live on. But at that time I was writing for the Florida Times Union [00:42:00] as one of the in, what we call, stringers in those days. They're corresponders but we always called them stringers. I wrote a feature story on Emory Bennett and the girls he had dated. I interviewed a couple of the girls he had dated in high school, something about the background of the Bennett family.

It was a full page story and I received a letter of commendation from the editor at that time about my story. But that was Emory Bennett who became so famous of course with [00:42:30] the Medal of Honor. That gave him something very, very special indeed. That's just one of the personal things I remember. So many interesting things did develop all through the years and to see Cocoa grow, and to work with the merchants.

When my bosses would come from time to time and say, "So and so wants a spot on your Cocoa Chatter show." I'd say, "I'm sorry but I can't advertise for [00:43:00] them." Then my boss would say, "Yes you are going to." Then I said, "Oh no I'm not going to. I can't sell somebody I don't believe in." For instance, there was a dress shop here briefly for a while who wanted a spot but I had already been in touch with those people and had bought some things there, and no I didn't have any confidence in that management. I wouldn't advertise for them.

I said I can't sell something I don't believe in. I went through this over the years. [00:43:30] If they're honest then I'll advertise for them and do a good job but otherwise if they are questionable, the answer is no. That's the way it was. But the police force in those days were so nice. I remember Chief [Dempsey 00:43:45] especially. But all the policemen of Cocoa, they were so nice. Sometimes I'd be running so late that they'd run my tape out if I had a tape of something and didn't get it out there. Or if I couldn't get there on time. A lot of times they'd follow me [00:44:00] out there, out to the station way out at west Cocoa when I was at KKO.

The radio station had rented a little building in the Brevard arcade, one room down there at the Brevard arcade. I think I was the only one on the ground floor beside the restaurant that was there, facing Brevard. I was in the arcade office [inaudible 00:44:25] goldfish and the water things grow in there in that little fish pond. [00:44:30] The port authority had their little office right across from me. The original [00:44:35] Port Canaveral office was there. All I had to do was walk around the fish pond to attend the port meetings when I had to cover that.

I was working down there so often in those nights taping or doing some sort of special work or writing for the newspapers, I wrote for the Orlando [00:44:52] newspapers for years. Wrote for the Daytona Beach newspapers for years. Anyway, then I [00:45:00] was there. It never occurred to me to lock the door, the screen door or the other door in the winter time. One night somebody this man walked in when I was there typing. I'm a terrible typer. I don't know how my editors ever lived through it. Anyway, I thought he was a little strange. I finally talked him into going out. But after that I locked the door. I think I had sort of a warning in that.

That was before it became so [00:45:30] unsafe, you see. The night policeman, I called and I told him about it. They sent somebody over there to look around immediately. At night, when any of the Cocoa policemen were patrolling this area they'd always stop by for just a minute and wave to me or something and let me know they were there on the nights when I'd be working. They were wonderful really, in those days.

We were small enough then. The whole area wasn't so big. As the space program grew, everything here whoosh just like that. Of course. [00:46:00] So many important people came down here. I did have a lot of interesting tapes. I had arrangements, of course, and had the opportunity to interview a lot of people. I interviewed Dr. Billy Graham when he was here. This is way, way back. The thing I remember most about Dr. Graham was that he said, "Pray without ceasing." In

all my trials and tribulations over this long life, I thought about that many times. Pray without ceasing.

I interviewed Dr. Von Braun when he was here. I [00:46:30] interviewed Walt Disney. I think Walt Disney was probably the most charming man I ever interviewed when he was here. I interviewed so many of the celebrities who came down here. It was very interesting. Then I interviewed several people. Senator Holland, who was, I believe, the senator when they finished the causeway bridge. That was another big plus, when the politicians finally got the bridge built and then they had the big ceremonies up on top of the bridge.

It worked out fine. So many interesting [00:47:00] things. Listen, I could talk for a month, I suppose, without slowing down because there's so many interesting things and fascinating people to talk about.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us a little bit about more of the coverage that you did with the space program.

Mercer L. King: Oh, all right. I would be glad to. Lot of funny, exciting experiences there. Fine. I went down to ... Except, Ascension, I think was the only one I didn't reach. That was the farthest one way, way out. I went down to all [00:47:30] of the different tracking islands down at the Bahamas, all down through the Atlantic where we had tracking stations for the missile. I went on press trips down there. The first time I ever went down, I believe it was to Grand Bahama. That was the first of the tracking stations there. A young lady by the name of Laura Reynolds, who used to write for the Melbourne paper, and I had met her during my sojourn in Melbourne broadcasting. She and I were the only two who went down to the Grand Bahama.

That was the first tracking station, and how exciting [00:48:00] it was to see those native people out there putting down the stones to make a road. This was early, early in the space program when they first started building those down range tracking stations. I had a lot of interesting experiences. I've been to practically all of the islands down that way, almost all of them. Also, on press trips, I've been to all of the various manufacturers of the big missiles out in California and I went everywhere from [00:48:30] Los Angeles to all around out there, all of those big manufacturers out there.

They built this aircraft in Santa Monica. I went out there and had a very interesting experience there. I went there personally though, not on a press trip. But I went there because the public relations director of the missile ... What in the world did they make now? I've even forgot. Thor, I guess is what they made as I recall. This man arranged [00:49:00] for me to go on the missile plane. For years they had a missile plane that went out of Patrick three times a week and came back three times a week. I went out on that missile plane alone and went to the Douglas Manufacturers out there and I was there for several days.

They paid my way at the hotel. They were very, very nice. I can't think of the PR director's last name who was here who arranged it all. Larry something. Isn't that [00:49:30] dreadful? Can't remember all these things. I'll have to go back and check some of my tapes and notes. I haven't been looking at them for years and years. But anyway, while I was there then, I did go down to Disney. One of the PR people there took me down to Disneyland out in California.

Then later, when the strategic air command was located over here in south Orlando, it's now under the mountain out of Denver. I went there later too on a [00:50:00] press trip. The strategic air command was over here in south Orlando and had that big base out there. Anyway, we went to Disney once. They took us on a trip to California out there. Where were we? Somewhere up the road, I think we must've gone up to Los Angeles. [00:50:30] I've forgotten. Oh, I know what it is. We went to the international bombing competitions.

The SAS was promoting it and I was invited to go so I went. While we were there then, and we went to all kinds of press conferences and there were so many airplanes there from everywhere. We had an afternoon off. We didn't have to go to the press conferences. This is really a funny story. We didn't have to go to the press conference. I said to one of the boys. I think [00:51:00] there were three of us, three girls on the trip. Usually about two or three of us. Mary [Bub 00:51:06] was one and I was one and I can't remember who the third one was, not often anyway.

We got out there and we got on the Air Force van with this little driver, the Air Force sergeant or private who was driving the van. Whole bunch of us then got on that because we didn't have to work that afternoon. I was the one who suggested we got right down the road [00:51:30] to the Disneyland because they'd never been there either but I'd just come from there a couple of months before, two or three months before.

We got down there and we rode and we rode and all these boys got the tape recorders out and everybody was singing and having the best time on the bus. There must have been about 10 or 12 of us. Finally we rode and we rode and finally I said to some of these boys, "Listen, that driver doesn't know where Disneyland is. Somebody better get up here and give him some directions." "Oh no. He knows," they said. About [00:52:00] that time we wound up on a dirt road in the middle of an orange grove. I said, "Is that so?" Then they redirected the driver. We finally landed at Disney World at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. This was a bunch of reporters, a lot of very important reporters from all over.

We landed there at 5 o'clock just as a lot of people were leaving. I said, "I wonder what's going on?" I had interviewed Mr. Jack Sayers at Disneyland. He was the manager [00:52:30] when I had been out there two or three months before and had put it on Cocoa Chatter, of course. Well, we all piled out of the bus and we got to the gate and the gate manager said, "I'm sorry but Disney is closing at 5 o'clock today." I said, "They can't close at 5 o'clock. We're a bunch of reporters from Florida, from the Cape Canaveral area. We came all the way here just to go

see Disney." I said, "Will you please step in there and call Mr. Jack Sayers, your manager, and tell [00:53:00] him that Mercer Livermore is here with a whole bunch of reporters from all over Florida and what should we do?"

Well, the man came back in a few minutes, almost in a state of shock. He said, "He said for you all to come in and be our guest until 9 o'clock." I said, "That's perfectly wonderful." But I've always maintained that was the day my fame was made. All these big shot reporters from everywhere. It was all free. We didn't have to pay anything at all. Later, after we [00:53:30] got through with Disney, we went to some restaurant right there nearby. About 15 of us I guess, at least. We were having dinner. Somebody in this great, big fancy restaurant was having a birthday and somebody had started singing happy birthday and, of course, by this time all these press people had had a few drinks and were feeling good and perhaps had eaten so they all joined in with a happy birthday, whoever it was being birthday'd.

But that's just one of the funny instances. So many funny things happened on these press [00:54:00] trips. You can't believe the experiences that we had, and how hard we had to work on those things. Because you sat for hours in these information meetings and looking at films and all that sorta business. But they've always very nice. Everybody was very nice to us. Went to San Francisco in one of the press trips out there, near San Francisco. Sunnyvale.

Nancy Yasecko: Sunnyvale.

Mercer L. King: Sunnyvale. We went on a press trip there and the PR people there at Sunnyvale [00:54:30] took us to south San Francisco. Think of this, remember this now. "Tell your friends that every night at some restaurants there they celebrate New Year's Eve." Every night, 365 nights a year. Somebody took us there. Gosh, I forgot to remind me a while ago that, of course, when the Cape opened, let me go back a minute because I'm going to come back to this Sunnyvale trip, to the New Year's Eve trip.

[00:55:00] All of the atomic submarines, our nuclear submarines trained at Port Canaveral. I forgot to say that. I knew all the captains and all of the officers, many of the officers of those submarines because I interviewed the captains and I went out on the big boats. I've forgotten the name of that, too. Where the crew went and they tracked the submarines and all that. I knew all those people. Well, the night we were in San Francisco on this press trip at Sunnyvale, [00:55:30] we went there and I decided, after a bit, I'd walk down this great big, long restaurant place and see what the other end looked like. We were all at one end together. PR man had taken us, of course.

As I walked along, the piano was playing. As I walked along there, here this young man came up and he grabbed me and hugged me. I said, "For Heaven's sakes!" He was one of the captains of one of the submarines who had been stationed at Port Canaveral. Isn't that [00:56:00] something? I saw him there in that unexpected place. He came on up with me and met all the other press people.

But that was one of the fun things, one of the different things. We had all kinds of funny experiences on those press trips but they were tough, I tell you.

They expect a lot of you and you had long hours and hard trips sometimes. On the bases and different things, you'd tour all these different bases. But it was very interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: There's a limit to what they could tell you wasn't there?

Mercer L. King: That's right, of course. The PR [00:56:30] people handled it very well indeed.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you feel like they always showed you as much as they could?

Mercer L. King: Yes. I always felt secure in that. I always felt that they were all very helpful. I can remember one unexpected trip that came up. When we went to Atlanta. I went to Atlanta on a press trip for the rollout of the C5A, which is the huge cargo ship that carries all the station wagons and things in that thing. Later, when I went on a department of defense press trip [00:57:00] to Europe and I rode on a C5A there, my two daughters were on that trip because I had put both of them on the radio when they were in high school.

Then they both took journalism at the University of Florida. They both went into news of course. They both worked in New York. But the commanding officer over here at Patrick had arranged for me and both my daughters to go on this DoD press trip to cover [00:57:30] the allied headquarters in Europe. I took my tape recorder and away we went. We had so many interesting things there.

Nancy Yasecko: I'd like to talk a little bit more about what it was like to live around here. One thing that everybody has some comment on are the mosquitoes.

Mercer L. King: Mosquitoes! With a capital M, dear. Let me tell you, this place was overwhelmed with mosquitoes. They were the biggest and the fattest and the hungriest mosquitoes I had ever heard of, let alone ever saw. [00:58:00] Anyway, they were terrific. Of course, the county commission had to find to get ... Enough people were, I guess, were practically eaten alive, that they finally got onto the county commission and they did then create some sort of a mosquito control for the county. They had a mosquito plane. I remember Lee Wenner drove that mosquito plane all over everywhere and it would spray, spray, spray.

When the navy was here, they sprayed to beat the band. They used to spray a lot. [00:58:30] That helped. But I never had understood where all these mosquitoes hatched and why there were so many of them but they were terrific, I tell you that much. Of course, we had a lot of complaints from a lot of the newcomers about the mosquitoes but, actually, most of the newcomers like myself, we had been a newcomer back there a few years ago. We didn't leave because of the mosquitoes. We decided they weren't going to chase us out. I imagine there were other people who felt the same way about it.

But that was one of the [00:59:00] things that had to be licked, so to speak, here in the area. That was just one of the many things. Of course, it was all very interesting. It was a big citrus center here. The groves down here, the big grove down here. I can't even think of it. The Hooper's had a big grove. There were a lot of big citrus things. A lot of citrus. It was famous here for all that good citrus that they grow around here. Incidentally, [00:59:30] I interviewed the man. I do hope to goodness I still have the tape, because I've forgotten his name, who invented the tangelo orange on Merritt Island. I took his pictures when I was writing for the Orlando paper there. I wrote a feature story on him.

Maybe they have it on their file. I'll have to check that. But he is the one who ... What in the world do you call that thing? That unusual thing where it automatically ... One of the [01:00:00] little seed automatic landed [01:00:03] Anyway, he found out that it was on a regular orange tree and it was a new type of orange. It was a--

Nancy Yasecko: Hybrid?

Mercer L. King: No, that's not the name of what it's called but maybe I'll think of it in a minute. Anyway, then he did. He sold for years. It was a big tree. I took a picture of the tree. For years he sold branches off that tree that people could put on their other citrus trees to make tangelos and [01:00:30] never in the world was an orange grown on this earth any better than the tangelo, and that's still true. We do have a famous name there, you know. But I can't think of the man's name. In any case, in those early days everybody had to go to Orlando to shop. There were very few, very, very few shopping facilities here. The one big supermarket we had was small compared to what they are today but it seemed kinda big [01:01:00] then. Was an A&P store, as I recall, that was right behind Brevard Avenue there in that driveway through between that and US Route 1 there, no, not US Route 1-- whatever that street is up there. I've even forgotten that.

Anyway, that's where the AP was and that's where we did a lot of shopping. Years later then, George King Jr., my late husband's second son, he became county commissioner. It [01:01:30] was through a lot of his efforts during the time that he was commissioner that we got the Merritt Island shopping center in. Everybody had to go to Orlando to shop and he realized then what a terrible thing it was. Of course, Cocoa Beach was growing practically overnight and just sprouting up because of the missile program, all the space activity.

We were growing and we needed a shopping area. He was one of the people who was primarily responsible for that coming [01:02:00] there. Incidentally, George King Jr., when he was county commissioner, he had a Ph.D degree and had been a college professor before he came down here from New York State. He was also greatly responsible for the arrangements and the coming of the Central Florida University between here and Orlando. University of Central Florida over there.

But, anyway, then all of [01:02:30] these things took place as we grew and, of course, as the space program grew, we grew. That is, all of Brevard County grew.

Titusville was absolutely bursting at the seams with people coming in, and so were we. So was Cocoa Beach. It went up like a mushroom overnight. Many places here developed. Then of course businesses moved in. That meant the place, everything just boomed. Then in the meantime, the Indian River was being used.

Nancy Yasecko: [01:03:00] Tell me, when all these new people were coming in, how did the original natives, the old timers here feel?

Mercer L. King: The Crackers and things. The Crackers [inaudible 01:03:10]. I tell you. They embraced the progress. Everybody that I ever ran into, they embraced the progress. They liked the newcomers who came because most of the newcomers who came here, they had already visited here or they had heard about this place and they got here and they saw this beautiful arrangement with our [01:03:30] own river, and the Banana River, and the ocean right there near, and being close enough to a city like all that so they can go back and forth for the medical things if they were not satisfied here.

Of course at that time Wuesthoff hospital was a very small hospital, not large like it is today. I don't know about the hospital in Titusville. I'm sure it grew also. But Titusville grew and the central Brevard grew and the Melbourne area. All of Brevard County then just grew like a mushroom because so many [01:04:00] people came and so many people then were employed at the Cape or at the base so that they had to have places to live and, of course, facilities to draw on. Groceries and all that. Everything just boomed of course.

The changes came of course with all the people. I have to [01:04:30] remind you too that, at that time, there were very few facilities available for so many people coming in. The motels, they sprang up over at Cocoa Beach. The hotels here, this Brevard Hotel, I came in 1946. This had quite a history, a marvelous history here because there was another part to this hotel, south of this area, the present hotel. What was the present hotel now, the Brevard, which was a charming thing. [01:05:00] There was a whole section down there, a whole wing. That was torn down when the [Laycocks 01:05:06] took this over. During those early years, before the missile situation got underway, worlds of those people up north, especially from the Philadelphia area, those rich, wonderful people came here as guests and associated and partied with a lot of the local people.

My husband and I met many of those people and they were charming and wonderful people. The local people [01:05:30] accepted all of them and then some of those people would come back to live here. Many of those people who came here on vacations and things. It was interesting to see how central Brevard ... That's the only thing I can really speak of. Of course, north and south Brevard too because very prominent in choices. But the central Brevard, where I was stationed here most and lived, would be the one I knew most.

You just can't believe how fast all of it took place and how well it was policed and how well everybody [01:06:00] went along and cooperated with the community

activities. This was before danger lurked at your elbows for both men and women and children like it is today. It was a whole different world at that time. You can't believe what a different world it was at that time. Now the police chief of Cocoa Beach back then, his name was Scotty Caldwell [01:06:24]. He was a Scotsman. Way, way back, his little boy had polio. [01:06:30] That was the first person we had ever heard of who had had polio.

Individually, the only one we'd ever known. Every year then, the people at Cocoa Beach and, of course, it wasn't very populated at that time, they had a big fish fry for the March of Dimes. March of Dimes had been birthed during this time. Scotty Caldwell, I knew him very well of course. Gone back and forth to Patrick Air Force Base to the press conferences and all that during that time.

Anyway, he was cooking fish [01:07:00] at one of the promotional fish fries, benefit fish fries one night. That's when I was writing for the Orlando paper as one of the stringers here. Had a little office right there in downtown Cocoa. I was down there many a night 'til 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning on that typewriter. In any case, I went to the fish fry. I went to all of them I guess but this particular one I do remember because I took a picture. That was the old Speed Graphic days. I had to set the camera on my shoulder because it was so [01:07:30] heavy.

I took a picture of Scotty Caldwell cooking the fish at the fish fry. I rushed into town after this and took it to my friend Johnny Fox who had that little photograph shop over there in Delannoy across from Travis's. I took it in there and I said, "Johnny, please soup up this thing so I can send it into ..." No, he didn't have to soup it up. I guess I took it up straight to the post office. Although the post office was closed, they would take things for me like that to get it on the postal truck [01:08:00] to Orlando. That's what happened that time. Anyway, Johnny Fox helped me out so many other times.

They got the film over there to Orlando that night to the Orlando Sentinel Star. I called the Orlando editor over there and I said, "This is a picture," I enclosed a note, I guess. "This is a picture of the chief of police of Cocoa Beach whose little son the benefit fish fry was held for. Please print it. I don't know what condition it's in. But print it, whatever you do." Sure enough, in the next [01:08:30] morning the picture came out in the Orlando paper in the Brevard edition.

Then I was over there coming from Patrick Air Force Base a day or two after that and all of a sudden the police chief came up behind me and he flagged me off the road and off the street and I said, "Scotty, what are you stopping me for? I'm not speeding." He put his hands on the door of my car and leaned inside a little bit and he said, in his Scottish accent, "Mercy, I want to tell you you are the world's [01:09:00] worst photographer." I said, "Oh, you saw your picture in the morning paper?" "Well, I sure did," he said. "You're a terrible photographer!" I said, "Scotty, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You don't realize that the only reason I cut off the top of your head was because I cut off, on purpose, the bald part. So now everybody thinks you have hair." He backed off and picked up his

hands and he took his hat off and scratched his head and he said, "Really?" I said, [01:09:30] "Well, of course!" "Oh, all right," he said. "Go on."

That was just one of those funny things. Have I got time for another funny story?

Nancy Yasecko: Sure.

Mercer L. King: The day that I was divorced, as all of my listeners new, of course, way back then, from Bill Livermore. It took two years to get my divorce. Finally the day came when the divorce came through. In the meantime, my poor old car was so beat up that I knew I had to have another car. Before my divorce came through I had made arrangements [01:10:00] with the Wooten Ford Company out there to trade my old car in for that Thunderbird that their young son in law wanted a new one. He had one of the first Thunderbirds. The little Wooten girl, her husband, he wanted a new Thunderbird.

They had that young man's car up for sale and I traded for that. I thought, "That's nice. I'd like a Thunderbird." Of course, they were sponsors of mine too and that helped. In any case then, [01:10:30] the day my divorce came through and after my broadcast I went to the hairdresser and normally I'm a brunette. I'm no more a blonde than man in the moon. I went to the hairdresser and she'd been after me for a couple of years, I had been getting so gray haired.

She'd been asking me to go blonde. I said today is the day. It's a new day. It's a new me. Okay, now I'm going to be a blonde. It's a new day. Sure enough then she made me a blonde. But I think she didn't know too much about. I was kind of [01:11:00] shiny yellow, almost goldy blonde. Anyway, then I went on out to the Wooten place and picked up my new yellow Thunderbird. I was driving back to town over here on King Street in my new Thunderbird, yellow, and my new yellow hair. What in the world's that boy's name? He was a big old tall policeman. [Corlew 01:11:24]. Art Corlew flagged me off the road, the street out there on King Street.

I said, "Art, you've [01:11:30] got your nerve. What are you stopping me for? I'm not speeding." He leaned, he's a big old tall boy, and he leaned over the door and he said, "My god, Ms. Livermore, is that you?" I said, "Well it sure is." He said, "I'd never know it." I said, "Well thank you for that." He said, "This is you?" I said, "Yes." "And your new car?" I said, "Yes. I just got it from the Wooten Company." He took off his hat and scratched his head and walked around the car and looked at all of it and came back and [01:12:00] put his hat on and he said, "You were speeding." I said, "Well, if I was speeding as you say I was, that's okay. Because that little Wooten boy, that young man that left this car on bouncing zero and I was hurrying to W. Bryant's gas station over there to get gas before it gave out in my new car.

He took his hat off again, he scratched his head and he said, "Ms. Livermore, drive on." That was another funny one. [01:12:30] So many funny things happened. So

many wonderful things. So many sad things that I could help with. I had a request in a letter from a lady up in Georgia, a young woman up there who had lost a member of her family. She was from here. She had written me a note and asked me if I would write a bit of a story about her mother who died up there and used to live here. She gave me some details and I did. It made all of her papers up [01:13:00] there and she was so pleased. I was able to do a little good here and there. But many a time, I guess for about 20 years I must have had between four and five hours sleep a night because I was on that typewriter doing my writing and also a lot of times then.

I had a lot of wonderful experiences. Then if I were going away or something, I had the tapes. I'd be up all hours of the night or early in the morning. I was an early riser. Not anymore. Not on deadlines anymore. I'd [01:13:30] be up early. I never did have much chance to sleep because I didn't have time. But in the meantime I had raised my two girls and supported them after my husband and I had divorced. Had supported them. I'd supported them before that. Anyway, afterwards too and sent them both to college. That was hard. That's hard for a single mother to do as you very well have heard I'm sure. A lot of people who, you know people have experienced that.

But the strange thing about it is, and I've given a lot of talks on ... I also established a public relations [01:14:00] business here too. The Cape Canaveral news service. I did a lot of special work for a lot of people in that. Cape Canaveral news service. I was busy doing a lot of outside writing. I wrote for the *Florida Journal of Commerce* for many years. That's a magazine that covers the port activities of the state of Florida. I guess it's still being published. I don't know. But I've been very busy. I did take active parts in the UDC, [01:14:30] United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, all of those, because they are trying to preserve the history of America.

So many of the writers have tried to throw out the real history and make everything ... Actually today the parents should check the history books they're using in school. I can tell you some stories that would lift your eyebrows over that.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell me what it was like when some of the people, reporters from other places, would come in.

Mercer L. King: Oh [01:15:00] honey, I can certainly tell you that. All these big shot, famous reporters, at least many of them thought they were famous, working for the big papers in the big stations and TV's, radio stations and all that. They came down, they saw this little quick speak gal like me out there on the telephone, broadcasting, and everybody seemed to know me, all the local reporters seemed to know me, but somehow they were not used to any girls out there very much at that time.

I guess [01:15:30] I was the only girl reporter for a long, long time. I was a girl then. I was so young then compared to now that I still say I was a girl then, not a woman. Oh my, they'd take one look at me and decide, "She must be a moron,

something like that." One time I broadcasted for one of the big stations down in south Florida, the launches [01:15:49], for years. The radio stations, yes.

In order to get a telephone to broadcast the launch as it went up, you had to go [01:16:00] through Patrick Air Force Base and sign up for that telephone in advance. At this particular time, the Air Force had built this platform about 10 or 12 feet high. We went up steps to get to it and across the back of this platform. It was about 15 feet long and about 10 feet, 12 feet wide. Had a banister all the way around except across the back end there were about eight or 10 telephone booths. Each telephone in its own separate booth.

I'd signed [01:16:30] up for one, of course, and I'd not only broadcast the launch to my station down below but to my local station here. One day when I was broadcasting up on this platform, this was way back in the space program. This young fellow came up to me and he said, "You get out of there." I was fixing to dial the phone or something. I said, "Are you talking to me?" He said, "I sure am. You get out of there. I'm going to use that telephone." I said, "Well now, young man, I don't know when you're going to use this telephone, [01:17:00] but I do know you're not going to use it until I'm through with it." He said, "Oh yes I am. If I have to pick you up and throw you over the banister, I'm going to use that phone."

I said, "Let me suggest you try it. Just try it. When I get through with this phone, you're welcome to use it from now and into midnight if you want to. But you're not touching it until I'm through with my business. If you needed a phone, why didn't you go to Patrick Air Force Base and sign up for one like the rest of us did? You better go tackle some of the rest. You're not budging me. [01:17:30] You're not budging me. I can tell you that right now." That's how I stood up to him. One time the day that the Saturn arrived on the Cape, that big, huge thing came up there. I'll tell you another funny story.

The day the Saturn arrived was the day that I had ... Let me go back a minute. I had bought the preacher's house next door to the little Methodist church down here. Preachers had moved into another-- [01:18:00] abandoned this small church and had built a bigger church. The little preacher's house, I'd forgotten what you call the preacher's house, was for sale. I bought it. I had made arrangements. That's another funny story. Anyway, that was the day the thing was to go down US route 1. The house was to go down US route 1 and be put on the back of my property, which was on US route 1, five miles south of Cocoa. That was the day, wouldn't you know, that the Saturn was to ...

I had to go up there [01:18:30] to the dedication, so to speak, and the ceremonies of the Saturn missile, so I did. That was the day my house was to go down the road. I stayed up there through all of that and made my tape recordings and described all of that for my broadcast the next day. I came flying out of there but I didn't want to come back on the bus. At that time, they made us park at the gateway going into the cape. They had a van there, not big, but a station wagon [01:19:00] for the TV people to take their pictures off first so they can get it to

wherever they were going for TV. I wanted to get on that van and get to the gate to get my car to go see if my house was moving down the road.

I got over there and there was an old boy sitting on the back seat. The only person in there. They was fixing to load up. Sitting on the back seat of this station wagon and his arms were out like this on either side of the seat. I said, "Young man, would you be so kind as [01:19:30] to move over and let me get in?" He said, "No, I'm not going to move over. This is for the photographers to take out. Are you a photographer?" I said, "No, I'm a broadcaster." He said, "No, you're not going." I said, "That's strange." Ken [Grime 01:19:46], he's a colonel now, he was a major then. But he and his lovely wife Barbie, Barbara, host when I come to Brevard County. They live in Satellite Beach and they're the most wonderful people God ever made [01:20:00] among them, certainly.

In any case, Ken Grine was in charge of the PO. He was one of the PO officers. He was there that day. I went over to Major Grine and I said, "I must really get off to the gate to get my car. I think they're moving my house down the road." He said, "Certainly you can go in that car." I went back and I told that old boy from New York. I said, "The major said that I could ride out with you all." "Well, okay," he said. Really snarly [01:20:30] like. He moved over a little so I could get in. Sure enough then I got to the gate and got to my car and I went flying down past Victory Groves, which is the most famous groves in the whole county, and has always been.

Anyway, they were sponsors of mine for years. I went flying down to Victory Grove, past there, and right next to Victory Grove was my gas man. I stopped at the gas station and I said ... I can't even think of that dear, darling man's name right now. I guess I'm so wound up in all of [01:21:00] this grand information. I stopped there and I said, "Did you see a house go by here?" This was US route 1, long before I-95. I said, "Did you see a house go by here?" He said, "Yes I did. I never saw anything like it before." I said, "Thank goodness. At least my house got this far, then."

He says, "Is that your house?" I said, "That's right. I bought it to put it on the US route 1 of my property down there. I'm going to rent it when I get it fixed up." I went [01:21:30] on down there and sure enough they were just finishing getting the thing lodged up this steep hill on my property. I don't know how in the world they got that two bedroom house up there over that. But that's how I remember the day we went to inspect the Saturn missile was the day my house was moved. All these funny stories. I could go on and on about some of the strange people I've met up there.

The people of the submarines, the men of the submarines were so exceptional. [01:22:00] All of those people who worked in the submarine department, oh boy they were wonderful people. I later met several of them when I went to Scotland. That's where our submarines were stationed over there for a while and I was over there and met some of them on the submarine there. That was interesting. I did

want to get back and tell you, among the most famous people of Brevard County were the Cruickshanks. Allan and Helen Cruickshanks.

The bird people. The bird authorities. They've written [01:22:30] numerous books. Allan wrote numerous books. They were from up in New England originally and they bought this place, built this place down on the Indian River and were just up the river from where I lived and were very close friends of ours and charming, delightful people. Helen still lives here. Allan died very tragically with some sort of a health problem some years ago. But those of you who are interesting in the bird picture. Because of the Cruickshanks and the Audubon [01:23:00] Society here, of which they organized, and of all the activity of all those Audubon people, Brevard County had the highest count of birds in the state of Florida for many, many years.

I don't know what it is this year but they just had the bird count I believe recently in some of the areas. But I must find out how we rank now because back there, year after year, we had the top number of birds in Brevard County, of any county in the [01:23:30] state of Florida. Because of the Cruickshanks and their efforts and many other people of course who did help them and who cooperate and the officers. I've forgotten those names but I'll have to go back and review my memoirs and see what those names were. But the Cruickshanks were very famous. They were world famous and nationally famous, of course, and wonderful people here in Brevard.

Brevard County inherited a great many of these wonderful people like that, very famous people. A lot of the commanding [01:24:00] officers at Patrick were outstanding officials and officers. Many of our own county commissioners and city commissioners have been outstanding people. Many of them have been great disappointments, but you know, that's true to life of course. Especially the politicians today, as a whole.

But we have had some very fine representative people from Brevard County over the years. Those of you who still live in Brevard County are extremely fortunate to have such a wonderful, solid background [01:24:30] behind you, of history, with so many nice people and capable people and nice people who, many of them were uneducated, but boy they worked for us. They worked for the county and the community. I don't think there's any county in the whole United States that could compare with Brevard. I've been sorry I left. But the time comes, you know, when you get up the hill, that you have to go.

Now I'm in a beautiful retirement center in Jacksonville, next door to the Mayo Clinic. If any of your people [01:25:00] ever get to Jacksonville, go to the Mayo Clinic, remember I'm at the Cypress Village Retirement Center. A beautiful, gorgeous place. I am very lucky and fortunate to be there. I'm very pleased. Been so nice. I hope you let me come back one of these days and give some more of the history. Fine, thank you darling. Thank you so much. Very, very much. My little Yasecko, blooming little flower here. Little Nancy Yasecko. She's the one who

wrote the book, "Growing up with Rockets," which I talked [01:25:30] about so much. I met her mother and interviewed her, I believe, one time.

All kinds of excitement. Yes. Thank you so much, dear.