

Interview with: Mimi Scoretz

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Interviewer: Vera Rosenbluth

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**MS:** My name is Mimi Scoretz and I am the daughter of Marion Schmidt, who is presently at Copper Ridge Place in Whitehorse, Yukon. We believe, looking at mother's journals now, that ten years ago, she was actually suffering from the initial stages of dementia. And she knew it. And it was very distressing to her. And she actually told us, many times, but because she had been so bright, so capable, so indomitable, for her entire life, we children all 'pooh-poohed' her and said, "Oh, Mother, it can't possibly be." You know, "You're just tired," or "You're just not thinking straight today." But, she did know. And one of the things that was probably a clue was she had loved to go square-dancing and she started to get mixed up with the calls and they finally gently ushered her out. And these were all issues that none of us took seriously. We thought, "Oh, she just stopped square-dancing." But, in actual fact, these were all the signs, I think.

**VR:** How old is she now?

**MS:** She will be 86 in June. So, 75, we think, was probably the beginning of it.

**VR:** I'd like to ask you a little about her childhood. Just tell me a bit about her childhood.

**MS:** Well, her childhood was very, very sad. Her whole life she was determined, like Pollyanna, to do better, to be better, than her childhood. And there was no blame, really. It was just that these were the things that, kind of, happened to people and people didn't know what to do. But, basically, her mother was a beautiful woman, who married a man who was a kind of an inventor, rough, a goldminer, and prospector. Very hands on, very bright man, who was not used to this beautiful delicate woman. And she had one baby after another. There were seven children that just came tumbling out. And, by the time the last one was born, we think that she had the flu in 1918, or one of these diseases that affect the mind, can affect the mind. And this beautiful woman could no longer cope. She could not cope. And he, rather than find the patience in his heart or whatever, and for reasons that were secrets never talked about in the family, he threw her out and she could never see her own children again. And that is what happened when my mother was five years old. It was a terrible thing for these children. They loved their mother. They never understood what had happened, why she had gone. And so, that was her childhood. At the age of five, she and her brother, who's a year older, were put in an orphanage. Their father was working. By this time he worked in the forest industry out of Seattle. So, anyway, that was what happened. And for mother, being in that orphanage was one of the happiest times of her life. It was peaceful. They loved her there. There was nothing negative about it. It was sad when he came and took her out, for goodness' sakes! By the time she was seven, he had marshalled his family to his aid and he brought his children home. And he was a completely devoted family man. And, for the rest of the time, the children stayed with him and he saw them all to maturity. But, it was just that there was their mother, living in Seattle! They lived in Hobart, a little community outside of Seattle. Now, it's practically in Seattle. But, they were totally denied her. No access to her ever.

**VR:** It must have influenced the kind of person she turned out to be.

**MS:** You know her life was always blessed in the most interesting ways. And there were many people who loved her. She was so beautiful. She was like a little angel. When she began going to school a neighbour lady from her Sunday school made sure that she had panties and looked halfway decent. And

other ladies taught her how to cook. And, by the time she was twelve, she was taking care of her father. She was sending him off to work everyday with a lunch kit, which she had made, and she was cooking and house cleaning after school. By this time the older sisters were married; the family was, of course, moving on. And, eventually, there were just a few of them left at home.

In high school Mother was the salutatorian of her graduating class. She had this goal, always, to be a lawyer and go to university. Her father had a kind of cruel streak in him, or something. Maybe angry is a better word. Maybe his life hadn't been happy for him either, you know. He said, "No," he would not pay for her to go to university. But, he would pay for her to go to secretarial school. And then she would be able to always take care of herself. So, she agreed, because she was so determined to go to university. And she did very well and she went to secretarial school. As soon as she graduated she had a job; it was in a scary part of the Seattle waterfront, the industrial district in Seattle. They didn't treat the employees well and unions were forming and the employers were threatened if they didn't want to join the union. She left that job and found at Packard, Seattle, which was a car company. The man she worked for was wonderful to Mother, as was his wife. I guess it must have been a dealership or something, but it seemed to be larger than that. She was a good secretary for him. And then she was planning to go to university. She was going to the University of Washington, that was her goal, when, I think, September 1941, she met our dad. And then everything changed.

**VR:** And who was she at that point, do you think? What kind of a person was she?

**MS:** Oh, I think she was very beautiful. And... [*emotional*] Well, I think, she was just learning to be a young woman. An independent young woman. She always had this... You know how people have a sense of themselves as being of value, you know? This wonderful sense that she was precious. And she, never in a prideful way, but she understood somehow that she had value. She lived in a place called the Evangeline. It was a place for young women, where they had a concierge to watch over them. She lived there. And she went to work and she had her friends. And she had some wonderful friends that she had for her whole life. That she had from high school. But, I think she was just finding herself, her own voice.

And, meanwhile, her older brother Carl, whom she loved very much—he was the oldest brother—had gone to Alaska. He, actually, yes, he'd gone to Alaska to be a goldminer. I'm trying to think. Was there some other reason that he'd gone up there? Carl. The war was threatening. Maybe he'd gone up there to work at... Fort Wainwright. It was the army base in Fairbanks. I have to get my dates right. Because the war hadn't been declared until '41, and he was up there before that time. Before the war he would have been involved in the mining business.

**VR:** Well, the war was on. But the States hadn't joined yet.

**MS:** That's right. And, so, he met our father, who was a young mining engineer. He'd graduated from the University of Alaska. And he had gone out to what they call 'the creeks' to mine. And Carl, mother's brother, had met Harold. And they liked each other a lot and miners, I mean people in Alaska, would always go south in the winter, if they could afford to, if the mining season had given them that much money or gold. And, so, Carl had come out and invited my father to a party. Carl wanted his friends from Alaska to meet his friends from Seattle. And, so, of course, he had invited his sister, Marion, to come to the party. And he'd invited Harold Schmidt. Well, apparently, our father saw Mother and he

just fell in love with her. And there was no way he was going to not see her again or let her out of his sight. He took her home that night of the party, and he put his foot in the door of the Evangeline women's residence and he wouldn't remove it until she promised him that she would see him the following day. And, so, of course, she did, because she had a curfew. At any rate, it was a great story. And, astonishingly, my sister reminded me—I couldn't quite believe it but my sister recently reminded me—that they were married three months later. It just seems incredible now that people would meet and marry for life.

**VR:** How old was your mother then?

**MS:** She was twenty. And he was thirty. He was ten years older than she.

**VR:** There was something about the war that I think people felt "Grab your happiness while you can." People did get married quickly during that period of time. I may be wrong.

**MS:** In September of '41, war hadn't been declared by the US yet, but, yes, it must have been 'in the ether' for sure. Although, we hardly suspected that the Japanese were going to bomb Pearl Harbour. Did we?

**VR:** Okay, so they decided to get married and had a short...

**MS:** Well, he went back to Alaska. I do remember that. He had to go back to borrow enough money to marry our mother! My sister confirmed that Dad borrowed \$5,000 from Mr. Nordale<sup>[1]</sup> to return to Seattle and marry mother. And so, he was gone for some part of that. And then he came back and they were married. I mean, part of the thing that amazes me, too, is that Dad married Mother and she had never met his parents. I find that a kind of a startling thing. He, of course, had met her father and her immediate brothers and sisters.

**VR:** I gather there was something special about the wedding, the timing of the wedding.

**MS:** Yes there was, because they were married on December 6<sup>th</sup>, Saturday, 1941. And that night, or early that morning, Pearl Harbour was bombed. And when they woke up the next day, war had been declared. So, it really was amazing. And they left on their honeymoon, but already there was talk of blackouts. No one knew how far the Japanese would come. So, the whole west coast had to be put in darkness and be ready for an invasion of some kind. Yes, it was pretty astonishing.

**VR:** What do you know about their wedding?

**MS:** You know the only thing I really know about their wedding is what Mother wrote in her diary. And, when I was re-reading it recently, I realized that she talks about what a rush it was. The pictures were taken by the photographer, the ceremony took place, and suddenly everyone was rushing out to go to the reception. It's funny, because, I think in our imaginations weddings take a long time. And, yet, in my experience, wedding ceremonies actually are pretty brief affairs. And I think theirs was too. But, she had this wonderful woman, Elizabeth Caulkins, to help her. She had, of course, no mother there. But, there were people to help and people did help.

**VR:** And tell me a bit about their honeymoon.

**MS:** Well, their honeymoon. I guess the thing that I do remember about their honeymoon is that we have two little things. I think Liz has them now. Two little glass trinkets. One is a fish and the other is an elephant. And what amazed me about their honeymoon is that they drove from Seattle down to Sun Valley, Idaho, across through Nevada and down through San Francisco, and then back up the west coast to Seattle. [*knocks against microphone*]And that was their honeymoon.

**VR:** Just say that last sentence again.

**MS:** Okay. They drove from Seattle to Sun Valley, Idaho, to Nevada, to Reno, I believe, and then across the desert and through the mountains to San Francisco and then up the west coast to come home to Seattle. And just before they arrived in Seattle, they had 26¢ left of their honeymoon budget. And with that 26¢— Mother always told us the story—they bought those two little trinkets. And they arrived home with nothing left. I can remember her telling the story and I was secretly appalled, that she would even share that. But I remember for her that she was just quite amazed, that they'd done it. They'd made that trip like that.

**VR:** One of the things you have in the family is a diary that your parents both kept...

**MS:** The honeymoon diary. Well, that just turned up. We never knew it even existed, and a few months ago, when we were in Mother's home dispersing her things, because we realized now she's completing her third year at Copper Ridge and she isn't going to ever come back and it was time that we moved on. We found this in her writings and we were just astonished. So, we have one sister who has volunteered to do all the literary things. So she transcribed it.

**VR:** Why do you think there's so much torn out?

**MS:** Because Mother didn't want intimate parts of herself to be revealed. It was kind of that time. People were like that. She had this modesty. And our dad was much...I don't know. He would never go against a wish of hers to have her modesty maintained. Never. But, at the same time, he was probably just more outspoken. And, I have a feeling that the things she tore out were probably things he might have written, his observations, that kind of thing. But, the unfortunate thing was when she tore it out

on one side, writing was removed from the opposite side of the page, so we lost twice, not just once.

**VR:** And they were clearly very happy.

**MS:** Yes, they were very happy. They had a wonderful marriage.

**VR:** So, where and how did they live after they were married?

**MS:** Well, for mother, a city girl, it was pretty remarkable what happened next. They went back to Fairbanks. He was a goldminer. And goldminers work on the creeks in almost total isolation. And, of course, now it was 1942. People were still dog-mushing mail in. The mail came in by dog team. Dad had that \$5,000 loan to pay back, war had been declared, the US government had given miners one mining season (the summer of 1942) before they had to turn their heavy-duty equipment over to the government to build the Alcan highway. They went out to a creek called Jack Wade Creek right on the US Canada border. And every bit of this was new. Every bit was new for mother. And you know, from the diary, you can just see that she is in her element. She's given a dog. She has her own little puppy. She walks everywhere. And she's trying to fix up these mining camp buildings that have cracks in their floor boards. They're slabs of wood, and between there's like a quarter of an inch and the cold air can come up. And nothing seems to faze her. She is so happy. It is all so astonishing.

Dad has mining partners. He's working with his partners on the creek. Their wives are coming. Some of them have children; some of them don't. And they live in these conditions that people today would say are like migrant workers' conditions. But, that was how it was for everyone. No one was being singled out here. I guess, maybe the cook shack was the warmest place in the camp. But, anyway, that's how they lived.

And, then, in the wintertime, they would go back to Fairbanks, where Grandma and Grandpa were, where my father's mother and father were. And, they had a lovely home there. A lovely home. Mother thinks it was probably one of her most favourite homes ever. And it still exists. My brother just took a picture of it when he was in Fairbanks last summer. It looks beautiful. And they were very happy there. And they lived in that little house until my sister and I were born. And then, when we were three and four, they moved to California in the wintertime and back to Alaska in the summer. So, all her life she did this. And we think about this now. We ask, "How could she have done it?" All her married life, she went up north lived there in the summer in these incredible conditions with all the children. Right up to the end, practically. I can remember when we celebrated cold running water being hooked up in the house on the creek. One spigot in the kitchen. And, then, in the fall, she would take all these children, five children, back with her to California, where we lived this beautiful life on a ranch. It was in the country, north of San Francisco in Sonoma County. Everything was available - the opera and symphony, movies and library and every modern convenience. And, then, in the early summer, it would all change and we'd go back north. And that's what she did our whole life.

**VR:** What was she like as a mother, when you were little?

**MS:** She was a wonderful mother. She taught the younger children. She home-schooled them, which was pretty incredible. My sister, Barbara, was telling me a week or so ago that she came across the Calvert School lessons that she did with our two brothers. Calvert School used to be advertised on the back of *National Geographic*, in those little tiny ads, and it was originally designed for the children of US diplomats and ambassadors abroad. It was a very rigorous system. And that's what she used. And, she taught all the younger children. And, as Barbara said, "You know, she was a kind of genius," because, when came it time to enrol the three of them, she put our brother who was four years older than Barbara one class ahead of her. She put Barbara two years ahead of where she should have been, and she put Craig, our younger brother, right behind Barbara. And everybody did well, but she was really intuitive in terms of where they really were in their studies. And, of course, they would all study together, because that's what happens.

And, she had her trials, too, which we didn't understand until we were mothers ourselves, or adults ourselves. But, it also took quite a toll to do all that moving. And, our father would always go earlier. He would always go up in March. There were always these two or three months where they were separated. And that was always really hard on her. When he wasn't around, it was terrible. Because she really needed, with all those children, she needed his support. And he was so good about helping. You know, helping, when men never did, with the housework and vacuuming and all that stuff. Because he wasn't, quote, working, and he was free to really help her. So, anyway, yes, that was hard and she would kind of freak out. That's how we saw it as kids, you know, that she was a little freaky today, a little anxious. But, now, of course, we understand. I mean, when you're kids you just go, "Gosh, what's going on here?"

**VR:** She did have real tragedy in her life, too, in terms of the family.

**MS:** Well, in terms of our brother, yes. He killed himself when he was 23. And then our dad died when she was really quite young, 48. Yes, that was really hard, really, really hard.

**VR:** How did she deal with it?

**MS:** [*speaking through tears*] Well, she wanted to die. She was so beautiful and she was only forty-eight. And he died of a heart attack, so it was very sudden. He was only 58. And, she didn't want to live.

**VR:** You remember that?

**MS:** Yes. Dad died in May 1968. The mining season was just beginning. It was a terrible scene really. There was the mining camp. There were the men who worked there. There were all the equipment, everything that had to be done; it was all in disarray when he died. She came back to the mine. No one knew what to do. People were telling her to declare bankruptcy and she just couldn't do that. She couldn't do that. So, all the children came back to help, but two of the daughters were married to university professors. It was the most ridiculous thing. They didn't know anything about mining and probably did more damage to the equipment than good. Eventually, just through her sheer tenacity and determination, she made a go of it. Eventually the price of gold went up and that helped her, too. She

kept it together. But, yes, it took a terrible toll. It really did. Dad's sister, Aunt Sylvia came. She was a wonderful woman, and she kind of read everything right. She saw the kids squabbling. She saw Mother just failing. And I don't know if she was instrumental in talking to Mother. She must have been. But, at any rate, at about three months into Father's death, our mother kind of rallied. She saw that she just had to do this. She had young children. The youngest boy was thirteen. She had to carry on. And she did.

**VR:** Three months isn't very long.

**MS:** No. She didn't have much time to grieve. But, you know, there were certain things that she said, I'll never forget them. Within some months after Dad died these good men were coming from Fairbanks to try to help her. Her brother, Carl, came. He was wonderful; because he was a miner, he could see what needed to be done. He got rid of the people that shouldn't have been there and he set things to rights. But, there was a man who was interested in her, that had known her all her married life, too, because they were all friends together. And we kids, we were thinking, "Oh, this is a lovely thing. This is a fine jovial man." [*break to put chirping bird away*] So, this gentleman that we all thought was a nice person was attentive to Mother. And, I'll never forget. We were sitting around the table. He had gone back to Fairbanks. And Mother said to us, as we were discussing him and we were all kind of eagerly hoping that maybe she would show some interest in this man and then the little ones would have a father and this sort of thing, "Children, I want you to know that your father was the love of my life and I will never marry again. He was my husband and he will be my only husband." And we thought, "Well, she certainly doesn't mean that. She's only 48." And she was so beautiful. And she did mean it. Here she is 86. But, in the course of those years from 48 to 86, there were many man, and lovely men, who were interested in her. And she never encouraged them. She was their friend. She was happy to be their friend, but she never married again.

**VR:** I want to talk about her life since then. But, I wonder if you would tell me a bit about your brother.

**MS:** The brother who died? You know, he was the most amazing child. He was not too much younger than Barbara, our sister, who is ten years younger than I. He was twelve years younger. And, he was an unusually bright, unusually gifted child. We, recently, Barbara just recently found something that he had written for the Calvert School. It was a description of the working of a gasoline engine. And we just couldn't believe what we were reading. And it was perfectly spelled and this was before spell check! And Barbara said, "This child knew this at ten. This was his genuine knowledge, authentically his own." It was what made it so amazing. Anyway, he was very, very bright. But, sort of like one of these people that was not for this world. I mean, there are people like this. And, probably he was a child that never should have lost his father. He needed the strength of his father. He needed that. And he was only thirteen when our dad died. And, he was sort of lost after that. And we didn't realize it. Nobody understood about schizophrenia. It didn't have a name all those many years ago. We see now that he probably became a schizophrenic. We feel that that's what it was. But, after Dad died, he stopped going to school regularly and Mother stopped having the authority over him to make him go to school. Since he'd been home-schooled for so long, he didn't have a relationship to a normal school. When he was 17, he went to school in Whitehorse, to an industrial arts school. He was the brightest student they'd ever had. The teachers begged him to come down here and go to Simon Fraser and become an engineer. They could just see this child was so gifted. But, he didn't. By this time, he didn't have the inner courage to face the world. He had lived on the creeks too long. He had been without his parents. You know what I mean? We could see it as his siblings. Oh, we have so many regrets. The way you have with a child who dies by his own hand. And, so, the year he was 23, and my husband told me, he said, "Mimi, he's not going to live through this summer, if he doesn't get help. He has to have professional help." But they didn't even have a psychiatrist in Whitehorse. There was nobody. So, through a series of incidences he died: we had a wonderful party. It was the end of the season. We

were all there. He looked so great. We were so happy to see him happy. And, within hours, he'd killed himself. And that was that. Oh, yes, that was really a tragic thing.

**VR:** So, how did your mother, how did she cope with the tragedy?

**MS:** Well, she'd gone through our dad. She'd achieved a great deal of strength in those ten years. She'd achieved a great deal of success in terms of business. She was an excellent businesswoman. She'd just never been given the chance, right? And once given the chance, once responsible for her own survival, she just... whoa. She was a powerhouse in terms of that. And, so, when that happened, by this time, her spiritual life had become...very active. She was in all kinds of new thinking, spiritual thinking. And she really had some spiritual mettle, too, I think. And, she just dealt with it. She just dealt with it. And went through it. But, it was so interesting, as I mentioned to you, that she...even in her dementia, in January of this year, when she saw his picture, she stopped and put her finger on the image of Craig. She said nothing, not a word. And yet it was clear to my sister and me that she was processing information about that photograph.

**VR:** This is the sense I have, that she never stopped questing, whether it was in the spiritual realm or learning things. At the same time, it seems that she was very practical, and you were going to tell me a story about killing a wolf.

**MS:** The story of killing the wolf. Oh my gosh. It is an amazing story. She actually wrote it out as a letter to a friend, of which we have the original copy. And it is an amazing story. Our brother had a farm, in the middle of an island, in the middle of the river that runs near Mayo, Yukon. I've forgotten the name of that river. The Stewart River? I can't remember. Anyway, Stuart had a farm. He had longhorn cattle from Scotland. Do you know they have a horn span of over seven feet? They're gigantic. And he said to Mother that he needed someone to come and take care of this property for him. Would she do it? Well, she was game to do anything, and especially for him because it was Stuart! She had to cross the river in a boat, to get to the farm. And then she was there alone. There was one other couple that lived on the island. She didn't even have a dog. She took her two cats. And, as she tells the story, she got up in the morning. And she opened the door. Everywhere she travelled, she travelled with her cats. And they were lovely cats. We all loved them. And, she opened the door to let the cat out and the cat's ears were pointed forward and it was not going out. And this was a very adventuresome cat that always went out. As they looked out toward the barnyard, Mother saw a black wolf running along the fence. It paused and looked toward the house. Mother got Stuart's gun, and she...she was an excellent shot...she killed it. It had been eating chickens in the chicken yard. And the thing that was so amazing in the story is that she said, "Well, I put the gun down and went back inside the house to make a cup of tea and consider what I should do next." And the reason she said that was because, if I'm not mistaken, it's against the law to shoot a wolf. And she just shot a wolf, no question. At any rate, as she continued her story, she finished the cup of tea and then she went out and skinned the wolf. She tied its hind feet onto the wooden poles of the fence. It's a lateral fence, made of wood. And then she gutted it. She dug a hole at the base of the fence boards and cut out the gut and entrails loose at the backbone and they fell into the hole. She skinned the whole thing. Put it down in salt, or whatever is done to tan a hide, and that was that. That was the morning. Anyway, the story is so amazing because she tells it in such a matter of fact way. And, you know what? She kept that hide. When we were cleaning out the house in January, there was that wolf. It was really quite a nice wolf. So, anyway that was one of many stories of about Mother. When she was 65, she climbed the Chilkoot Pass with two retired men friends. I mean, I can't imagine it. With a backpack. Yes, she was just incredible.

**VR:** And the book for her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday shows her travelling with her 18-year-old granddaughter to...

**MS:** ...Thailand. Oh, she did wonderful things with her grandchildren. She took Barbara's two oldest children with her to Scotland and England. She took Barbara to Europe. Oh, well, she loved meeting them and travelling with them. But, she went all over the world, actually. Meeting her sisters in the Yucatan peninsula. Travelling by balloon over the Arizona desert. She did all kinds of things. And, actually, the year that Craig killed himself, she was scheduled to go to China and walk the Great Wall. And that was one trip she did cancel. She just couldn't face that, but yes, she was very adventuresome in that way.

**VR:** What has her impact on you been? Just a little question. What has she taught you?

**MS:** You know, I would say, everything. And I actually don't feel like I've lived up to her standards. We always maybe feel that way, but, as I told her in that little booklet we wrote for her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, everything I value came from her. It's quite remarkable. I mean, for me personally, it is the sense of the spiritual life and the importance of the spiritual life, because she was always searching, Vera, and how you caught that so perfectly is so true. She never stopped looking for a better way. And, how over her lifetime, she had to forgive much and how she succeeded in doing it. One of the most beautiful things I ever saw her do was when we were on a bus. Someone got on the bus. It was here in Vancouver. And this person was stumbling, like he was drunk or something. And she whispered, "God bless you." And I turned to her with a question in my face, "What are you doing?" And she said, "Mimi, do you know how important it is when you see someone suffering, to say, 'God Bless You'? Maybe no one will ever do that for the person. Most people judge. That person is stumbling. That person is failing." And she said, "What would it be like if that person was blessed instead of judged? Everyone deserves a blessing." I never forgot that. I never have forgotten that. It was one of the most beautiful things she ever said, I thought. And, I noticed that what really touched me was when we first took her to Copper Ridge... And that was so terrible. We never dreamed we would ever do that. That was one of the hardest things we ever had to do. There was a woman dying. And no one was saying anything. And you know how those circumstances are where people are brought forward to join in the group because it is so important that they still feel part of that energy. So, this woman had been brought in. And we were taking Mother back to her room, and, as we went by this woman, she reached out and touched her hair and said, "God bless you." It was so beautiful.

**VR:** She's a remarkable woman.

**MS:** She was still blessing others less fortunate. She still understood that. Even in dementia. But, actually, when we see her with others now, she's so unfailingly gracious. You know, that sense, that beautiful sense that she's had since she was a child, whatever that was, that sense of worth. She's taken that and offered it to others and she's recognized the worth of others at the same time. Well, I think, everyone has been touched differently. But, as you see from that little thing that was written by the grandchildren, everyone saw her in a little different light. But, what did they see? They saw she was feminine. She suffered greatly. But, she was so courageous at the same time. And she was determined for all her children, and her grandchildren, she was determined to come to a better place. To bring her life which had been painful, to bring all of us, to a better place.

**VR:** And the other thing that strikes me from talking to you and talking to Liz and reading is that,

despite, as you say, such a difficult childhood, and obstacles and just the toughness of life, she felt gratitude, she appreciated beauty, she appreciated small things as well as big things.

**MS:** Oh, absolutely. Well, you know what? It's so interesting because, you know how when you come finally to a place where you have sufficient money and you can do what you want. She didn't live that way. There are going to be people at her funeral... many people who will surprise us...who are going to say, "Oh, you didn't know this but your mother gave us a second mortgage on our house so we didn't lose it, years ago." I know this is true because she did this. She felt that she had an obligation. She had some money and it should be used. It should be circulated, and if it could be done to help someone, then that's what she would do with it.

**[End of Side A]**

**VR:** This might be a good time to talk about Michael and his wedding, and what he and his fiancée chose to do.

**MS:** Well, Michael, you know...

**VR:** Start by telling me who Michael is, as though I don't know anything.

**MS:** Well, Michael is a 29-year-old soldier in the Canadian military and he's been, from the time he was born, a very unusual child. A very generous, thoughtful, young child that always seemed to know what he was doing, right from the get-go. You know those children who... I have this hilarious story... I'm a Gemini so I have this side that is very tidy and neat, and a side that's very messy. When he was about one or so... He couldn't speak, and this is what's so funny about it. And I was in the kitchen and I was singing and I had every cupboard door open and making breakfast and just carrying on. And this little thing that couldn't talk was pointing to the cupboard door with his fingers. And he was obviously distressed. And I looked at him and I looked at the cupboard and I said, "You want me to close it?" And he kind of nodded...so, I went and closed all the cupboard doors. And then he went on with his breakfast. He was quite happy. And, when he was five, I was taking him to school and we were walking through the laundry room. And, at the time, I was doing freelance art work and I was making something like seven thousand little trees, made out of sewing pins and sponges for one of these companies that make architectural model buildings. And as we walked through he said to me, "Mother, this room is really a mess; don't you think it's time to clean it up?" It made me laugh, but he was always like that. And never really accusatory, but just observing that things could be better here. It could be neater. Well, anyway, he went on... We put him in French immersion and he thrived. And he went on to be the first British Columbian who ever joined the Canadian military as a French-speaking British Columbian. It was pretty funny, actually. But, he always had great tidiness, this great fairness, and doing for others. It was a remarkable characteristic. When he would get his money from delivering newspapers, instead of spending it on himself, he would actually go and buy treats for everybody in the family and then bring them back to us. And we'd sit around the table and share his treats with him. And he would tell us his stories about his paper route customers. Well, it was always like that. He would go to the library and bring back books for the whole family, not just for himself. So, he joined the military when he was 18. Now he's 29. It's amazing. He's going to be out of the military when he's 38. And, a few years ago, he met this beautiful woman, Jacqueline, and we just love her. She's the most wonderful young woman. And it was time for them to plan their wedding. February 2006. He was leaving for

Afghanistan, and he phoned me up two days before and he said, "Mother, we have everything we need. We don't need anything more really. And we'd like to have you organize something with the Alzheimer's Society so that people could donate to that instead of buy presents for our wedding, if they wished." And I was just amazed. I'm telling the truth. You should probably turn it off. I'm kidding. But, I said, "Oh, Michael, you mean, you don't want any loot? You're serious about this?" He said, "Yes, Mother, I'm absolutely serious." Well, I couldn't believe it. I said, "Have you talked to Jackie about this or have you just dreamed this up?" He said, "Jackie and I have talked about this and we're in total agreement." So, I said, "Okay. All right. I'll do this." So, it was at that point that I first met Yolanda. We did everything through email; we always have. And we started figuring out what we were going to do. And it was, actually, quite wonderful. So, the idea was that wedding guests would have the opportunity to donate to the Alzheimer's Society. And I believe Yolanda said they received over three thousand dollars. So, that was wonderful. We were really happy.

**VR:** Was there a connection with his grandmother?

**MS:** Yes, obviously, because when he was young, of course, we went up and spent time with her. And he has wonderful memories of her. And, by this time, yes, she had been diagnosed and was living at Copper Ridge. He hasn't seen her now for a number of years, actually, being in the army, he's been away. Going to Afghanistan and coming back and then going back again. And, also, his other grandma, my husband's mother, is 97 and she has far less severe dementia, but definitely has it as well. So, he has two grandmothers with dementia. So, it just seemed like a nice thing to do. Neither of them could attend the wedding and I thought it was a lovely gesture.

**VR:** Do you think that generous spirit has come partly from your mother?

**MS:** Oh, I do. I definitely do. And also from his own self. And his wife shares the same kind of...she's a nurse...amazing kindness. Yes, we're really blessed with these people.

**VR:** You come from an amazing family. I like the fact that keeping records has always been important, I think, in your family. Keeping the stories alive.

**MS:** Oh, definitely. Definitely.

**VR:** So, it's an appropriate thing to put this on the memory bank website, whenever that is.

**VR:** One of the things I wanted you to do is just to end with, to read the section, the part "The things that Grandma said to us." Just read those. Tell me about the book a little bit and then read that part.

**MS:** Well, the birthday book was Liz's idea. Originally, she thought we'd just get everybody to say a few

words. But I came along and my thing is always to make things pretty so it ended up as a little booklet. It turned out to be so much fun to see it done, and to get it printed. From the very get-go, before most people even thought about health food or the environment, she was reading Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* in 1962. She didn't have to be convinced that the industrial-military complex was destroying the world. She knew all those things, she knew and would tell us. I remember when Teflon was invented, the first thing we knew she was telling us "Never cook with Teflon, girls. It off-gases carcinogens at high temperatures." She was the only person I ever knew who subscribed to *Scientific American* for years and actually read it. The articles were so interesting to her. She was all these wonderful contradictions. She was just so many things. But, the food issue was one of her big issues. And she had all these little sayings, which when we were kids we thought were just outrageous. Many of the things that she said have now been shown, many years later, to have been entirely accurate.

Now, these are some of the things she said to us. And this is what she said when, you know, people would come to her and they'd be complaining about someone, and she would say, "You know, we all do the best we know how at the time." And this was another one, "Hope is hopeless." She couldn't stand it when people would say things like, "Oh, I hope he will speak to me again. I hope he still loves me." This, for her, was just ridiculous. "Hope is hopeless." "Everyone always asked me to bring a pie because they always said, 'Marion makes the best pies'." And that was true. "Old clothes never die. They just get passed from one child to the other." We used to go back and go through her closet and find clothes that we'd outgrown twenty years before, and we'd say, "Can we borrow these back, Mom?" We were all more or less the same size, although she was the smallest. And, of course, we took it back. And, "Don't use margarine. Transfats are bad. Always cook with butter." And she never used margarine. She despised it. "Eat as close to the source as possible." Now, this was her thing. "Take the foil wrapper off the butter before you cut it." She couldn't stand it when the foil got in the butter. And this is what Michael always remembered. Because the kids would want to be doing something and she'd say, "Okay, kids. Hold your horses. Hold your horses." And then this, right at the end, when her mind was going, she started to tell us this, "Pour the milk into a little pitcher and then into your hot tea or coffee. If you pour from the carton, it will spoil the milk." And none of us knew where that came from, but she was insistent. So, we obeyed her.

**VR:** Mimi, thank you so much. It's been wonderful. I feel like I got to know your mother a little bit.

**MS:** Yes. Now, do you want a cookie? I made it with butter.

**[End of Interview]**

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[1]<sup>1</sup>Transcriber's Note: The Nordale Hotel, Fairbanks, Alaska, was built by Tony Nordale in 1908. It burned down in 1923. Nordale bought a building on another site, renovated it, and opened a new Nordale Hotel, which remained one of Fairbanks finest hotels until 1972 when it also burned. It was not reopened. See [www.festivalfairbanks.org/history2.asp](http://www.festivalfairbanks.org/history2.asp). An Anthony John Nordale served as a Democratic member in the Alaskan House of Representatives from 1919-1923 (<http://politicalgraveyard.com/bio/noone-norrell.html>) and there is an Anthony John Nordale Foundation of which the University of Alaska is one beneficiary ([http://www.alaska.edu/finance/foundation-accounting/downloads/financial\\_statements\\_03\\_ua\\_foundation.pdf](http://www.alaska.edu/finance/foundation-accounting/downloads/financial_statements_03_ua_foundation.pdf)). It seems likely that the Tony

Nordale of the Nordale Hotel and Anthony John Nordale are the same person, but I did not find any definite proof of that.