Mavis McKelvey: —forest problems, and I still don't think they are. They’re more urban. It may be that Denver dominates so much—

Doris Milner: You’ve got the forests [unintelligible] no idea how much they contribute to the—

MM: They’re huge! They’re huge forests.

DM: Yeah, but are they commercial forests? Like we have the old saying here [unintelligible] what it was up until now where we’ve got the [unintelligible]. I don’t know. I don’t know how much it contributed to the economy, whether it was more grazing and sheep and oil and—

MM: Well, it was mining and agriculture and general agriculture and forestry, I suppose, you don’t see a lot of mills in Colorado. You don’t see the remains of old tipi burners the way you do in Montana. But those forests are sizeable.

DM: I wonder if they had the economic impact there as here. This would be a question you could look into.

MM: Do you think that the thrust of the environmental movement or the conservation movement centered around the forests, and that’s how it began? Having talked to Brandy, I have a strong feeling I’m terribly forest-oriented now, but I wonder whether that was—

DM: I would say probably [unintelligible] to begin with.

MM: But that only goes back to 19—what?—50?

DM: You see, it took nine years to get the Wilderness Act passed and that went in ’64. The idea of a wilderness system went back, oh, let’s see... [unintelligible] was born in ’58 and things were going since like 1946 about the idea of a wilderness system. And, of course, that started nationwide; it wasn’t just here in Montana. If you read—what’s his name? Wilderness and the American Mind or what’s his name’s book?

MM: You mean Brewam? John?

DM: No, no. Roderick Nash.

MM: I haven’t read that.
DM: It’s a history of the wilderness and it’s beautifully written. It really gives them tremendous respect. He gives you the history and he writes it in the sense of [unintelligible] so you know that these things happened. He has a sense of timing to get things rolling together. It’s very, very good. I have Cliff Merritt’s copy which I think I won’t give back [laughs]. Have some more tea. I don’t know. The immediate—

MM: See I came here and I hit head on at the first wilderness meeting. I hit on you and Cecil and the Smiths and Brandy and, my God, what is this?

DM: It was actually right then the Forest Service was coming into it, but you see with the hassle about the backcountry, which we owe for 10 years, as a matter of fact. [TAPE STOPS]
...represented to the timber industry, so really this is kind of where it got—

MM: So the Lincoln backcountry with Anaconda? That wasn’t it.

DM: That was on the [unintelligible] Creek thing [unintelligible].

MM: That’s different. Oh, okay.

DM: But here was, all of a sudden we began to realize that the demands on a particular piece of land were multiple, and there were different groups in society which had their eye upon a piece, whether it’s the Anaconda Mining, or whether it was the timber industry, or whether it was the environmentalists or conservationists. So all of a sudden, because the number of people build up, and we found the consciousness of the last of the undeveloped land was becoming better known around the country—thanks to publications like Roderick Nash’s and the consciousness nationwide through the organizations [like] the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, and so forth—people nationally began to look at these areas out here, not just as a place where timber came from, but the last stands of the wilderness resource. So these things kind of came together. Then the consciousness about the problems with the timber; if we don’t look at our private lands and put them into production, the demand on the national forests are going to be so great that eventually there will be nothing left to keep undeveloped. And this is where we can see the tremendous need to get into production of private lands.

MM: Brandy says that after the second war was when the push came, or started...

DM: For new housing.

MM: For housing [unintelligible]. He said that the federal forests really—or our public land—wasn’t really put upon except by grazers.

DM: Right. Not until the [unintelligible] year. See, then they used the private land. They cut the private land way back. The loggers [unintelligible]. In Montana, here in the valley in 1913 the
Burlington Northern had cut [unintelligible] here for ties and mine construction and one thing or another. There was a tremendous amount of clear-cutting right across in here. It’s coming back now, but it’s taken 75 years to do it. And the private land had sold off the big timber in the bottoms out here. This is all private land. A lot of this wasn’t even picked up till in the ‘40s for the taxes. People would sell it off and the Forest Service bought it up, some of it.

MM: So it was the people-resource push after the war with everybody wanting his own house and—

DM: Yeah, and the market was good and the businesses wanted to expand and people had money. There were many people that had money after the war. I can remember going down here to the Elks Club. You know, young people were coming home and they had 8,000 or 10,000 dollars in the bank and businesses were picking up. People were having babies.

MM: But do you think that the private forests had been pretty much depleted by that time, or were they just setting—decided they were going to put those aside and go after the public forests?

DM: Now, you get into a place here that I’m not so sure I could give you...I might tell you what I thought, but I’m not so sure I could give you the facts, but the facts could be found. I think out on the coast, see they had such tremendous holdings out there that hadn’t been touched. But now, they give them 10 to 20 years and that’s it. I don’t know whether the private land...You’re talking about the industrial private land like Weyerhauser, not the small—

MM: Right. Now BLM (?) had huge holdings, but they’re not...I don’t know how much—

DM: Actually, I’ve got something here. This will give you something. [TAPE STOPS]. What they had in 1965 and what they had in 1972, and it’s a publication [unintelligible] and I had it just yesterday. I don’t know where [unintelligible] as far as what’s happened to the private lands.

MM: You know, what fascinates me, is that there was a lot of land degradation going on in the state forest for quite a long time; big holes in the ground and mining and no land reclamation and so on. But there was somehow an unspoken getting together of, you know, something hit a nerve, a raw nerve, that said you’re going too far on the forest issue. And it made it different from mining and made it different from, well, even strip mining, which now we’ve gotten excited about. But without that first strong nucleus fighting on the forestry, I don’t know that we could have made the same inroads on the strip mining.

DM: And also the subdivision buildup of public...I think all these things came from an awareness though of—people who would come here from the east, which I’m from the east, and I’m aware that we didn’t have this [unintelligible] farm to farm. They even mowed down fence [unintelligible] so that weeds wouldn’t grow. There was no such thing as wildlife to speak of where I lived. I think people coming in also became aware that, “Here’s what we have and this
is what’s happening to it, and these people are content to let it go because it’s always been this way, and there’s always someplace else to go, and it isn’t true.” I think outsiders had a great deal to do with the consciousness of protection.

MM: Let’s see, outside of—well, Brandy’s been here a long time—but most of the other people in the environmental movement—

DM: I was trying to think about this after I got your letter, just how many did I know in the movement are dyed in the wool Montanans...some. Now I think the Baldwins are both—I think they were both here, but they were people who really used the outside, you know, the outdoors, I think as long as they’ve been here, since childhood. They knew an area that they cared about that was Birch Peaks (?). And Steve certainly wasn’t. Dean certainly isn’t. Scott I know isn’t, and of course he isn’t here.

MM: Well, it’s interesting to look at the legislators who are interested in preserving Montana, because a lot of them are out-of-staters too that come in. I don’t know where Harry Mitchell and people like that came from. I don’t know where Jim Posewitz (?) comes from. I was trying to think of people in the state government, too, who really put the—were committed.

DM: I don’t know where Frank Culver came from, or Bill Cunningham. Rick Applegate was born in Libby.

MM: Right, he’s a Montanan and Dorothy’s a Montanan.

DM: Well, the Bradleys though, are from Wisconsin.

MM: Yeah, but they’ve been living in Montana for some time.

DM: They’re going back, you know that? They’re going to leave?

MM: Why?

DM: Well, he will be retired and then I guess it’s next June they’re going back to...see, she’s Aldo Leopold’s sister, or daughter.

MM: Daughter.

DM: That’s what Liz says, they’re going to leave. It just breaks your heart because they’re special people. Well, there’s something. Okay, at least there’s a spark that comes in, or an impetus that people out of state have, I think, added to this because of their awareness of what’s happening, more so than people who lived here. It isn’t 100 percent that way, but there’s a strong enough position that you—

Doris Milner Interview, OH 413-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MM: Do you think that...okay, like Cecil, or, take yourself also. When did the consciousness of the importance—

DM: It was special to me, it was threatened. That’s the same way with him. It generally takes something that is gut level with you to get into action because it takes an awful lot of energy and time and money. And it’s got to be something...I mean we had enjoyed the Magruder Corridor as our place. We had learned the wilderness, we had taken our kids there, we had had probably the best time we had ever had in our lives. And all of a sudden this was going to change for reasons which we didn’t think were right. But it takes something that strong, at least it—

MM: Because you were oriented towards the outdoors to begin with.

DM: I was born and raised on a farm and I really enjoyed it.

MM: Now Cecil came from the gaming tables of Nevada, didn’t he?

DM: Well, but he came from the back country of North Carolina.

MM: That’s true.

DM: He enjoyed the country. He’s a farm boy right down the line.

MM: But now, do you think that if you extend this idea of—because if anything’s going to be turned around, we’ve got to multiply the Doris Milners and the Cecil Garlands (?) by quite a few.

DM: They’re coming out of the—we have a Wilderness Institute. If there’s any other time I’d feel like I would be discouraged, it is finished. I no longer feel like it’s impossible because they’re coming out all over the place.

MM: And these aren’t necessarily rural people or with rural backgrounds. These are city people.

DM: No, these are young people who are part of the consciousness of our earth. I don’t care whether you’re angry at subdivisions or whether they don’t like to see a forest decimated without reforestation. It doesn’t matter. It isn’t just wilderness. It’s care for earth. Awareness of our environment. It’s finite and this is where we have it and earth is good.

MM: Where do you think they’re learning this? Not in school I don’t think, do you? Most of them not in their own families.

DM: Possibly the media—books, other people.
MM: I wonder if we...I begin to think that we transferred things in ways that we don’t understand, that there is a sensitivity that’s running like an undercurrent and...I don’t know.

DM: I think that definitely the schools are responsible for—they were slow in the uptake, but I feel that they are doing a very large percentage of awakening grade school kids, for instance. And I think the media, the television is always awfully limited, isn’t doing a good job, but it’s done something.

MM: Certainly you’re not unaware. If the courts make a decision on the Reserve Mining Company in Duluth that allows asbestos fibers to continue, well, the government isn’t doing anything about it, but you certainly know about it if you watch the news. I don’t know whether that’s building up. The other thing, some people say that the whole environmental movement is faddish and—

DM: No, no. It’s survival. I definitely feel that way. That’s what keeps you going after you’re...you know, you get a plateau of your own particular problem and then you realize that you grow in your understanding as you get involved in the process, in a particular problem. You become aware that it’s not by itself. It’s part of a whole picture.

MM: Do you think Montana is still rural enough so that the rural values of, I don’t know—there was a rural ethic. People say, well, look what farmers do to land, but I also know farmers in Wisconsin who were, because they had to survive, they had to treat the land with a certain amount of respect. They couldn’t—

DM: My father was a [unintelligible].

MM: Yeah, they couldn’t cut and run.

DM: I don’t know, though. One of the things that scares me; this big deal about raising wheat for the world. I know some people who have talked to the farmers or us about this and land is wearing out. Now what are they going to do, beat the land to death for the next buck? This scares me. And I don’t know if they’re going to be able to stop this, not until it’s all done and we’re done too.

MM: They over-fertilize to a point where there’s nothing—yeah, the sterility of land is really a serious problem.

DM: Well, look what we did to the...the saline seep is something that—don’t tell me people haven’t really had an idea what was causing it. They maybe didn’t at first, but there have been enough scientists around at the agricultural colleges who have known this. But that wasn’t going to stop them from [unintelligible] and putting in some grain when they make a buck. Now we’re really in trouble. We’re paying [unintelligible] to study why they have saline seep and what to do about it.

Doris Milner Interview, OH 413-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MM: ...things I’ve noticed about Montana—in addition to those people who have so much strength and certainty about what they’re doing—is that we also have another group that’s sort of subservient because of the nature of business in the state for such a long time. But Brandy says that’s—he thinks that we need to change; that that’s fear of jobs and so on, loss of jobs because corporation power is fading. These people have to come around also. It just can’t be an intellectual leadership of a few enlightened if it’s going to remain a permanent kind of...if everything that’s being done now and everything that has been done in the last 10 years is going to hold. Because the pressure is going to grow, Doris, you know that. God knows the wilderness battle is almost just beginning.

DM: That’s right. I was talking to Bill Cunningham who had been over on the coast for two weeks and he was just aghast. He was in wilderness areas and they are crawling, crawling with people who are hungry to be out. Just hundreds. He said, you know, we’re next. Now I can see this is something that the Forest Service should be considering. They are, but not in depth. I think they don’t—they wouldn’t fight this wilderness bill if they really understood the need. Talk about the needs, you know, one of the criteria about things is regional economic need or enhancement, the national—seems to me the need is here and if they could get the sympathy of the Forest Service as a [unintelligible] agency and not as a timber management agency. It hasn’t come yet. There are some in the Forest Service. I think we’re beginning to feel this and know it, but...

MM: Do you think there will ever be the day when the timber becomes so scarce that we’ll have to go through the whole thing all over again? I mean, with the fight to preserve. I can see this happening.

DM: I think there will never be a let up on our demand on public land if our population continues to grow.

MM: I suppose all those problems go back to population.

DM: Yes, as I see it. You know, because if there were too many people here you could go someplace else. That’s done.

MM: Well, given what we want out of our own lives, I think, if we do not want to live the way people are living in India with such a total—I don’t know what resources they have left over there. Given that some people are obviously surviving in that kind of a situation.

DM: Well, I guess we’re not to the—we still may have a little choice, this country. We have maybe a little choice by eliminating our families and by careful use of our resources, because we have many, many resources. But they should be used for the welfare of our people. Now,
see, we have two levels of use. One primarily is for the profit, and the second is whatever good it does people. It took me a long time to come around to this, but I know it to be true.

MM: The two don’t really get along very well.

DM: Primarily it should be for the welfare of people, and if there’s a reasonable profit that can be made without decimating the resource, there’s nothing wrong with that. I’m certainly appreciative of the great strides that have been made in the private endeavors. As a matter of fact, Bill Moyers, in the July 14 issue of Newsweek—have you read this report? It’s very interesting, and it has to do with decisions made at the local level, not strong central decision-making where the people aren’t involved. It’s just excellent and I agree 100 percent. It’s just the way I feel about it. More and more decisions must take in the people who are the grassroots, where we are, and how things are affecting us.

In other words, Thursday morning when I go to this breakfast, there are things I will have to say and Bill’s going to write me a report: “Okay, this is what’s happening in wilderness areas in Washington and Oregon.” Now, we have a chance. We have this bill. And yet we don’t seem to have any cooperation from the Forest Service to see that this study is made for this group. So the ability of these areas—because the tide is going to hit Montana, and if we really want to keep wilderness of any kind with the protection of its plant and animal communities, in addition to having a dispersed recreation opportunity, we’re going to need every bit of qualified land that we can get. And by doing this, we also preserve our wildlife habitat and watershed and, goodness knows, we’re the headwaters of the two greatest river systems: the Columbia and the Missouri. So it seems to me that it’s the part of wisdom to consider very strongly; leaving what little undeveloped land we have as undeveloped. [unintelligible] certainly points this out, that if wilderness didn’t have any other value, for watershed it could stand alone.

MM: Right, and I think somebody—I think it was Mr. Jeffrey Vickers—said that the two words that he felt had done more damage in societies for a hundred or more years was “economic benefit.”

DM: [Laughs]. Agreed. All right, this is essentially what I’ve been trying to say. Yeah, economic benefit—whose?

MM: And how it’s defined is so—he said it’s in tune with the Victorian society, but it hasn’t been in tune with this society for a long time. Yet we have even people who are public servants with the Forest Service defensive about a natural thing that they should be doing, which is defending our multiple use.

DM: It should be public benefit, not necessarily economic benefit.

MM: See, Vickers says that we value too much what we own privately and then what we own publicly—which is of a fantastically greater value if we want to look at it—we don’t have the
same value system. Then we overload—well, he said you allow the private sector to go its merry way until it does something which there’s a cut-off point and they’ve gone too far. Okay public sector, do something about it. And the public sector, the government is under-valued and under-strength and doesn’t have—also philosophically is not trained to really take over at that point. And then everybody says, “Oh, that damn government.”

DM: Well, they have their own dirty linen. We’re fighting a motorcycle race on public land. It was there in the tires where the skin is that deep on the earth and it takes thousands of years to make that and one motorcycle race and it’s done.

MM: I got a call from the BLM [Bureau of Land Management]. When I come back from Wilderness Council meetings, I sit down [unintelligible].

DM: Oh, I must tell you about—

MM: I got a call from them. Did they call you?

DM: Yes.

MM: Oh, okay.

DM: I mean, go ahead. What did they say? Did Rex Ferry (?) call you?

MM: No, he didn’t call me. A fellow named David Fedley (?) that I know from Missoula because he used to be in Missoula Action when it started. Well, he was somewhat defensive and I was surprised. He said, “I’m calling you because I know you, Mavis. You know this isn’t going to be up in the priors, this is going to be down on the floor.”

DM: The part of that trail goes up on the side of the mountain [unintelligible].

MM: Yeah, and I said, “Well, I’ve seen a map and this is what the Smiths had said,” and so on. And he said, “Well, you know, there’s not really much growing there.” And I said, “Well isn’t that the whole point? That this is what happens in the desert—it takes 300 to 400 years to heal [unintelligible].”

DM: He was supporting you.

MM: He was, in a sort of a—he was defensive.

DM: Well you know what’s happened now with all the letters that go in. Did they send you that little booklet; about six or eight pages about—

MM: Yeah, they came after I sent the letter, yeah.
DM: Now they’ve gotten stuff together and they have an [unintelligible] written. And this one
down at Missoula, Dean’s going to send it up. Don has it now and he’s going to bring it up to me
on Monday, all the information that they got together to write this environmental analysis
report. I have a feeling the Friends of Earth’s going to take them to court if they do it. The thing
is, this is a major—if the Sierra Club took the Bureau of Land Management to court because of
overgrazing and damaging the land—if this isn’t another way of equally damaging the land, I’d
like to know what it is. There is no excuse ever for allowing this.

MM: He said they have to have some place for recreation.

DM: They don’t have to have some place—tracks.

MM: I said, “Well, there are roads, tracks.”

DM: They have stock car races on tracks. If they let that one go over there, it will be every little
motorcycle club from Alvion (?) to Eureka will be having some—okay we’re going to do our
thing. Well, how many do you think you can handle with this country? Oh, no, no, no. There are
certain things you can’t do. There was some private land—you heard Liz saying—they wouldn’t
have it. See [unintelligible] was saying this a while ago. I think on private land it seems like it
could go. Well Burlington Northern wasn’t about to...I think it was BLM (?) land.

MM: Probably.

DM: That they wouldn’t have it, they said no. So why should it be allowed on our land?

MM: Because what the public owns in general is supposed to be in general for its use. However,
the general use has to be [unintelligible] as—

DM: Non-degradational, too.

MM: Right, non-degradational. Just as we would be the first to say, “All right, if we have to stay
out of wilderness then we will stay out of wilderness. If that’s what it takes to keep wilderness
natural, then...”

DM: You have to be willing to say that.

MM: Yeah, then we will stay out of it as long as anybody—

DM: It’s a delicate—every place that’s overused, we’ll have to stay out of it, and I’m prepared
to do that.

MM: Fredley (?) also then got onto the thing about the platinum mine.
DM: Oh yes, it’s over in the Clearwater.

MM: In the Clearwater. I was telling all the damage and he said, “Why, there isn’t a lot of damage, I was up there.”

I said, “Not in the river? Not in the creek?”

He said, “They haven’t moved a thing. As a matter of fact, the road over that creek used to do far more damage than it does now with the bridge.”

Of course I’ve never been there. I have no idea what [unintelligible]. I said, “Well, it’s strange that we have these different kinds of reports coming out of there.”

He said, “As you go up there you don’t even see the site until you’re within about ten feet of it.”

I said, “Well what about the site itself?”

He said, “Well, I think we’ve done it on a flat piece of land. There doesn’t seem to be a lot of erosion and so on.” Then he said, “Mavis, I just think that sometimes you environmentalists go too far.”

I said, “Well that’s an interesting statement out of the BLM.” [Laughs].

DM: We might say that you’ve gone a little too far in letting grazing go on the BLM too. Maybe that’s one of the things that makes us suspicious of you. You can really get him on that because their land is so bad.

MM: And here the public servants are taking care of the public land.

DM: I don’t know because I don’t really have a good depth in the strength of this movement. I’m talking about the earth movement. But nationwide—from the little town up there in Vermont that fought the Deepwater Oil thing to Santa Barbara—all over, you see this awareness growing. It isn’t just one little group here in Montana. This whole thing was growing. People became aware that the places they used to go to were no longer there. I think it’s a national consciousness. This economic recession, and believe me, I think this thing’s here to stay, because there isn’t—we’ve been dealing on a war economy for all the years that I’ve been born. It’s always been a good economy because there was war. Well I don’t think we’re going to have many—

[End of Side A]
MM: I think in our minds we redefine progress, don’t you? That sort of had to come first, didn’t it?

DM: Quality of life is something we never really treasured until we saw it maybe slipping away.

MM: You know, it bothered my father, the places that he had...old rivers that he swam in as a child were now polluted in the Milwaukee area and couldn’t be used anymore. But he excused this because he said, “Well, that’s progress.”

DM: Is it? I wonder if he’d rethink—is he still alive?

MM: Yes, but the interesting thing is when he started doing work for the mining company in Colorado. He worked for [unintelligible] all his life and he was farmed out to a company in Colorado for a while as a consultant. And they’re working on the oil shale. And that was in 1962. My father thought that western Colorado was like the mountains of the moon. There’s nothing green.

DM: So it really was useless.

MM: It’s sort of ugly. But he came back and—I remember we lived in Boulder at the time—he came back and was staying with us that night and he said, “I don’t know. You like this country. Now I don’t see much use in it, but you like it, and I want to tell you. They are really going to change it down there because it’s going to have to take down the mountains and then they’re going to have to fill up the valleys. And he felt that the slag was [unintelligible] because the amount of oil in oil shale didn’t seem—

DM: Stuff gets bigger when you [unintelligible] the oil.

MM: Yeah, it swells up and it becomes like [unintelligible].

DM: And it’s slippery. What are they going to do?

MM: There they had the experimental plant and [unintelligible]

DM: Did you move down there?

MM: We did an article on it. We tried to get Foley and the reporter to publish and he said it was too hot to handle. Isn’t that interesting? We went down and we got tours. We couldn’t get into the colony (?) plant. They had guards at the gate and we weren’t to get anywhere near them. But the Anvil Points, which is the government’s Bureau of Mines plant, now they took us all through it and we wore our hard hats and saw the slag that smolders and smolders. Then they
have water that they play over it and of course that leaches down out of there; this black gook flowing down out of the slag heap. It looked like coal. I mean it looks like big [unintelligible] kinds of things after. The problem is oil shale is expensive. That’s the only thing that’s going to stop it. It’s not worth it to do it if they—

DM: The energy it takes to get it out may be more demanding—

MM: You notice now that they’re really beginning to look at solar energy in an entirely different way.

DM: The tides (?) can be hardest too. It’s a matter of just putting the ingenuity and the thought on that. We have tremendous energy and tides.

MM: But even my father, who spent his entire life working for Allis Chalmers on mind-crushing machines. Half of Butte—those big machines over there—are patents that my father got on for all the years for Allis Chalmers. When he retired he had over 52 patents on those blasted rock crushers. But even my father had some awareness came over him that there was a cut-off point. They’re going too far. And that’s—what you’re saying, I think, is that the extension of this cutoff point and the defining of it; that we’ve gone too far.

DM: It wasn’t out of all that we had to have no more frontiers before this was going to be, sadly enough. We started to look back on ourselves and I think that [unintelligible]. Now the challenge is to see if all our ingenuity and sensitivity—I don’t know whether we’re sensitive or not. Economically we are, but I don’t know if aesthetically we are.

MM: If we get into a worse economic situation, which I think, unless there’s a retooling and a serious consideration of just exactly where we’re headed in terms of national goals and so on, that it probably will get worse.

DM: Oh, I see no way but I can’t see any—I can’t see a comeback in the same sense that we have, in the same way that we have now. Our factories are obsolete, many of them. Terrifically expensive to rebuild, and it’s a challenge. I’m interested. I think that the potential to take hold with our bootstraps is here. I see something else that scares me, and that is I think the Vietnam and the Watergate has made a fear and a dislike, almost a hatred, of government. A very serious situation. And when you don’t have law and order—and I don’t mean the kind that’s cracking down on everybody who steals an apple—if you don’t have respect for law as being the basis and the backbone of the nation, I don’t know what you have. Then you have a police state, and that really scares me.

If you have an economic—a country where people are hungry without jobs, are scared, they have no future. Here’s an unknown, and I don’t know about this. We live out here in never-never land. We really will be one of the last to feel the brutal impacts of it, I think. If you lived in Detroit or New York or San Francisco, I think you would feel it quite quickly.

Doris Milner Interview, OH 413-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MM: In the wintertime when you’re skiing up a little trail with a bunch of little children, and they’re all chirping and hollering and so on—and I saw way too many war movies for my own good when I was at a very impressionable age. I can always remember those movies about Jews in Germany. They were all sitting around the piano and singing and they’re having the good life. And then the storm troopers that would pick them up. And I have the same sort of ominous feeling that we’re living in some kind of idyllic state [laughs].

DM: I have this too, you see, and I keep trying to adjust to it, because it’s very definitely there. And of course the nuclear thing we have set ourselves up for is so [unintelligible]. I think that’s the number one fear: that, and a society that doesn’t know what to do with itself, which is scared.

MM: I fear less the nuclear because I feel that the bomb has actually become a regulator.

DM: Oh, I’m thinking more of the waste, our nuclear—their waste.

MM: Oh, yeah, just from—not just—but from energy. Yeah, okay. Just the plain waste. The bomb has receded in my mind almost as a feeling that it’s the only thing that’s holding the whole thing together, probably [laughs]. There will be a lot more scrapping going on.

DM: I think it’s very interesting how there’s a—this is a gross overstatement—but our relations with Russia, I think the thing that’s putting us together is China. It’s not because we’re getting closer to the Russians, or they to us. It’s a matter of we’ve recognized a force that I think is tremendous, tremendous. And I don’t necessarily mean in terms of force, either. I think in terms of ideology.

MM: Now I wonder about that. I was just going to get into that. We seem to suddenly have become very limited in our imaginations when it comes to economic systems. We have capitalism, socialism, communism, and somehow those aren’t really all that old. Even in historic times, they’re nothing, they’re no more than a little blip. But the idea of it, that a new system could be started that would somehow take into effect the needs and the problems that we have. It doesn’t seem to me that communism is environmentally doing very much more than—China is more in tune with the environment because it is labor intensive.


MM: Right, human labor, labor intensive. But then China has a brutality of control that we would not want.

DM: I have no idea how the Chinese people accept this. It’s completely unknown to me. You can rationalize and say it gets forced on, but you see, what did they have before?
MM: It was extremely bad.

DM: So I think this means a better world, in many ways, without the stresses and strains that we have. I don’t know. We have other things that I would—but then I haven’t been there and I can’t talk about something that I don’t even have even a skimmer of philosophy. I wasn’t born in that...I was inoculated with another way of values and I’m sure that this is important.

MM: I think that we need, as humans—man has always had stresses and strains. I think this is what has made his mind, probably, evolve. Anxiety and tension have to be there. But they can go too far and then you just get tied up in knots and then nothing happens. But then you can also take care of too many and then you have what I think I tended to do with my own children, was to remove—shield and remove—too many so that they’re not...the toughness had to come later, but it probably should have come earlier, the coping. So I don’t know, but I think we’re going to have to think about economic systems and we’re going to have to think in a realistic sense and not just say—start shrieking and hollering communism and socialism and whatever isn’t—

DM: Oh that’s just a cover-up because we don’t have any alternative. We don’t know what else to do. We’ve got to blame the trouble on—

MM: We’re not thinking about it. That’s another thing. A marvelous book that I keep in my head so deeply, Vickers’ book.

DM: What is this?

MM: It’s called Freedom in a Rocking Boat.

DM: Freedom in a Rocking Boat. That’s so interesting. Is he talking about a society—

MM: Yeah, and he talks about...well, he’s an 82 year-old man—

DM: Is this in a paperback?

MM: No, I got it out of the library. The only reason I know about it is I watched a Bill Moyers [Journal] last winter and he interviewed Sir Jeffrey Vickers. He’s about 82 years old and he was the head of the coal council or whatever it is that wanted to nationalize the coal industry. He’s got a very profound mind and he is distressed. He says we have a crisis, not of energy, but of imagination. And for years man has been using his imagination to think his way out of all sorts of things and now suddenly we’ve become victims of fate and stand immobilized before this. There’s nothing we can do. This is what distresses him, is that the morale or something is so low that we think that we can’t change anything, that we are victims of the age.
DM: Well, I guess we all want it to happen more quickly. And you know and I know that change is a thing that comes slowly. And maybe the changes and process, and we’re unaware of it. Obviously, it is in a process because physical things have made it so—the lack of resources, for one thing, the number of people; our awareness that systems aren’t working.

MM: Yes, and there was also this business that perhaps we could change, you know, [unintelligible] says “Make the kingdom of God on earth,” which he finds blasphemous, but anyway [laughs]. But that also is easily wrong. That kind of arrogance probably got us into the spot we’re in right now.

DM: Yeah, the complete comfort that everybody should have. And as you pointed out a while ago, man has never been without stress or strain. If you had all the material things you wanted, you’d have other kinds of stresses and strains. We’ve all learned that because we transfer our—one thing or another threatens us. If we have this, then this threatens us. There’s no such thing as not having it. I think this is one of the valuable things that a person should teach children early, as you were saying, and I can remember being sort of aware of this but I don’t know if I practiced it as actively as I should have simply because life had gotten so much easier for me as from my childhood. Although as a child, you know, we didn’t have electricity or a bathroom for a long time, and I never thought about that as being a hardship until we had one. And then to be without one was awful [laughs].

I think the movement in the ‘60s when the kids were rebelling against the establishment, see they didn’t have—and this is understandable—any kind of plan or an alternative. It was merely, the first thing you do is rebel. Over a period of time, consciousness picks up those threads and begins to knit the other a little something. And it may not be in our time. There are going to be some tough times for our generations and the next half generations; to face the fact that the economic well-being in life is not going to be based on economics as we’ve known it.

MM: Why did we have that thing called Earth Week and that spurt in about 1971, and then it sort of went down again?

DM: Well it was a culmination, perhaps, of the movement of the young people toward earth. Then they all of a sudden had to start to work because they had to support themselves.

MM: And work within the system.

DM: Because there wasn’t any other system and the idea is that you have to understand the system to be able to change it.

MM: This is what distresses me about the University is that the University sits there and is no more than a training school for the system.
DM: That’s exactly right. [unintelligible] books in there as far as the women’s lib is concerned and the whole ballgame, because textbooks are very carefully looked at by school boards and boards of education and the establishment. And people get very angry about certain things that are in school books. That’s another argument for—

MM: And here the University is an idiot place. How many engineers do you need in society? Well, we think we need so many. Or, how many economists, or how many mathematicians, and so on. And then if this blind—and I think the economic system is as blind as a bat—it’s certainly narrow focus is no longer—

DM: What’s its interest? It’s got a focal point.

MM: Yeah. And maybe 30 years down the road is all it ever thinks in terms of time.

DM: I wouldn’t even say that far. How long is a building obsolete? A car is 10 years old and it’s done.

MM: I don’t know. But then when that thing goes berserk, then the whole University says “Oh, here we are, victims of—”

DM: Yeah, we don’t have the engineers that we need now to work on solar heat and so forth.

MM: Right, and this is what—well, I don’t know, that gets into the whole thing is so geared into the exploitation of the resource system, which doesn’t seem to be able to work without exploiting resources, or at least as yet it hasn’t. They haven’t found a way. To have profit is the only motive. The morality of that is even being questioned by The Wall Street Journal because there was an article last week in there about the business schools—the Wharton School of Business and, I think, Columbia University—beginning to introduce ethics courses into the business schools.

DM: [laughs]. That’s probably because of the campaign crap that’s gone on.

MM: Well, and also products. Products are becoming shabby.

DM: Business is in danger because the public is rising up in holy wrath about one thing or another. I would suspect that’s what’s brought it on, because it represents a regulatory danger to them, don’t you think? Ethics, my foot. I mean, in terms of watch out or they’ll close you down. I suspect that’s part of it.

MM: I think there is also an idea that the rip-off is across the board and has become a way of life in this country. And given an honest—working honestly and using money honestly has become almost nonexistent.
DM: Only a fool would get into it.

MM: Yeah. That’s another thing, that business is not attracting our best brains, hasn’t for a long time. The more mediocre mind goes into it; the mind that easily conforms. And that’s another thing, in most businesses, in giant corporations, the mind brainwashing is as severe as it is in any place.

DM: Sure, it’s [unintelligible] of course once you’re in. You follow the line, because this is security and a job and that’s one of the things I think that has hurt the Forest Service. I don’t know how they fight free of it.

MM: Well, when they have, for example, before [unintelligible] was it?

DM: Pardon? Who was it?

MM: I don’t know. Who was under Johnson?

DM: Barts (?).

MM: Was he?

DM: Who was right before Barts? Oh—

MM: Was the Forest Service any better? Was it doing anything any better under Democrats than the Republicans?

DM: No, no. It’s been the system. And basically the two parties aren’t very much different. Labor unions were just as greedy and I don’t think—they may not be as corrupt yet, but I know there’s been a lot of Mickey Mouse work and undercover work with the monies that were supposed to be put in for the retirement, you know that.

MM: Yeah, we used to hear a lot about corrupt unions until now the corruption has gotten to a higher level and now you don’t hear about [laughs]—

DM: Did you see—there was a joke in The New Yorker. The other judge was looking down at this poor, obviously wasn’t a very affluent, businessman. He was saying, “Haven’t you learned that corruption doesn’t pay on your level?” [Laughs].

MM: You have to go for higher stakes.

DM: So what time do you have to meet Maureen?
MM: I have to meet her around five and I should see Ruth for a half hour. So we can gab for a while longer. [unintelligible] wrote down here and I think in our round-about way we’ve—here I've got something: how does the environmental movement grow within the capitalist system? Aren’t they opposites? I think we’ve been talking to that point right along.

DM: Well, there are a lot of people that don’t necessarily buy the capitalist system right down the line. They’ve lived with it but are really fighting it in many ways. And what do I do with my AT&T? [Laughs]. I put it to the good cause.

MM: I know. My mother’s living on it. I suspect that if—well, I guess you rationalize, but the children will all inherit that stuff. I’ll inherit it first and then the children [laughs]. And then we’ll all feel guilty. Well, I guess we all say certain things should exist, like communications. It’s better to have closer communication.

DM: I think so, yes. There’s nothing wrong with the idea of television, it’s what we...Nothing reflects the level of our culture more than television. It’s there. There’s a tremendous possibility of human understanding. And it also has tremendous possibilities for—you know, there’s a certain amount of horror that you can take in, and then all of a sudden it becomes a fairy story that doesn’t exist. And I think this is...I don’t know, I guess one has to shut this off or you could lose your mind.

MM: Remember in 1969, suddenly there was this great push on the environment? I remember an NBC White Paper that went on for three hours on television one night on the total kinds of pollution of the nation. And Frank McGee was the anchorman on that one. I sat there for three hours. I was just absolutely washed out at the end of it. It took on water, air, waste, the whole works. Looking back on it, I find it slightly incredible because we haven’t had anything of that nature for almost four years. But it’s been, I think, as you say, more steady.

DM: Yes, I think it’s a tide now that is irreversible. It’s not like it’s hard to get...I think there’s a strong enough push.

MM: Can you make it a political issue, though?

DM: No. Well, it is obviously a political issue on a local level.

MM: Yeah, local legislature.

DM: Yeah, even in town. Glen Flanning (?) here is obviously—there’s a struggle going on between the realtors and the established ranchers who are on that county planning board. No way are they going to have any invasion into the private sector. No way. Why they’re always for it, is beyond me, except that they represent, probably, the sentiment here. With the exception, you know—maybe 300, 400 people here feel like I do about things, and the rest of them maybe don’t.
MM: How do you feel about the people who say that they’re for the environment and they can’t understand why—you know, it’s a matter of degree. Like Danny Lambros says this to me all the time, “Mavis, you and I are in favor of the environment. We both like the environment. I love a beautiful—”

DM: Oh, but it’s deeper than that.

MM: Yeah, but he just...I said, “Danny, you and I wouldn’t want to live in Los Angeles in all of our lives, would we? But there’s some force pushing us in that direction.” I look right at him. He’s making a pile of money.

DM: Is he in real estate?

MM: Yeah, and head of the chamber. Yet he thinks that he wouldn’t live anywhere else but in Montana in these beautiful mountains.

DM: What do you think about that story that Bill Schneider wrote up about the Montana Sunset Subdivision up at Lake Mary Ronan. Have you read that?

MM: I haven’t read it.

DM: He wrote it very well, too. He wrote it dispassionately but factually, and boy, oh God, it just makes you sick. It just kills you. Everything was against us. Absolutely everything was against putting that subdivision in. [unintelligible] had gone to great depths of understanding of what’s happening to Lake Mary Ronan right now and they have the goods and everything. The landowners are beginning to see the impacts, and they recommended to the County Commissioners that they turn it down. The County Commissioners did turn it down. Then this realtor, this landowner, is the one whose—I don’t know how he came back and talked 60 percent of the people into reversing their position on a resolution to support the Commissioners, I don’t know. I don’t know what he told them. It doesn’t say. Schneider either didn’t know or wasn’t able to find out just what he told them, but they reversed their decisions on the support of this and I don’t know what’s going to happen now. It’s just so discouraging.

MM: I thought that the Schwinitzen (?) story in this morning’s paper was fascinating [laughs].

DM: Well you see, I happen to know people. I’m going to send it to them. The Weeks, you see, they bought land and I think that Marjorie—I think that [unintelligible] because they got caught in this. They wanted to buy some land there, but Hummel didn’t have a clear title and she wouldn’t buy until she had a clear title. Now, how she got a clear title on that particular piece of land, if she did, I don’t know. I was going to send that to them. They’re really good friends of ours. Did you ever meet Mart and Louise? The lawyer who comes through and goes

Doris Milner Interview, OH 413-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
backpacking with us? Very good friends and have been for 10 years. He worked up the brief on the Magruder Corridor thing just as we were going to go to court and that sort of thing.

MM: They said that Fred Rupe (?) was the—

DM: Yeah. In fact, there was a lot of hanky panky going on, it seems to me, in that deal.

MM: Well, that was a real [unintelligible].

DM: [unintelligible] tried to run for the school board. He didn’t like that.

MM: God. That’s the first sign I’ve seen of that kind of land—I mean, that sort of thing goes on in Florida all the time, and I suppose it goes on in Montana.

DM: Well they just over—they had to pay so much. This place is very expensive. It’s been sold. It was the old Ford and Hollister ranch, and it was a ranch and then it sold again, and then it sold again, and every time it would go up a couple hundred thousand dollars until—I don’t know whether it was a half a million the last time or not. An astronomical price on something that is—there are others that go for millions, I understand, but that isn’t that big. It was around 1500 acres to begin with. Now they couldn’t get the money to keep this outfit. Money got expensive and they didn’t have enough money to buy it so they could give clear title to the people, and not enough people bought into it to give them the money to buy it. That was speculation and I’m glad they got it.

MM: Right. One is that, that area up there probably could use—there aren’t enough camping areas in here for public camping, and lots of things that those things can be used for.

DM: Oh, yes there are.

MM: You think so?

DM: Because, for instance, they’ve done check work on the amount of use that the campgrounds have been having around here. For instance, Black Bear, a couple years ago—five years ago—only had 11 percent usage. See that’s 11 miles or 10 miles up the road from, you know, off the highway. And there are a couple up the West Fork. I don’t know how much [unintelligible] gets. In the past couple of years this may have changed a little bit. Como [unintelligible] washed out this year and they haven’t been able to repair that bridge, so that makes it a real long way in there. You have to go up on Lick Creek.

Twin Lakes is a—I know because we got something wrong with our car up at Twin Lakes. It was a long drive up there.
DM: Possibly there could be more but you see a lot of them now that camps like to have these developed campgrounds because men [unintelligible] that kind of thing. I remember talking to a forester in the Teton National Forest and talking about the campgrounds here and he said, “Well, you know, it’s a funny thing. We have areas over in here that they’ll say, ‘Is there anybody over there?’ And if there isn’t, they’ll say, ‘Well, where are people?’ And then they’ll drive in where there’s another car. Now, whether they’re afraid of vandalism, or afraid of being alone, or what...” So trends in parks, you almost have to talk to the people who really do the census on them, or take care of them, and know what kind of use they’re getting.

MM: Do you think that Montana should have another national park or two or three?

DM: Did you see the thing that somebody wrote about making Montana a national park? It was hilarious.

MM: You mean the whole thing [laughs]?

DM: It was hilarious. I’ll have to get you a copy of that. I sent it to Lee. It was very well done and very funny. I’m only on page five. Lee said, “Just as soon as we get this wilderness bill stashed away, this is our next project. I just want to warn you ahead of time.” And he said, “Well, people who think we have enough wilderness and people...And people who run them don’t work.” Oh he had a funny—he came back with a funny...He has a sense of humor.

MM: Alaska probably should have been one gigantic national park—the whole thing. These last areas. This is why the whole thing has to be turned around in terms of how we value what we own as people, as opposed to this little postage stamp that we own that we call ours for that brief period of time.

DM: Especially, now, this is what has changed the [unintelligible] tremendous amount all over the nation, especially in Montana. When you consider the number of people in Montana now who live in the cities rather than rurally, see, this changes the whole attitude toward the private land because they no longer own very much. They have their own house in the city or maybe a rental apartment. But public land is becoming the only place they have to do. It’s keep of the grass and no hunting, no trespassing, no nothing. What we’re going to have as a nation is what public land we have open to the public. I think this is a good point to make when you’re talking to people about how much wilderness. Well, where are you going to go if you want to go out?

MM: Yeah. The definition of the nest and the definition of ownership is quite narrow, I think, in most people’s minds. I don’t think—this is another thing Vickers said on the Bill Moyers show. He said, “A man that considers his automobile an asset, and a street a cost, is pretty dim.”

DM: [Laughs]. Yeah.

[End of Interview]