

Interview of Kathy Davison

From the Archives of the Wyoming Department of State Parks & Cultural Resources

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- Subject:

Kathy Davison

- Occupation:
Emergency
Management
Coordinator

- Interviewer:
Mark Junge

- Interview date:
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- Place of Interview:
Kemmerer, Wyoming

- Topic of interview: Cokeville Elementary School Bombing.

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Transcriber's notes: I have added some reference footnotes to this transcript where I thought appropriate. In most cases I have deleted redundant ands, ers, uhs, buts, false starts, etc. If I deleted an entire phrase, I have inserted ellipses ... Where you find brackets [] I have added words for explanation or to complete an awkward sentence. Parentheses () are used for incidental non-verbal sounds, like laughter. Words emphasized by the speaker are italicized.

Introduction: By Sue Castaneda, Program Coordinator

This oral history collection is entitled “Survivor is my Name” and features remembrances of the Cokeville, Wyoming Elementary School bombing of May 16, 1986¹. It is produced for the Wyoming State Archives by Sue Castaneda. The interviewer is Wyoming Historian, Mark Junge. The entire project is funded by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. No part of this audio recording or transcript may be reproduced in full or in part without written permission of the Wyoming State Archives. Here now is Kathy Davison, EMC and First Responder on the day of the bombing.

Mark Junge: My name is Mark Junge and today is the 23rd of September, 2010. We are at the Kathy and Ron Davison ranch—what, about eight miles east of Kemmerer?

Kathy Davison: Southeast of Kemmerer.

Mark Junge: Eight miles southeast of Kemmerer. It’s a beautiful ranch here in the Hams River Valley. To my right is Sue Castaneda who is the director of the Wyoming Oral History Project, working for the State. To my left is Kathy Davison who is going to tell us her story about what occurred on May 16, 1986.

Kathy Davison: This is Kathy Davison. I was the Emergency Management Coordinator on May 16, as well as part time dispatcher.

Mark Junge: Okay. So what happened that day?

Kathy Davison: Well, it started out—you know, a little history before—I had been a dispatcher for the Sheriff’s office and I had worked in Emergency Management and when the coordinator left they appointed me as the coordinator. I had been a coordinator like six weeks. There were a lot of things that happened that I didn’t know about emergency management. We had a full scale exercise and we pulled everybody in from all over the county to work on this exercise to see how responders would

¹ The **Cokeville Elementary School hostage crisis** occurred on May 16, 1986, at Cokeville, Wyoming, United States, when former town marshal David Young, and his wife Doris Young, took 167 children and adults hostage at **Cokeville Elementary School**. After a two-and-a-half hour standoff, a gasoline bomb the couple was carrying went off prematurely, injuring Doris Young while David Young was out of the room. Returning to the scene, David Young shot his wife, then himself. All the hostages escaped, though 79 were hospitalized with burns and injuries. [Wikipedia](#)

respond which was a pretty impressive exercise because every didn't know everybody but we all did that. That had happened about three weeks prior and then that morning we had some flooding going on in Cokeville. I was called to go over there to meet with the Corps of Engineers and the County Officers to look at the flooding because it was going to take out about twelve homes if we didn't do something about it. So we walked up and down the river all morning looking at the flooding and then we had a meeting in the town hall to decide what we were going to do for the flooding situation.

So at that time, we had just concluded our meeting and we were leaving the town hall. As I went out the door this girl ran into me. [Princess, David Young's daughter] She started hollerin', she said, "I need a Sheriff or somebody!" And one of the guys said, "Well, here's Kathy, she works for the Sheriff's Office." I said, "What's the matter?" And she said, "My Dad went in the school to take it over and a bomb's going to go off and it's going to kill a whole lot of people."

I said, "What is he doing?" And she said, "It's my Dad and he's going to take over the school and he's going to kill people." I was trying to get information. I told the secretary to call the Sheriff, the deputy that was in Cokeville and she said, "Well, he's out of town." So I told her to call the Marshall, and she said, "He's out of town." And I said, "Then call the Sheriff in Kemmerer."

So she called the dispatch in Kemmerer and told them and she said, "They won't listen to me." I just took the phone and I said to dispatcher, "This is Kathy and we need everybody headed to Cokeville that we can get because there's an incident at the school." And she said, "Oh, my God! This is the real thing!" And I said, "It is."

(Phone rings and interview is interrupted)

Mark Junge: I should mention that to Kathy's left is her husband, Ron, who just answered the phone.

Kathy Davison: Oh, you mean the phone here? I don't know where it rang.

Mark Junge: Well, I think you were—do you remember?

Kathy Davison: Well, I'll just start over when I ran into the girl at—

Sue Castaneda: I'm sorry to do that to you, but I want it to be clean.

Kathy Davison: Okay, anyway, the girl ran into me—when I opened the door she ran into me and she said that her dad had taken over the school and he was going to kill a lot of people—or there would be a lot of people killed if we didn't do something quick. And I said, “Well, what is he doing?” And she said, “He's just going to kill a lot of people so you're going to have to do something.”

So I talked to the secretary at the town hall and I told her to call the town Marshall and she said, “He's out of town.” And I said, “Then call the deputy.” And she said, “He's out of town too.” So I said, “Well then, call the Sheriff's office in Kemmerer and tell them to tell the Sheriff, and when she called she said, “They don't believe it.” So I just took the phone and I told the dispatcher who I was and I said we've got to get everybody we got headed to Cokeville. And she said, “Oh this the real thing?” And I said, “Yes, it is the real thing.”

So then she started working on getting everybody headed—I had a State person with me, Grant Sorenson, from the State Emergency Management Office. He'd been there looking at the flood with us. So he and I started getting things together. The first thing that happened is that I was asking the girl questions at the same time and she told me that if anybody went to the school her dad would start shooting the kids. He would shoot them with a .22 because he didn't want to kill them, he just wanted us to know he was serious.

We had to set the road block and we went out and put—all we had was a little red car to put in the street. So we did that, and when we did that, several of the firemen got upset because they thought we were doing a mock accident and this

one said, “You know, if this is a mock accident I’m going to punch somebody!” and I said, “Well punch Grant because he’s the one. But it isn’t a mock accident, it’s a true thing.” He said, “Oh, well then what do we need to do?” and I said, “Well you need to get some vehicle here besides this little red car.” Because we looked really unofficial.

About that time another lady came up and she said, “I’m going in the school because my child is in there.” And I said, “No, you can’t go in there.” She said, “Well, I’m going!” and I said “If you do I’m going to arrest you.” And she said, “Oh, okay.” She turned around and left, and Grant said, “Do you have a gun?” And I said “No.” and he said, “Do you have a badge?” and I said “No.” And he said, “Oh, I understand!”

Anyway, this is just some of the things that happened. Then in the meantime we could see all the parents and grandparents were headed to the town hall. And knowing that all of them had people in there, we went over there. I didn’t know what to do but I told them go down to the Senior Center and make sandwiches and coffee because we’re going to need it. I sent ‘em down there and they made sandwiches and coffee.

It was about forty minutes when the Sheriff got there. He just drove up and he said, “What’s going on?” And I told him, and he said, “What have you done?” and I told him, and—thinking now that I was through that he was there, but he said, “No, I want you to start evacuating houses.” And I said, “Well, that’s not my job.” He said, “It is now.”

So a highway patrolman and I started evacuating houses. The second house we went into this woman was crying and she said her husband had a gun and he wasn’t going to let anyone take his house. I said, “Well, this house won’t be here if the bomb goes off, which could happen.” I explained that to her and then I told her if everybody has a gun, innocent people will get killed. And he just handed

me his gun and they went to the Senior Center! It just worked out that way.

In the meantime, the Sheriff and I went to the town hall and started making phone calls. We had all of our resources lined up and the Sheriff told me that he was going to have the bomb squad—or the tactical team from Jackson coming in and that we would get them to see what we had to do. It started about 1:30, but in the meantime, the Sheriff and I were standing there talking and we heard a loud noise and the Sheriff told me that the bomb went off and I said, “No, it’s the fire alarm.” But we went out and immediately we could see that the bomb had gone off.

I ran to the triage center where we had set up the triage because we actually had six ambulances on scene we had all of law enforcement from surrounding areas and we had the bomb squad on the way and we had the tactical team on the way. So we were as well prepared as—we’d arranged for buses to be on standby if we got the kids.

When the bomb went off the Sheriff and I ran around the side of the building and we could see these little kids comin’ out the window. The firemen were throwin’ them out the windows and they were just—as soon as they hit the ground they were runnin’ and they had black faces. It was really bad because they all looked like they were burned and cryin’ and a lot of ‘em we didn’t catch. They ran all the way home. But the ones that we did catch we started taken to triage and—it looked like popcorn flyin’ out the windows. Those little kids were just runnin’ and we couldn’t figure out why when they hit the ground they were runnin’ but David Young, the guy who’d taken over the school told ‘em that if they got out there were people waitin’ to shoot them. So they were runnin’ as far as they—you know, a lot of ‘em ran all the way home. In fact we had four that ended up really tragically burned and three of those kids ran all the way home. Because they didn’t—that’s where they were goin’ to get safe.

Anyway, at that time, in the meantime, Princess was tellin’ me that her father had worked in Cokeville. She didn’t want to tell his name, but she told me that—

finally I told her if we found out his name that maybe somebody could talk to him. And she said she didn't want anybody to know that her father was doin' that. So I finally got David Young was her father. And then she told me her mother was in there so immediately I thought that maybe it was a domestic so I told the Sheriff and she said, "No, she's helping him and they're going to take over the school. And they want a school bus." Well, they had called and they wanted a school bus there because he was going to take the kids and leave in a school bus eventually.

So we had the school buses right there which turned out to be a real plus because we were able to transport those kids to the hospitals. We took 'em to Kemmerer and Afton and Montpelier Hospitals which were all about forty five miles away. We just put 'em in the buses and took 'em. Then, at that time, David Young started calling the town hall and he told us what he wanted and it was—I can't remember—I think it was a million dollars a kid or something like that. And that he'd already sent a letter to the President of the United States and to the Governor and everybody and also to the LDS Church because he knew that if the government didn't pay the money that the Church probably would. She said that he just was mad.

So we went through the whole thing. We got the triage set up and we had the kids comin' out and we took them to the hospital. At that time I was over by the school and they threw a body out. My only thought was what we were going to do with all the parents when these kids came out and they weren't alive. It turned out the body belonged to David Young's wife. We didn't lose anybody, but we didn't know that.

And then after that was over we just—at one point a guy from the Senior Center came over and said, "You know, we're out of meat." This was just a incident that happened. He said, "We're out of sandwich stuff." And I said, "You go to that little store and you buy all the meat and all the bread they got." So they kept

makin' sandwiches and I said, "Just keep makin' sandwiches." So they did and we were just tryin' to do—get things goin' and get things—you know, find out what happened.

In the meantime the law enforcement officers came and were tryin' to go into the school to see what actually happened. 'Cause we could still hear gunfire goin' off and we thought they were shootin'. But what it turned out to be is he had put boxes of .22 shells in the bomb and that's what was goin' off the whole time. But it sounded like—well, of course it did. We thought he was shootin' somebody. So then after we did that—at one point the Sheriff came over and he said, "Kathy, I don't know what you're going to do with all the sandwiches. The whole kitchen is full of sandwiches." I said, "Maybe we can freeze them and feed them to seniors! I don't know!" Anyway, Deb and I laughed about that because it was—there was sandwiches everywhere.

So we went through the whole day and then toward night, it was about 10 o'clock at night and I finally told the Sheriff, "You know, I'm goin' home." And he said, "Well, you can't go home." I said, "I am. If you don't take me home I'm gonna go catch a trucker. 'Cause I've had it." He said, "Not yet. You're gonna go help at the crime scene. Go do a security check." And I said, "No, I'm not." So we got in a little argument. But two of the officers just grabbed me by the arm and said we're gonna go. And I was mad, so all the way to the school I was tellin' them how dumb he was he'd made me do that and when we got to the school he was right behind me! I didn't know it. And he just put his arm around me and said, "You just have to come with me to the school." And that was Deb Wolfsley.

So we went in the school and he shone the light around. He said, "You had to see this." There was a place that had been marked off but all of the light sockets were melted and the windows were broken out. Wherever the kids were sitting there was just like a line around the room. And the bullet holes. They'd missed all of it. They'd all gone above the kids head. But the walls were full of holes and all of

the sockets were melted and none of those kids got really—you know, we didn't know how bad they were but we knew they were all accounted for. So he said, "You had to see this, Kathy, for your own sake."

Mark Junge: Did you see the outline of an angel.

Kathy Davison: Oh, yeah. It was very obvious.

Mark Junge: Really. On the blackboard?

Kathy Davison: Mm hm. You know, at the time I probably didn't think of an angel, but the outline was there and I remember Deb showed me that. He just shone the light all around the room so we were looking all the way at everything. Then he said that I could go home and one of the deputies would bring me home which turned out to be, his name was Ron Douglas. He had a very traumatic time and he had a hard time. But we talked a lot on the way home. He had been in Vietnam so this really affected him. He eventually ended up quitting law enforcement.

So the Sheriff told me he wanted me back first thing in the morning and to bring one of the county vehicles because—and get some sample jars and stuff from the mine because they had a lot of stuff like that. So when I got home—Ron was working, but when I got home I picked up my two little girls and they were scared to death. They only had got out of school and they knew that I was in Cokeville and they knew the school was bombed and they didn't know where I was so they were both traumatized by that. So the next morning when I had to go back my youngest daughter said, "Mom, don't go to Cokeville. I don't want you to go to Cokeville anymore."

But I had to, and I did, and I met with Rick Haskell and Deb and I took all the stuff I we were supposed to. I went through the bomb scene with Rick and he showed us how the things happened that made the bomb go off. Because the flour was wet. He'd made it out of flour and gasoline and the flour had all gotten wet for no reason. Then there was a wire cut. We knew this guy—everyone told us

this guy knew how to make bombs and it was a well-made bomb. The bomb went off totally different. It was supposed to go off like a grain explosion bomb and it went off like a fire bomb. If it went off the way he planned it would have leveled the whole wing of the school but it didn't go off that way.

We went through that and Grant Sorenson that was supposed to be at Camp Guernsey because he was in the Guard, they wouldn't let him move his car to go, so he was all upset. He said, "I'm gonna get into lots of trouble if I don't show up." Well, it turned out that Rich Haskell was also supposed to be there. When he got there he told him and he said, "Well I don't know what we're going to do." Well, Governor Herschler flew in and he went over—so Grant went over and he said, "We're supposed to be in Guernsey and I've been trying to get there all night." Governor Herschler looked and he said, "What in the hell do you want me to do, take your place?" And Grant said, "Yes!" And that was the end of that.

As soon as this happened the media just swarmed in Cokeville. They took all the motel rooms. And of course, we only had one café. They cleaned the café out so the emergency workers—

Sue Castaneda: But you still had all those sandwiches!

Kathy Davison: Yeah! They all ate those sandwiches all week. They told me they'd never eat baloney again. It just worked out that there was plenty of food for 'em. They did have—people let 'em stay in their homes and so we worked all that out. But there was a lot of things happened that day. As a new coordinator I had no idea what I was doing, but everything went the way it was supposed to. Everything I did turned out right except at one point this one fireman kept sending me notes that he wanted a Porta-Pottie, 'cause there's no Porta-Potties. And Rick Haskell still tells me that. He'll send me a note, "Where are the Porta-Potties?" We didn't have anything for our responders like that. 'Course I had Porta-Potties for—but anyway those are just some of the things that happened from my experience.

After it was done, you know we didn't lose one child. And we didn't lose one teacher. We didn't lose anybody except the perpetrator killed his wife and himself. And when he shot through the smoke we figured out he couldn't see and there was still kids in there. But he didn't hit any kids. He hit his wife. He shot himself in the bathroom so none of the kids really witnessed that. It was just a lot of things that were felt—that we know. There was a lot of intervention.

Mark Junge: How many times did you talk to David on the dispatcher's phone?

Kathy Davison: I talked to David twice. Then from there someone else answered the phone. The only time I talked to David was when he called and I was helping answer phones at that point. I was in the town hall and he told me about the ransom, the money he wanted. And then the Sheriff took the phone over. Then the next time he called it was because somebody had done something and I just handed the phone to the Sheriff. I didn't answer him.

Mark Junge: Did he sound panicked?

Kathy Davison: He didn't sound so panicked so much as he was angry and he sounded sick, which he was sick. He was a diabetic and he didn't have any insulin. We were tryin' to get insulin in to him. We'd called the hospital in Montpelier. It was sending insulin over for him.

Mark Junge: Oh, did he say he was diabetic and needed it?

Kathy Davison: I don't know if he said it or we knew it. But the Sheriff had arranged—we had arranged already for the doctor to send insulin over.

Mark Junge: Meanwhile, what is Princess doing all this time.

Kathy Davison: Princess is sitting there just beside herself, crying, and I was trying to console her, but it's pretty hard. She told me at that time, she said there were two guys in the van that he had handcuffed and put in the van. I said, "Where's the van." She said, "It's outside because he told me to take it." So I had some officers go get the

two guys and bring them in. They couldn't hardly talk they were so scared, but what I got out of them is that they had come here because David Young had told them he had this great business thing going. They had been sending him money for several years. He had called them and told them it was time for them to come. There were actually three of them but one of them—I think it was Mendenhall, maybe—when he came he wouldn't tell 'em what was going on so he left.

Mark Junge: Oh, this is the Harrison from Jackson Hole.

Kathy Davison: Yeah, he left. So then the other two, they stayed because he told them in the morning he would let them know the whole plan. They stayed, and when he told them the whole plan they didn't want anything to do with it. So he handcuffed them in the van and left them in the van.

So Princess and her mother had helped carry the guns and everything into the school. Then Princess told him she didn't want to do it so he threw the keys at her and told her to leave. That's when she came over there. And then she told me that her dad was a really bad person and that he would kill people. She was very upset. She didn't want her dad to get killed, of course. She just didn't know what to do. But she was talking to us the whole time trying to tell us whatever we could find out that might help. And we did find out that he'd been the Marshall in Cokeville like seven years prior and had gotten fired, but also that this wasn't the only school he had looked at. I think they told me that he had looked at schools in Afton, Big Piney, La Barge, but he chose this school because the law enforcement was so minimal. And he also knew the LDS community was there. He was pretty sure he'd get the money.

After that the Sheriff wanted me to help Ron Hartley go through the records because he was tryin' to put it all together. Ron was having a very hard time too but—so we did that. We spent days and days going through everything. He had diaries he had kept and he had all this stuff in the school with him. He had his diaries and I think he had seventeen rifles, he had everything that he possibly

could. He even had all his report cards and other mementos from growin' up. Everything was with him. We concluded that no matter what happened he was going to kill those kids. Because his letter to the President and everybody said that he was going to go to a new world where he was going to be the king and he was going to take the best of this world with him, which were the little kids and the money.

Mark Junge: Did Princess ever talk to you about how he was raised or what's wrong with her dad?

Kathy Davison: Hm mm. She didn't to me. She may have with Ron. She didn't talk to me about that. I sat in on some of the interviews but I mostly went through the diaries with Ron. Recorded things from the diaries.

Mark Junge: What did you think of the diaries?

Kathy Davison: They were horrible! You could tell right away that he was a very possessive man. He talked about what his wife ate and how much she weighed. In her diaries, she said if she gained a pound he punished her. He was a very controlling person. We could see that he was one of those people that probably could talk people into doing what they did. But in this case, those two guys didn't really know. I felt really strong they didn't know. They were just very, very upset.

Mark Junge: Did you let 'em go?

Kathy Davison: The Sheriff interviewed 'em. After he got there they took 'em in and interviewed 'em. And I don't know how long they kept 'em. But they did let 'em go. And then Princess, she stayed there quite a while. And I'm not sure what the Sheriff ended up doing with her.

Mark Junge: Whatever happened to Princess?

Kathy Davison: She's in Nevada. The FBI kept tabs on her for a long time because they thought that maybe we had missed something. But eventually they knew that she never

really did know. And she was only nineteen. She was a young girl then. And he was a very demanding person. And she did say that. She said you never told her dad no. that was not—you know—anything he wanted, that's what happened.

Mark Junge: Who do you think the heroes were that day? You have to be considered a hero.

Kathy Davison: Oh, no. the heroes were everybody. I can't believe—those EMTs, those law enforcement people, all had people in that school. And every one of them did their job. It was pretty amazing that they could function knowing that their own children—

Mark Junge: But you functioned too.

Kathy Davison: Yeah, but it was easier for me. I knew all the people, but I didn't have my own family in there. I think that the heroes that day were the EMTs and the law enforcement, the people that went through and did their jobs. No matter what happened they were there doing their jobs.

Mark Junge: Do you have recurring nightmares on this by any chance?

Kathy Davison: Not anymore.

Mark Junge: You did for a while?

Kathy Davison: Yeah, I did. Yeah, for a while. I think you always think—for me it was like what could we have done that the bomb wouldn't have went off? And I think that watchin' those kids go through—and the parents actually—the parents—our mental health people did a wonderful job. We had debriefings immediately. We tried to include everybody in town. Every person that was affected. The mental health did a really good job. We went through that for weeks.

Then when they started restoring the room, they took all the kids through the school to show 'em what happened. And then as it got better, they took 'em through again to show 'em how that was rebuilding. And by the time school

started they called it a happy place. And the kids could see that. They related their healing to what they were seeing.

Mark Junge: Why did they want to take you in so badly? For the same reason?

Kathy Davison: I think so. I think the Sheriff knew I'd had enough and I think he just wanted to make sure I was debriefed.

Mark Junge: So what have been the long term effects for you? Has this made you a stronger person?

Kathy Davison: Oh, I think definitely! You know, how quickly things happen. And I think one of the big things for me, of course, the field I was in was preparedness. So seeing that—what preparedness can do—because for the first time in our life we had the exercise, and everybody, all of our responders came to that exercise and worked together. Before that they didn't even know each other's name. I think that was a big thing. That is one of the things that I thought was amazing. Because we had never had La Barge, Cokeville, Kemmerer, everybody. At that time you know we started knowing what our resources were and where they were. And I think it made me a better person for the fact—you know—you just know—it certainly made me stronger spiritually. There was no doubt in my mind things couldn't have just happened that way. And then when I started hearing—Ron Hartley and I spent a lot—many many hours together and he started tellin' me about his children. His little boy seeing the angels. At that time Ron wasn't very religious and we talked about that and he said, "Kathy, when he went through our albums and pointed out that—my grandmother, who he'd never seen, I can't deny that." And I said, "Why would you? Why would you deny that? Because he was only six years old and he seen something and something guided him." And that's what Ron said, "I just know, but it is a hard concept."

Mark Junge: If you could do this all over again, would you—what do you think? Would you go through it? I mean, you said it had its beneficial effects. Would you go through it

or do you wish it never happened?

Kathy Davison: Well, I think it'd been better if it had never happened, of course. And I certainly would not want myself there, not in that position. I think there were a lot of people that could've—that were much more qualified. Could've done a better job. I think that it could have been an amazing thing but everything turned out that I think that it could have been better. You know we couldn't have had more resources on hand than we had.

Mark Junge: I want you to explain something to me. This question popped into my head last night after interviewing all these people, Kathy, and that is, if God was really a part of this whole thing, if the angels were a part of this whole thing, why didn't he do the same thing for the people at Virginia Tech, or for the people at the bombing in Wisconsin, or Columbine? Why didn't he do the same thing?

Kathy Davison: Well, my mind is that God has a plan. Your plan is different. And perhaps there's a reason that that had to happen that way. Perhaps there's a reason it had to happen in Cokeville the way it did. Perhaps there's a reason that it was Cokeville and not Kemmerer, not La Barge, not Afton, not any of those other schools. But I think God has his own plan we don't know about. We can't second guess why things happen.

Mark Junge: So the fact that everybody survived this in Cokeville except for the two perpetrators is God's reward for everybody being obedient?

Kathy Davison: No, I don't believe that. I just think that's God's plan for each one of those people. I think that God has to—you know, he has a plan, and when your time's up whatever the reason, and perhaps God was trying to bring us to attention to what's started goin' on in our country from then on. Our country has got away from belief so much and it just keeps goin' that way and maybe—I don't know!

Mark Junge: Well, maybe one thing it did do, which I think is an interesting comment that you made is that it brought some people and communities together that would never

have come together.

Kathy Davison: Yeah. After Cokeville, I would have thought if anything happened anywhere in our county we could handle it because of the way we worked together and the camaraderie-ship we built.

Mark Junge: You had some fire drills though, right, luckily?

Kathy Davison: The school had. We didn't. We had this main big exercise. At the time we did it on an earthquake. So we went through a lot of the same things that we had to do which was a Godsend, because I didn't—I had no clue what I was doing. Everyone said, well you knew what to do and I'm like, no I did not! I prayed a lot!

Mark Junge: Had you had training on this? This was your first day on the job wasn't it?

Kathy Davison: It was six weeks. I had trained on some of these things. I'd worked with the emergency coordinator before. But I hadn't been—I'd done the paperwork basically.

Mark Junge: So this was your first emergency?

Kathy Davison: Oh, yeah! By far!

Mark Junge: You know, you talk about you've changed your perspective of this whole thing? In what way have you changed?

Kathy Davison: My first focus was always on the preparedness side. And I spoke at seminars all over the country. I did a lot of work in Virginia with seminars talking about how prepared we were and how this preparedness is so important and I think that when I'd go back there and speak they always didn't want to hear the spiritual side. They wanted to hear the nuts and bolts and why it was successful and I would always tell them, you know we had six ambulances on site. And those guys would just laugh! They say we have more than that in one garage! And I said, yeah but

you don't understand. We have *one* ambulance in town. But we had six ambulances before the bomb went off which is a big thing because they had to come from a long ways. They were all there. Big departments, they couldn't understand why that was that important. But it was pretty important because we were ready. As ready as we probably could have been.

Sue Castaneda: Why earthquakes? Do you have earthquakes up here?

Kathy Davison: There's a fault line that runs from Cokeville to Kemmerer. So when we'd planned the exercise I tried to find something that would affect all of the county so that all of the county participants would want to be involved. What happened, when I became coordinator, I was only there a couple weeks and the state notified us that if we didn't have a full scale exercise—they had give us grants to build our EOC—that they would take the money back.

Mark Junge: What's EOC?

Kathy Davison: EOC? Emergency Operations Center. So we had to have an exercise within a year and the coordinator before me hadn't done that. And they said if we didn't do an exercise and it wasn't a good exercise, which was a full-scale exercise, that we wouldn't be able to get our money to pass off. So that was the first thing I had to do was get an exercise together. At that time I thought exercising was jumping jacks or something. I had no clue! But it turned out the state office came down and they helped. We went through and we set up a really nice, a really good exercise and it went off really well. The only glitch we had was communication which, no matter what we had communication, you know because of the small area. And the first thing that happened to us in Cokeville was, we lost our phones. 'Cause they didn't have cell phones in those days. So we lost our phone service cause everybody was callin' in and tied it up. So we had to have the media go on the radio and the TV and say don't call Cokeville because we need those phone lines.

Mark Junge: What did you think of the media's role in all this.

Kathy Davison: I think the media was—they caused us a lot of problems comin' in because they just came right in. They overwhelmed us. But on the other hand they helped us too because they were able to get word out that we couldn't get out because our phones were tied up. So they played a really important role in letting the people know what was goin' on and not to call Cokeville. And then they tried to keep an update for the people that were interested.

Mark Junge: Did they have enough time to get cameras in place and take pictures of this?

Kathy Davison: Oh, they brought helicopters in. Before the Sheriff got there the helicopters started coming in. I don't even know how they got it that quick.

Mark Junge: Somebody said there wasn't any TV coverage because they couldn't get their cameras in place when the bomb went off.

Kathy Davison: Yeah, that's probably true. But the helicopters were there with their personnel, but they didn't have—after the bomb went off they didn't have their cameras in place, no. But they were runnin' up and down interviewing people. Even before the bomb went off they were tryin' to get interviews with people.

Mark Junge: Isn't it a little strange you wouldn't have somebody from like KSL or one of those stations have one of his photographers just stationed at the school with the camera?

Kathy Davison: Well, they couldn't. the school was perimetered off. Where we set the road block up, when you went to the school, when you turned off the main street we had a road block and we did the perimeter clear around. There was no way they could have got closer.

Mark Junge: And they wouldn't have allowed photographers?

Kathy Davison: Oh, no! We didn't let anybody go—well, I just said nobody. And then when the

Sheriff got there he said nobody. We didn't let anybody through.

Mark Junge: Did you have any more troubles with people with guns?

Kathy Davison: No. You know, my own self, that was the only two instance, well actually that was the only instance that I knew was that one that I tried to evacuate. And I don't think we had any trouble. Immediately, once the people understood why we were putting the roadblock up then everybody came forward and helped. You know, the firemen, and they replaced that car with a fire engine. To block off the street.

Mark Junge: Can we go back a step here? You were talking about how this incident in your mind has morphed into something else over the years. Into something spiritual. You were talking about Virginia? Okay.

Kathy Davison: Well, what I did is when I went around doin' these presentations I would always get emotional. And I thought that it was just time for me to quit doin' that. But then some groups called and asked if I would talk about the spiritual side which—I had really talked to a lot of people and a lot of people told me the same thing. That their kids saw those angels. And the more that the Sheriff and I put things together, and the other officers as well, we could see that there was something else that helped. Because I was brand new. I didn't know anything. But everything I did turned out right. And I had no idea I was doing anything right. You know, when the bomb went off, all the things that were wrong with the bomb, it just seemed that there had to be some intervention.

Mark Junge: There were too many circumstances.

Kathy Davison: Yeah, plus the kids seeing the angels. And I don't doubt for a minute that happened. Because a lot of kids seen the angels. And the more they talked about it the more I could understand. When the bomb went off it was not very far from the door but most of those kids went out the window. Because instead of going through the door to the door. You know, the natural thing would have been for those kids to go through the door but most of them went through the window. I

think it's because those angels were pushin' them. That's what the kids said, "The angels told us." I don't even know if we had a dozen kids, maybe not even six kids that went out the door, that even tried to go out the door. Yeah, and they were closer to the door but they all went out the window. And I've always thought that was phenomenal. Because if I were in a building and something happened, I would go to the door.

Mark Junge: Plus, they were trying to do that.

Kathy Davison: Yeah, because of their drills. But they didn't.

Mark Junge: Okay, so this led you to sort of change your mind about this whole incident?

Kathy Davison: Not change my mind, but certainly I could see that I do believe there was intervention there. I think that that was probably always there. I was focusing on the preparedness because that was my job. And when I talked to groups that's what they wanted to hear is what we can do to help us through something. What would you do and what we could do and maybe something that we did would help 'em. So that was my first focus. The very first time I got called to speak at the National Search and Rescue I refused to go because I had never been out of Kemmerer and I didn't want to fly to Reno and I went and told the commissioners—well, they called me over there first and they said, "There's a bill here for \$500 for lunch meat and bread. Who authorized that?" And I said, "I did." And they said, "Well who told you to?" And I said, "Nobody." And they said, "Well, who's going to pay for it?" I said, "You can take it out of my wages if you want to." And they started laughing, they said no it's fine.

But then they said they wanted me to—they had got a request that I would go speak at Reno. And I said, "No, I'm not going to do that." And the commissioner said, "Why aren't you?" And I said, "Because I don't like to fly and I'm not a speaker and I don't want to do it." Well, they talked to me for a long time and finally they said, "Well, what if we told you you wouldn't have a job?" I said,

“Then I guess I won’t have a job.” So I left and then the commissioner came over who was Russ Thornic and had five grandchildren in the school and he said, “Wonder if I went with you?” I said, “Would you speak?” And he said, “Yeah.” And I said, “Then I won’t have to?” And he said, “No, they still want you to speak.” And I said “I don’t think I can do that.” And he said, “Yes you can.”

So we went to Reno and we talked at the National Convention and—

Mark Junge: Was it hard?

Kathy Davison: It was very hard, and that’s where I met Pete Minitree. He was kind of a psychiatrist and he kinda debriefed and talked to me and then we started getting requests all over and I kept telling Russ that I didn’t want to go. And Russ said, “We need to go because it’s important that people hear the story and what we did, what happened.” We did a lot of traveling, and then the National Institute for Emergency Management in Emmetsburg, Maryland contacted me and had me go out there. They did the case study and everything and then—I don’t know. I did it for a long time and then I just felt like, you know, after a while you think you’re a boob ‘cause all you do is you keep goin’ through this.

And then what happened when Russ and I were doin’ this, we started getting churches that would ask us to speak on the spiritual side. So we started talking about that and many times we would go for a seminar and some church would come say would you just come and give a presentation? So, I didn’t want to do that either, but Russ and I did that. Then after that I just felt like the most important thing about the whole incident was the spiritual side. Whatever we had learned from the preparedness, probably they had heard that side.

Mark Junge: It was secondary to the spiritual message.

Kathy Davison: And in reality it was. The spiritual message should have been the one given the whole time.

Mark Junge: Are you LDS.

Kathy Davison: I am.

Mark Junge: Ron is too?

Kathy Davison: Yeah.

Mark Junge: So do you now testify more vehemently on behalf of the spirit, or God or the trinity, or do you—

Kathy Davison: Oh, I think so. I don't know just from this, but we've got a lot more active. We were pretty inactive for a long time. I think that there's no doubting it's given us a stronger testimony.

Mark Junge: Well you said in your writing here that there were lessons that you learned. They weren't, I take it, just preparatory lessons?

Kathy Davison: No. No, I think one important lesson is to be in tune with the spirit. To know when God's prompting you to do something. So many times a little voice might tell us something and we don't do it and I think that's an important thing because that day, Deb and I prayed together a lot, the Sheriff. Deb was a lawman, I mean, he was the Sheriff and he'd never been through anything like that as well. So together we prayed quite a few times and it really helped. They told us the whole high school shut down and they had a prayer. The entire school! Which was really a neat thing that they could all come together and do that.

Mark Junge: How did you feel when you heard we were coming over?

Kathy Davison: I was a little apprehensive, but I was also very happy to think that this was going to be part of our history, because it should be. So I was glad for that.

Mark Junge: Why should it be?

Kathy Davison: Because I think it's a very important event. I think it's something—you know

when Columbine happened, and when those other things started happening I think it was a shame that they didn't call some of our mental health people, our people that had gone through this to figure out what they did and did right and did wrong. But I think it's a story that needs to be told as well as the fact that there really is a God. If you believe in God!

Mark Junge: Well, we've talked for fifty-one minutes. Do you still feel apprehension? How do you feel now?

Kathy Davison: You know, I just hope I haven't left anything out. I hope that the story's there that needs to be told.

Conclusion of interview

This oral history was produced by the Wyoming State Archives for the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources. It was produced by Sue Castaneda. The interviewer was Wyoming Historian Mark Junge. The entire project is funded by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund.