

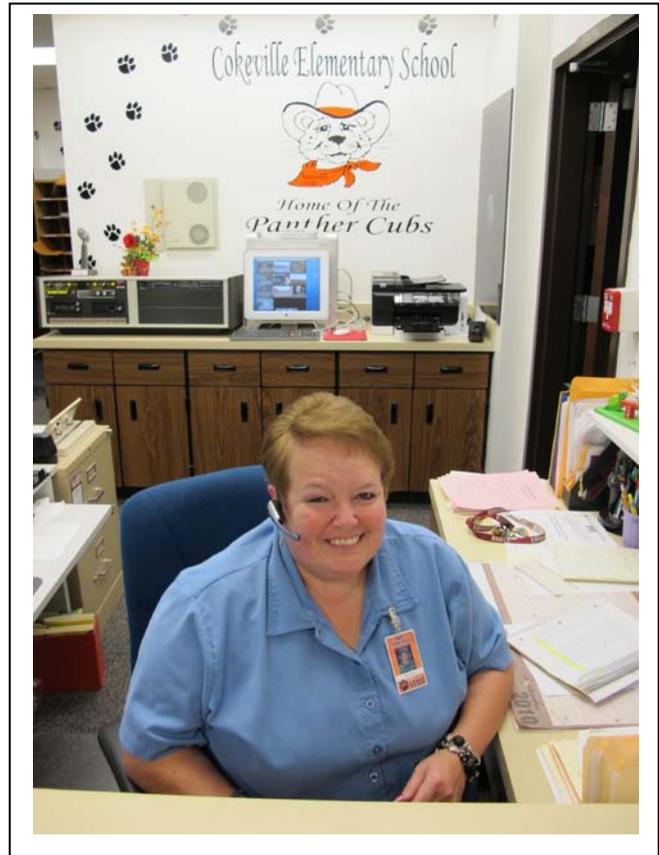
Interview of Christine Martina Cook

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

Transcribed and edited by Russ Sherwin, 2/22/2011, Prescott, Arizona

Version: V-1 First Draft for review

- Subject: Christine “Tina” Cook
- Occupation: Receptionist at Cokeville Elementary School, then and still.
- Interviewer: Mark Junge
- Interview date: September 22, 2010
- Place of Interview: Cokeville, Wyoming.
- Topic of interview: Cokeville Elementary School Bombing.
- Source recording for transcription: MP3 Podcast from Wyoming Dept of State Parks and Cultural Resources.



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 Christine Cook, the receptionist and first hostage of the Cokeville Elementary School incident.

Mark Junge: Today is the 22nd of September, 2010. My name is Mark Junge and I’m here in the house of Charlotte Freeman, at the dining room table with Tina Cook—Christine Cook—our interviewee. Next to her on her right is Sue Castaneda who is the directory of the Wyoming Oral History Project. So, Tina, why don’t you just go ahead and give me that information I wanted.

Tina Cook: Okay. My name is Christine Martina Cook. I was the secretary at Cokeville Elementary on the day of the bombing, May 16, 1986. It was right after our lunch hour and I was expecting a young lady to show up to interview for a kindergarten position. I looked up, there were three people standing at my counter. The one told me she was there to interview for the job. I told her that the principal was at lunch right then and that he should be back in a few minutes if she’d like to take a seat across the hall from my desk. So she said, “Well, could you point me to a restroom.” So I sent her off to a restroom.

The other two people just kept standing there and I thought they were her parents, which she never forgave me for! When they kept standing there I looked at them and said, “Is there something I could help you with sir?” And he said, “Mrs. Cook?” He read my name plaque. “Are you Mrs. Cook?” and I said, “Yes, I am.”

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*

He said, “Mrs. Cook, this is a revolution. We’re taking your school hostage. Step back from your desk. Don’t touch any buzzers, don’t push any buttons, don’t sound any alarms, don’t answer any phones.” So I did. I said, “So what is this all about?” and he said, “Like I told you your school is being taken hostage. You are now a hostage.”

He said to his wife, “Go around the desk.” He told me to unplug the telephone, and I reached over and unplugged it and he said, “How many telephones do you have in the building?” At that point we only had five and I told him five. He said, “Is that the principal’s office?” I said, “Yes, it is.” He said, “Go into the office and unplug the phone.”

I started around my desk to go into his office and he just screamed, “STOP!” At that point I was pretty scared that he was going to shoot me in the back. He said to his wife, “You go with her.” So we went into the principal’s office and she said, “Mrs. Cook, I guess you realize that the life of everyone in this building is in your hands right now. How you react will make all the difference in the world. You’re doing fine, Mrs. Cook. You’re doing fine. Just unplug the telephone and let’s go back out.”

So I unplugged the telephone and went back to my office. About that time our kindergarten teacher—no, our first grade teacher, I’m sorry—came into my office to get her mail and they took her hostage. Then the UPS lady came while we were still there and she was taken hostage. Then Mr. Miller, our music teacher came down the hall and he just walked on by and went back again and then they took him hostage. Then Mr. Moore came from fifth grade around the corner and David Young said, “Well, Mr. Moore!” And Rocky looked at him and he said, “Do you remember me?” And Rocky said, “Nope. Don’t believe I do.” And he said, “I’m David Young. I used to rent a place from you.” And then Rocky remembered him. They conversed for a couple of minutes and he pulled a gun on Rocky and told him not to try anything, or he’d blow his head off.

Then he decided to take us down the hallway—oh, Verlene Benion also was an aide at the Elementary and she got caught up at my office also. And he said, “We need a room.” His wife said, “Well, there’s a conference room right here.” And he said, “Let’s go in there.” They took us into the conference room and he said, “This is too small. This won’t work.” She said, “But it’s close to the telephone and it’s close to the P. A.” He said, “It won’t work. It’s too small.” So they took us back out again and he started walking down the hallway and told us to follow him, his wife was behind us.

Oh, I’m sorry! Can I way back up? Just when—I believe it was just Jenelle and I involved and it may have just been—I think it was even before Jenelle came. He said to me, “I have guns.” And he opened his jacket, showed us all the guns, or showed me all the guns he had around his belt, and he had the cart that I call a personal shopping cart, you know, the kind you can buy to take to stores? Those collapsible ones? It had some rifles in it and there were boxes and a plastic jug. I remember the jug sitting on the top most.

He said, “This is a bomb. If you will notice I have a cord wrapped around my wrist that is attached to the clothespin on the bomb, and if I were to be hit, or shot, or knocked over, the bomb would go off and everyone in this building would go up with it. Mrs. Cook, I want you to know this bomb does work the way I’m telling you. I know because I’ve done one in the Arizona desert and I know the damage it can do.”

He then proceeded to take the clothespin and show me how the detonator worked on it. He said, “As you can see, I have a clothespin here. If I squeeze it open and take this stick out you can see the metal screws that come through from both sides. If those screws touch the bomb goes off.”

The piece that’s in between was another piece of a clothespin and it was what had the cord attached to it and that was what was around his wrist. So he said, “If my wrist gets bumped, that pin will come out—or that bar will come out and the bomb will go off.”

After that, after he got everybody collected he took us down the hall and Delbert Renfrow was our custodian at the time. He was a big man. Like six-foot-three, big, big guy. And he says, "What's going on?" And they said, "You just mind your own business. Just go on." Delbert thought we were having some kind of an assembly because he saw this cart, saw the guns, everything. Thought we were having some kind of an assembly and so he just went about his business, went down to the kitchen and started working on the dishwasher that he'd been asked to fix. So he was down there.

They took us down to this classroom, and as we walked down the hallway, his daughter [Princess] was standing at the back door and she says, "I can't believe you're going to do this. I can't believe you're gonna do it!" And he says, "Just get the hell out of here." And he threw her the keys and she just took off runnin' out the back them doors. And then he took us into the classroom which at the time was Mrs. Mitchell's first grade classroom.

He told all the students in there, "This is a revolution and you're being held hostage. But we don't want to hurt you children. We will watch you. We don't want you to run, we don't want you to try and do anything, want you to stay away from the cart, stay away from the guns, but if you do try to run, we will shoot you in the legs. We don't want to kill you, but we will shoot you in the legs so that you won't run. As far as you adults go, we'll shoot you and kill you, we don't care. We have no use for you. We can kill you.

He sent her and had her start gathering up all the classes in the school. When she got all the classes in there she handed me a big sheet of paper. She said, "You know everyone in this room. I want you to start writing names." I said, "Whose names?" She said, "Everyone in here. Start with the adults. Write all the adults first." I took the piece of paper and I wrote my name on it, and I could never write anyone else's. She came over to me several times and she said, "Do you have that list done?" I said, "No, not yet." She said, "We need that list. Get that list done." But I couldn't do it! I just couldn't write anyone else's name.

As time went on the kids started getting really restless. Some of the male teachers were afraid that the bomb was going to get bumped or that he was going to get bumped and it would go off, and so they asked him permission to do what we called the “magic square.” It’s always been called the magic square to us because Jack Mitchell was the one that asked if he could put a square of tape around where David Young was sitting on the desk. He says, “You know, we’ll keep the kids on the outside of that square and then they won’t bump you.” So he gave permission for the teachers to do that and they did it and then Mr. Mitchell told the kids, “That’s the magic square. Nobody goes inside the magic square. We all have to stay outside, you understand that? You can sit anywhere you want in the room but not inside the magic square.”

And the kids were really good! They stayed outside the magic square. But the smell of gasoline was getting really, really strong in the room and some of the kids were starting to get sick. They were starting to throw up. So then they asked could we please open some windows and doors so that we can get some air in here because the kids are starting to get sick. They finally agreed to let us open the windows. Then he said we could open the door between that classroom and the next classroom. Between those classrooms there was a little hallway and there was a bathroom there just for little small kids.

He said, “You can do it, but I want it all blocked by desks.” So they had some of the teachers go and pile desks up and everything at the other end of that hallway, which was a pretty short hallway, but it was all blocked with desks and everything so that the kids couldn’t get out. Some of the kids were crying for their moms and wanting to go home and everything. They told them, “It’s going to be okay.”

Doris Young was like a social director. She’d say to the kids, “It’s okay. You don’t want to be scared. You don’t want to cry, because if you cry you’ll make your neighbor cry and then we’ll just have everybody crying and that wouldn’t be good. You know, this is an adventure. You can think of this as a special adventure, and when you get big, you can tell your family about the special adventure you were on.” And then she’d pass out tissues and everything and just

tell 'em, "Now don't cry. We don't want to hurt your children and we're not going to hurt your children. You understand that. We're not going to hurt your children because we love children."

Anyway, so the afternoon kept wearing on and they just kept talking and telling the kids everything was going to be okay. Well, because they were elementary kids they just thought when the bell rang and the buses came they could go home. When they realized they weren't going to be able to go home then they really started getting upset and they got restless. The teachers asked if they could go to the library and get some books and get some coloring things and get things for the kids to do to keep them busy. So they left to do that.

By that time our principal had come back and he came down and found us. He got caught up in it and they sent him off to the office to make phone calls. They wanted him to call the president, they wanted him to call the FBI, they wanted him to call all these people to let them know what was going on. And they wanted him to let them know that he wanted two million dollars apiece for each and every one of the hostages in that room. They said that he believed that because most of the kids in there were Mormon that if their families couldn't come up with the money that the Mormon Church would because the Mormons loved their kids.

And what was interesting was he was a policeman in the town before I moved here and they—I guess really about the time that I moved here—he was here but I never did know him. His wife was married to somebody else when I moved here and then she left with him but I really didn't know them. But in his diaries he had planned this thing for eight years. He called it "The Biggie" in his diaries. He planned it and had books and books and books that he had written, these diaries, planning all of this.

It was just after three o'clock the bell rang, and it was soon after that the bomb went off.

Mark Junge: You mentioned that there was a calm before the storm and you felt calm, right before the bomb went off. Why?

Tina Cook: It's really interesting because I was standing back by that little hallway and he had left to go into that little bathroom. He called his wife over and had her take the bomb. He had slipped it off his wrist and onto hers and then he went into the bathroom. And I think all of us felt a little calmer because he had seemed so agitated and so nervous. As time went on he got more and more agitated. So when he put the thing on her arm we all felt just a little more like, oh she would never do this, you know. She was the one that was trying to calm the kids and everything and just didn't really think that she would do it. I think that had a little bit of calming effect. But then we had a substitute teacher there for our third grade teacher, and she said to me, "Do you believe all of this?" I said, "It's pretty hard to believe, huh." And she goes, "No, I mean, serious. Do you think this is real?" I said, "Oh, Pat! If you look into his eyes you will know that this is very real."

Mark Junge: What sort of look was it?

Tina Cook: It was like looking into emptiness. I've never seen anything before or since. But it was like, you looked into his eyes and there was nobody there. There was just this big, empty, hollow look. But you knew, you just knew that he planned on doing what he said he was going to do.

But anyway, when he went into the bathroom it just seemed like there was just all of a sudden just a little bit of calm peacefulness. The kids got quieter, they seemed to calm down and there was just a feeling in the room like things had changed. It was almost like evil walked out of the room, but not totally because as far as I'm concerned she was as bad as he was and maybe even more so for me because she was a mother and she could do this to kids. I had a really hard time with that. So even though she went prancing around like a social director I just never liked her almost more than I didn't like him because she could do this to kids. But anyway the room just seemed to get calmer and more peaceful and there was just a feeling like—I don't even know how to describe it—I don't know if you'd call it a tender feeling?

But all of a sudden—you know, before I'd been thinking, "I'm never going to get a chance to say goodbye to my husband and my children!" Because I knew we'd never walk out of that room. He told us we wouldn't and I believed him. And all of a sudden I had almost a feeling of hope. I don't know how to describe it beyond that. I know the children say they saw angels. Do I believe it? Yes, I do. I didn't see any angels but I felt the peace and the calm and I felt the difference in the room. I felt the change. But nothing that I could physically see or touch. But there absolutely was a difference.

Mark Junge: Then what happened?

Tina Cook: She was sitting in the middle of the room and I was watching her because she said, "It's getting too noisy in here. It's just getting too noisy." And Mrs. Mitchell, our second grade teacher had a thing, you know, where she held up her fingers like this and the kids recognized that as a sign to quiet down and everything. And she said, "The gas is starting to get to me," Jean said. And she said, "I'm getting a headache." And Doris Young at that point said, "Yes, I'm getting a headache too."

And I watched as her hand came up to her head and the bomb went off. And it was just like almost instantaneous blackness in the room. I could see spots where there were flames. I could see little patches of fire but the room was just black, so black.

Mark Junge: Did you look at Doris, or did you turn your head away?

Tina Cook: You know, it's funny because at the time they asked me—right afterwards, the police interviewed me and asked me. And they said, "Did you see her?" And I said, "No, no I didn't see her." And yet I can remember watching her hand come up. But I said I didn't see her and the lady that was right with me as we ran out the door said to me, "What do you mean you didn't see her? You were looking right at her and she ran right toward you." I said, "I didn't see her! I didn't see her!" The police asked me, "Did the fire alarms go off?" And I said, "I don't remember. I don't remember hearing them." They said, "What do you

remember?” And I said, “Just the blackness. I just remember the blackness and the spots of fire and grabbing kids and throwing them out through that door.”

Mark Junge: Did you throw kids out the door?

Tina Cook: There were very few kids over where I was and I actually threw ‘em into that hallway. Out music teacher, I saw him run through that doorway and I thought, “That’s blocked. You can’t get out.” I turned back, because I heard a kid. I turned back and grabbed that child and turned back toward that hallway and saw John on the floor. I didn’t know if he had been shot or what happened because the bathroom door was open and there was light coming out of it. I looked and I saw David Young standing in the doorway. He had two guns held up like this. So I grabbed this child that I had taken and didn’t know how I was going to push through there and turned the other way to look and see if there was another way to get out. I couldn’t see the windows across the room, I couldn’t see the doorway, I couldn’t see anything.

When I turned back he was stepping back into the bathroom and the door was closing so I pushed that kid through and then I pushed the next one through. I think there were only about three of them. I pushed them through. John was gone by then. When I looked back and I couldn’t find anyone else, I couldn’t feel anyone else, I ran through the door and out through the hall into the hallway and out. But I kept thinking, he told us that if any of us tried to run out of the building there were people out there with guns that would shoot us. And at the time I thought he meant people that were with him, but I think now that he probably meant the police that were outside. But I don’t know. He didn’t have anyone out there, but I didn’t know that and so I thought as soon as we ran out through those doors we’d all be shot, but I kept running anyway. I had some friends that tried to grab me as I ran down the street and I said, “No, no, I can’t! I can’t!” And I just kept running. They said, “It’s okay. It’s okay. They’ve got him.” And I said, “No, they don’t have him. He’s in the bathroom.”

I went over across the street and the police came over and found me and told me they needed to talk to me. They asked me if I'd come over with them and I said, "I can't go back over there." They said, "We need you to come back over. The bomb expert needs to talk to you." I said, "I can't. I just can't go over there. He's in the bathroom." And they said, "No, he's not in the bathroom. He's dead." And I said, "No. He's not dead. He wasn't in the room. He didn't blow up." And they said, "It's okay, Christine. He's dead." I said, "He's not dead! He's in the bathroom."

They finally talked me into going back over and they had me out on the front lawn and Doris Young's body was laying on the front lawn, and then I knew she was dead, but I still believed he was alive. And they kept tryin' to convince me that the police had killed him, that he was dead, that he had killed himself. That the police had gotten in to him. In my mind I just couldn't accept that. But anyway, she was laying there and I just couldn't stand it. They finally got a blanket and covered her up and then I was able to talk to Rich Haskell, the bomb expert. They wanted to talk to me because I was the first hostage and because I knew where he had been in the building and so forth. And he had brought a lot of other stuff in. His daughter, Princess, had unloaded a lot of stuff down by the other second grade classroom and stuff. Anyway they just wanted to know wherever he'd been. And then they got me the next day and checked me back into the building.

Mark Junge: What was that like?

Tina Cook: They had boarded up the window because it had been broken out when the teachers broke it out to put kids out through. They boarded up the window so the room was dark and they just had floodlights in there. It was still really black. The soot had covered everything. Everything in there was covered with this black soot. But they wanted to know exactly where I was standing and where she was standing and then they took me to the spot where they said that she had died and I said, "No, she couldn't have been there because that's pretty close to where I was." And they said, "No, this is where she died." And they showed me the two bullet

holes in the ceiling. And then they explained to me that after we got out that he had come out of the bathroom and had crawled down under the smoke. They said that up where we were everything was really black but there was about a foot above the floor that it hadn't fallen down to yet. He had crawled out to where she was and saw her in flames because when the bomb went off all the gasoline went all over her. The milk jug that was in the thing was full of gasoline and it went all over her. So she was like a flaming torch, which I remembered about three weeks later.

But it took me three weeks to remember what I heard in the classroom, what I saw in the classroom. They said he had shot and the first bullet had missed her and gone through the ceiling and the second one had gone through her—caught her under the chin and went out through the top of her head and then out through the top of the building. The reason they could tell that was because the one hole was very small and it was just the bullet that had made it. The second one was after the bullet had, you know, exploded or whatever and tore a huge hole in the ceiling. Anyway, then he called back into the bathroom and sat on the floor and put the gun under his chin and killed himself.

Mark Junge: You said, Tina, in your writing that you felt guilt because you felt that maybe you could have prevented this by hitting the public address system and telling everybody to get out?

Tina Cook: Yeah, I just—for the longest time I just kept thinking if I coulda just run to the P. A. system and just told everybody to get out. And I know he would have shot me, but it might have just been me. But the police said that would have been the worst thing I could have done because if the bomb had gone off any sooner that the gas wouldn't have leaked into the powder that would have taken the building down and everyone would have died in it. But I had a hard time coming to that realization because you just keep thinking, you know. You were the only one and if you could have stopped it there—

Mark Junge: This whole thing took place 24 years ago, and you feel very strongly about it still.

Tina Cook: I do. I do.

Mark Junge: Has it affected your life?

Tina Cook: Absolutely!

Mark Junge: In what way?

Tina Cook: You know, in lots of ways, I guess. In the beginning it was fear. It was fear of everyone that came into the school. Anyone carrying anything really scared me for a long, long time. And after it happened—I worked that summer in the building and I was there alone a lot and that was really scary for me. I kept thinking that he was going to come up—you know, he believed in reincarnation and he said that he was taking us to this place he called the Brave New World and he would take us and all this money and he would raise the kids as his followers and he'd use the adults to help raise the kids. In my mind I kept thinking, "What if he really can come back?" So I'd be sitting there alone, and I had nightmares, just horrible nightmares for a long time that I was sitting at my desk and all of a sudden I would hear this slap on my desk and he would say, "Hello, Mrs. Cook! I'm back!" And I had those nightmares for months and I'd wake up screaming.

Mark Junge: Did your husband help you with this struggle?

Tina Cook: Oh, yes! Yes he did! I could never have gotten through without him and my children. They were all so kind and so good. So patient. Every time I'd wake up crying he would just hold me and he'd say, "It's okay. I'm here. He's not. It's okay."

Mark Junge: Has this incident brought any good into your life at all?

Tina Cook: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. It has. It's made me more appreciative. More appreciative of life, more appreciative of my family. I see more beauty in the world now than I may have if I hadn't gone through this. Things have a lot more meaning to me. A lot more lasting meaning.

Mark Junge: You wrote: “The real story is not one of psychopaths but of survival, courage and spiritual experience.”

Tina Cook: That is true. That is so true. You know, I go for months and months at a time now without even thinking about it until I smell gasoline, or I hear something that brings it back. There are a lot of little triggers that can bring it back, but you know, fireworks were really hard for me for a long time. When that bomb went off, there were a lot of shells in the cart and the heat made them explode. They said that the reason more of us weren't hurt worse than we were was because the shells would fly but the lead would stay in the cart. You know, that's the nature of the thing. So all of those sounds really affected me for a long time. Any gunshot sounds or—oh, when we went to the fireworks it took me years and years, but I kept going every year because I kept thinking, “He's not going to win! He's not gonna! I love fireworks and he is not going to make it so I can't do fireworks.” But even now, after all these years, the end of a fireworks show, when they do the Grand Finale, I'm still sitting there clenching my fists and saying, “I'm here and you're not!” (Laughs)

It's had a lot of effect on my life that way. I find I'll fight more for that kind of thing, for the freedom, for the peace that I was able to gain after it was all over. And I think, I look at the children they way they've grown up and I know it's affected a lot of their lives. It hasn't really been a bad thing for most of them. Certainly a terrible memory, but all of them have gotten through and we're closer as a community, we're closer as families, and the school. When people ask me, “How many children do you have?” I say, “Well I have two biological children and this year I have a hundred-forty-four!” All of the kids are my family. They were before it happened but even more so now. I'm very protective of my children.

Mark Junge: Did you ever talk to anybody about this? Did you talk to anybody?

Tina Cook: Yeah, I talked to the—they made us all talk to a psychologist right after that happened and I talked to him once or twice, but I didn't really feel like I needed it

so much because I had so much support at home. The hardest thing for me right afterwards is, our school is a very loving school. And it's a small community where the kids will just come up and give you a hug. They love the adults, they trust the adults and they know none of us would hurt them. That we're all there, that we'd protect them. Right after the bombing they realized that the adults didn't protect them. It was a really hard time.

Mark Junge: Do you think you've come out of this, Tina, as a stronger person?

Tina Cook: Yeah, I do.

Mark Junge: It bothers you but you're still able to handle it? Has it enabled you to handle other little crisis that have come along?

Tina Cook: I'm sure it has. You know, there aren't too many things worse in your life. So everything is relative, you know, so it's like, huh! I survived the bombing. You think that's going to scare me? You know?

Mark Junge: Did you write a journal?

Tina Cook: I wrote some in a journal. Not probably as much as I should have, but right after it happened.

Mark Junge: Did that help?

Tina Cook: I think it did. I really do think writing it down, getting it out helped. And my husband let me talk anytime I wanted to. It didn't matter if it was just getting home from school or three o'clock in the morning he would listen to me.

Sue Castaneda: Where was he that day?

Tina Cook: He actually at that time was working on the ranch and was in a tractor down in the field and didn't even know what was happening, 'till it was over.

Mark Junge: Which was good!

Tina Cook: Which is good. My son was on a bus trip to the prison down in Salt Lake and they were on the way home, stopped in Evanston to get ice cream and the lady that took the school voucher said, “You’re from Cokeville?” And they said yes and she said, “Did you hear what’s happening at your elementary?” and they said no, so this waitress told them that we were all being held hostage and there was a bomb in the school and everything. The supervisor that was with them, the teacher that was with them said to the bus driver, “Just get us home. Put the pedal to the metal, I’ll pay any fine you get.” He said, “Are you crazy? I’ve got kids in that school too.” So they took off and all of the kids—my son said it was just awful on the bus. They had the radio on listening to all the radio reports and everything and just as they got outside of Cokeville the bomb went off. And the radio announcer said, “The bomb’s gone off! It’s gone off! There are kids flying out windows!” And so my son at that point thought he’d never see me again. He thought I was gone. When he got into town and he finally found me it was pretty cool!

Mark Junge: It was a joyous reunion.

Tina Cook: It was.

Mark Junge: Yeah. How long have you been school secretary?

Tina Cook: This is my thirty-first year. Let’s see, I started in 1980 so yeah, this is thirty-one years.

Mark Junge: How do you like that job?

Tina Cook: I love my job! I have got the best job in the entire world. I love my job. How can you not?

Sue Castaneda: What was the lady applying for the day that she came in?

Tina Cook: She was applying for the kindergarten job.

Mark Junge: How many more years are you going to do this?

Tina Cook: Just as long as I can. Are you kidding? All my kids, I can't leave 'em.

Mark Junge: Well, I want to thank you for this and I'm sorry to have to make you cry and bring this stuff up. It's a painful thing but I'm hoping it was a little therapeutic or cathartic, maybe?

Tina Cook: That's okay. You know, I had a hard time talking about it for a long time. But once I was able to start talking about it, once I was able to remember seeing her, remember hearing the fire alarms, all that kind of stuff and start piecing my life back together again, it's okay. I don't mind talking about it now.

Sue Castaneda: I think that maybe it could have been anybody else. I think you were the one who was supposed to be the first person there. That if it had been anybody else maybe they would have tried to reach the button. Maybe they would have tried to do the things you have questioned yourself on and maybe things would have turned out differently. It's really hard as we've heard other people say they wanted to go in with a gun and Kevin Walker said, "You're not going in there." Things like that. It's hard to not want to do those things. But you had to be patient and go through with a lot of things that probably ended up really saving everyone.

Mark Junge: Did you ever think about it that way?

Tina Cook: Not so much. Not so much.

Mark Junge: There are people who are thankful to you.

Tina Cook: Thank you. But you know, the kids were the heroes that day. Our kids were so good. Just so good. And no matter what they took from us that day, they didn't take us from each other and that's the blessing in the whole thing. And yes it is truly a spiritual experience when you realize where you could be and where you are and the life that's been given to you. I'm a long way past where I could have been that day and how can that not be a spiritual experience.

Mark Junge: Do you believe in God?

Tina Cook: Absolutely!

Mark Junge: Are you LDS?

Tina Cook: Yes, I am. I am. But I believed in God before I was LDS. I will always believe in God because he's been beside me for a long time. He's looked out for me in a lot of situations so how can I not believe?

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.