

Interview with Mr. and Mr. W.L. McArthur

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Transcriber: Scott McMurtry

Date of Interview: December 11, 1987

Location: Mr. and Mrs. McArthur's Home, Waelder, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Scott McMurtry: Interview on Friday, the eleventh of December, 1987, with Mr. and Mrs. W. L. McArthur at their home outside of Waelder, Texas. How long have y'all lived here in the GVEC [Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative] service area?

Mr. W.L. McArthur: We've had GVEC service since 1970. We've actually lived on this ranch since '74. We bought it in '70. We needed electricity at that time; we were weekending and spending some time in the old house up the road.

Mrs. W.L. McArthur: The last two years we weekended up there; the weekend was four days long.

Mr. McArthur: We actually built this house and moved here in '74, and GVEC, Bob Campion, helped us design the wiring in this house.

McMurtry: What did you do for power in the old house when you were up here? Did you have any?

Mr. McArthur: GVEC. It was already here.

Mrs. McArthur: We've been using GVEC since '70, when we bought the place.

McMurtry: Have y'all been in this GVEC area just since 1970?

Mr. McArthur: That's correct.

Mrs. McArthur: Before that we were in Houston.

McMurtry: Have you retired down here?

Mr. McArthur: Yes, we've retired down here out of Houston. We run a six hundred-acre ranch here.

McMurtry: When y'all were growing up, did you have electricity in your homes then?

Mr. McArthur: Yeah.

Mrs. McArthur: You always had electricity? I remember when they put electricity in our house, and my little sister stood up on the bed and poked her finger up in the drop from the ceiling before they put a bulb in it.

Mr. McArthur: Did her hair stand up?

Mrs. McArthur: She got a shock. It was Myrtie. She must have been about eight or ten years old at that time.

Mr. McArthur: This was up in the panhandle of Texas, where we were born and raised.

Mrs. McArthur: Little town of Shallowater.

Mr. McArthur: That's where you were at.

Mrs. McArthur: Well, that's where we got electricity. Before then, we lived in the country. But I remember when they wired the houses in Shallowater.

Mr. McArthur: But I grew up in Paducah, Texas.

McMurtry: That's up in the panhandle, too?

Mr. McArthur: Yes.

McMurtry: What's the biggest difference between the way you live now and the way you lived before you had the electricity?

Mrs. McArthur: Electricity perhaps makes the biggest difference.

Mr. McArthur: Well, you have all the conveniences of the city.

Mrs. McArthur: Labor-saving devices.

Mr. McArthur: You can have an icebox; you can have a heating system; you can have a cooling system; you can have a just a complete electrical facility, just like they do in the city.

Mrs. McArthur: This house is all-electric.

Mr. McArthur: We have a heat pump.

McMurtry: Do you remember how your mom used to wash clothes and stuff before?

Mrs. McArthur: Yeah, I helped her on a washboard.

Mr. McArthur: How'd you heat the water?

Mrs. McArthur: Boiled it in a big old iron pot over an open fire in the yard, summer and winter. Made our own soap in the same pot.

Mr. McArthur: This was back in the thirties.

Mrs. McArthur: Well, hon, it back past the thirties; it was in the twenties.

Mr. McArthur: Well, I guess it was because we were born in '16.

McMurtry: What do you think of the relationship you have with GVEC?

Mr. McArthur: It's been excellent.

McMurtry: So you've been well treated by their employees?

Mr. McArthur: Absolutely.

Mrs. McArthur: They're very courteous.

Mr. McArthur: Service is good, attention is good.

Mrs. McArthur: We've never called them.

Mr. McArthur: The product is good.

Mrs. McArthur: We've called them on emergency a couple of times, and they were here before we hung the phone up.

Mr. McArthur: They have a key or lock on our front gate. We lock our lock on their lock. They can come in any time.

McMurtry: That works out pretty well, I bet.

Mr. McArthur: It does. We sat on their public relations board for GVEC. I don't know if we're still on it or not.

Mrs. McArthur: We did for years.

Mr. McArthur: We did for several years; we used to go to a lot of meetings.

McMurtry: So you probably know more than a little bit about that *GVEC Review* that they sent out, that little newsletter?

Mr. McArthur: We get that.

McMurtry: Did you work on that when you were on the public relations board?

Mr. McArthur: Yeah. We know Doyle Hines.

Mrs. McArthur: We know him a little bit socially.

Mr. McArthur: We have a very good relationship with GVEC. I have no complaints with them. Only that electricity's too high.

McMurtry: Yeah, I guess it's always too high, unless it's free. That *GVEC Review*, does it provide you with some useful information to save money and power?

Mr. McArthur: I read it to—you know, scan over it. They have put in—we have three hot water heaters in this place, and they put one of those—

Mrs. McArthur: Monitors.

Mr. McArthur: Monitors. I don't know, it's some kind of electronic system that—to save the peak level, that's where it starts costing, as I understand. And they cut off these things through the office electronically certain hours during the day.

McMurtry: Is that that load management program?

Mr. McArthur: Yeah, that's what it is.

McMurtry: That was my next question anyway.

Mr. McArthur: We have that here and also up at our—this is my foreman's house up there and up there on the hot water heater. I believe we have one on the heat pump and on just two of the hot water heaters. My hot water heater in my bathroom is too small, so they didn't put one on. It's just twenty gallons. I guess they save us some money, I don't know. I want Doyle Hines to hear that.

McMurtry: I'll make a special note of that. The management of GVEC says that they're going to start offering some services in the future like satellite TV, sewage and maybe garbage service—

Mr. McArthur: Satellite? You mean kind of like cable television? I'd like that. Run it on their own lines. We get good television here; we get Austin and San Antonio very nice.

Mrs. McArthur: But it's limited.

Mr. McArthur: It's gotten worse, and it's going to get worse. We like to watch it in the evenings; we never watch television during the day. But in the evening we like to sit down and watch a good honest-to-God movie, you know, not a bunch of screaming people, but there's not many of those on the regular program anymore. They have cable TV in Waelder. We live a mile and a half out of Waelder, but we can't get it out here. We were going to buy our own satellite, but I've seen some bad results from some of those, so I'm very interested in GVEC. I've heard this before down at the GVEC office. In fact, Leon told me about it. I wish they'd get that going.

Mrs. McArthur: Is this within the near future?

McMurtry: I don't really know. I don't know the particulars on it.

Mr. McArthur: They have it in their agenda, then?

McMurtry: Yeah, they must be thinking about it. Do you think that maybe an electric company is maybe getting off the track when they do things like that?

Mrs. McArthur: No, I think the more service they can offer their customers, the better.

Mr. McArthur: I think that anything they can offer the country people, and that's what we are now, that's equivalent to the facilities you get in the cities; I think it's great. Of course, there's always some people that don't care for it if they've got to pay for it. And I'm kind of that way myself, but things that I think are good and we need for the quality of our lives, well, we probably can rake the money up.

McMurtry: The Member Services Division offers advice on how to save energy. Have you taken advantage of this?

Mr. McArthur: Well, in respect to these things we talked about a while ago, yes. They had to get permission, as I understand it; they got permission from each homeowner to do that. It didn't cost us directly, but I'm sure we paid for it down the line. But that's all right. I don't know that it saves us any money; I don't have any way of telling. But we let them go ahead and do it because they said it worked.

Mrs. McArthur: We haven't noticed the difference. We don't lack for hot water.

Mr. McArthur: And another thing, if they have a service department, like they'll come out and fix your washing machine, and they'll work on your air conditioner regardless of what brand it is and other things like that that pertain to electrical appliances. That's very good, too. They have some good people on that.

Mrs. McArthur: Their repairman, Frank, what was his name? Very efficient and very considerate man.

McMurtry: So he'll come out if the air conditioner dies, he'll come out and fix it up?

Mrs. McArthur: Washing machine or anything. Any electrical appliance.

Mr. McArthur: They'll come out and put you in a—see, I had to have a hot water heater put in that house up yonder. They come out and installed it, and the price was very reasonable. They've got to charge something, and I'm glad for that because everybody pays.

McMurtry: How does the service you get here compare with the electrical service you got up in Houston when you were there?

Mr. McArthur: I don't think we ever had any problems electrically in Houston. I will say this, in fairness, that the kilowatt hour was higher in Houston.

McMurtry: Do you consider electricity vital to your life, or do you consider it a luxury?

Mr. McArthur: I think it's essential. In respect that I think by having electricity and the convenience that it affords, that you're going to live longer. And if you live long enough, you're going to get old.

Mrs. McArthur: It's still in the luxury department because we could very definitely live without it. It's been proven that people could live without electricity. I don't want to. And I hope I never have to, but no, I don't think it's essential.

Mr. McArthur: Better start saving your money then. Has your attitude about having electricity changed since you were younger, when you first got it?

Mrs. McArthur: Oh, yeah, I take it for granted now.

McMurtry: You don't stick your finger in the drop cord either.

Mrs. McArthur: No, we don't do that anymore.

McMurtry: When you first got electricity in the house there in Shallowater, what kind of appliances did you have or did you get soon after that?

Mrs. McArthur: We didn't have anything. We had lights. It took the place of the kerosene lamp.

Mr. McArthur: Well, you probably bought an icebox at that time.

Mrs. McArthur: No, it was years. We were in Colorado City before—we moved there in '27, and that's the first icebox we had, and we didn't have it right at first; we had it in a cold drink box. A standing box that you put ice in. And we were glad to have it. That was the first ice box we ever had. It wasn't bad. Life was real good then.

Break in Interview

Mr. McArthur: I used to, when our kids were all living at home, three of them, I used to charge them a nickel every time I found their light on in their room and they weren't in it. And I'd tell them, "Now, we have the electricity here for your convenience, and if you need it, turn it on. If you're not using it, don't need it, don't turn it on. Turn it off." That's the way I still do my wife, but she doesn't pay much attention to me.

Mrs. McArthur: No, I don't, especially when he's the main one who leaves the lights on anymore. Used to, they didn't mind running your bill up; they wanted your bill up. Now we're conserving energy, and they want you to conserve it. Even the light people—

Mr. McArthur: We've had several, twice that I can recall, people come up here. We have a very active Lion's Club in Waelder for a small town like it is. We've had Clarence Hallmark who is their PR man, I believe, and John Fritz come to our Lion's Club and make talks on how to save electricity, what their plants are doing to keep ahead of demand and stuff like that.

McMurtry: So they're actually trying to get people to not use too much.

Mr. McArthur: That's correct. They are now. I don't know that GVEC is gung ho about getting you to use much electricity as they were in places like Houston. They buy their current from LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] and other people.

McMurtry: They probably make a little money on it. Are you fully retired, Mr. McArthur?

Mr. McArthur: Well, fully retired from a business, but I—

Mrs. McArthur: We're fully retired and work like fury.

Mr. McArthur: We run this six hundred-acre ranch here with one man helping us.

Mrs. McArthur: He's just this year—

Mr. McArthur: Well, he's been in there two years. We run this ranch with 125 mama cows.

McMurtry: The question here is "has it changed the way you work?"

Mr. McArthur: Yes, it has.

Mrs. McArthur: Not here because we had it in the beginning when we first came up here.

Mr. McArthur: You mean since we moved up here?

McMurtry: Well, electricity in general. Like when you were working in Houston, was there new equipment that came along that made things more efficient? Since you've been here, has there been new or automatic equipment that you've started using?

Mr. McArthur: Farming's been pretty much stable. We do like the heat pump. It's steady, even-type heat.

Mrs. McArthur: We've been very comfortable in this house.

Mr. McArthur: We did have to have a humidifier put in.

McMurtry: What important changes in your life, in all these years, have been related to electricity?

Mr. McArthur: Well, I'd say important changes were the comfort of it and the convenience that electricity affords with appliances.

Mrs. McArthur: It's a convenience we've made a necessity.

Mr. McArthur: I really think that electricity in the cities and the rural areas prolongs the longevity of people's lives. I remember growing up as a kid, I don't believe if I had to be as cold as we slept at night and got as hot as we got at night sleeping that I would have lived as long as I have. You get sinus problems and lung problems, colds. You know, exposure to extreme cold will kill you. So that's been prevented in the home. And another thing, on this ranch here, we have the convenience of lights all over our barn up there and our corral and our washing pens. We can work cattle and unload cattle at night because of the availability of electrical current.

Mrs. McArthur: And the security light is pretty well-named because I feel much more secure with that light lighting up the outside so I can see anyone approaching the house. I take a great deal of comfort in that.

End of interview