

Interview of Jamie Buckley King

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

Transcribed and edited by Russ Sherwin, October 22, 2010, Prescott, Arizona

Version: V-1 First Draft for review

- Subject: Jamie Buckley King
- Interviewer: Mark Junge
- Interview date: September 21, 2010
- Topic of interview: Cokeville Elementary School bombing, May 16, 1986
- 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 Jamie Buckley King who was then student in the third grade.

Mark Junge: Today is the 21st of September, 2010, my name’s Mark Junge and I’m in the home of Jamie Buckley King—and your husband’s name is what, Jamie?

Jamie King: Bill King.

Mark Junge: Jamie and Bill King, and to my left over here at the kitchen table is Sue Castaneda who is the head of the Wyoming Oral History Project, and she’s the one that got this whole thing going. Jamie, now if you’d just give me your full name, and then tell me what you were, third grade, on such-and-such a day, May 16, 1986, and then just tell your story.

Jamie King: My name is Jamie Buckley King. I was in third grade on May 16, 1986, the day of the bombing.

Mark Junge: Tell me just from the beginning, everything you can remember.

Jamie King: I was a huge soccer fan, and at recess we would play soccer—every lunch recess. We had lost our game, and I remember turning to my friend and I put my arm around her as the bell rang, and we were walking back into the school, and I said, “I have a feeling it’s just going to be a really bad day.” So we all went back into

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*

class, and I loved—after noon recess—our routine. We went into our classroom and we got to lay our heads on our desks and our teacher read us a story. And that was my favorite part of the day. So I actually remember having my head on my desk, and there was a knock on the door, and the teacher got up—my teacher was Mr. Teichert, Mr. Bryant Teichert, who’s actually teaching my eight year old son today—got up and answered the door, and there was a lady with dark hair, kinda big hair, and she asked my teacher if he would please get us all lined up. We had an assembly to go to.

Well, of course, we’re ecstatic! So I remember looking at my teacher. He was very confused, like, we don’t have a planned assembly today. But he did as he was asked and we all lined up and we started out the door to head to the auditorium, and all we did was make a loop right into the next classroom right beside us. I remember going in there—well, I wasn’t quite in there yet, but I was kinda looking over another kid’s shoulders, and I thought, “This isn’t right. Something’s not right.” Because the thing I first saw was, David Young was sitting in the center of the room. I remember the tape that he had taped off, and I just remember guns all around him—surrounding him. I really wasn’t comfortable with guns. My dad had guns, but it was more of a—this is to protect my family, this is to protect our country—you know, it wasn’t for—my dad didn’t really hunt either, so I wasn’t really comfortable with guns.

I’m pretty quiet, and so I went back into the far southwest corner of the room and that is where I stayed the entire time. I wasn’t making up a plan of escape. When we went in there, I remember him—he wasn’t talking much when we went in there. He just asked for our class to go to an assigned area. I remember the smell of gas. Almost from the beginning I can remember the smell of gas.

Mark Junge: Did David talk to you about his plans? I know you mention in the book that he had these plans, and you’ve described the plans. Did you find out about his plans later, or did he talk to you about his plans, what he wanted to do?

Jamie King: I don't remember him talking about the plans in the room. And if he did, then I don't remember. I must have been told about the plans later.

Mark Junge: In the movie², it shows him handing out a sheet, and I guess there are people who are supposed to—everybody's supposed to read his manifesto, or whatever it was.

Jamie King: I don't remember the sheet. There might have been—he might have had a sheet. The sheet that I remember is the sheet that I colored on. They had movies in there, trying to entertain us. They had coloring sheets, you know, trying to keep us entertained that way. I remember him threatening a lot. I remember him threatening to 'be quiet, or I'm going to shoot somebody.' Or, 'you're not leaving the room or I'm going to shoot somebody.' I remember him threatening a lot. And it was way too loud, all the time. I remember him sweating really bad. I remember him just constantly dabbing his head with a tissue or something. Very nervous, very jittery.

I looked over at Doris a lot, 'cause I was very confused why she—I'm very angry at Doris, because she is the one that willingly—maybe not willingly—but it looked willingly, to a third grader—went to each door, knowing what she was doing, and just kept doing it. Went to the first grade, went to the third grade, went to the fifth grade. I'm not sure if she had been threatened, or if she was doing it willingly, knowing that we were going to die. That really bothers me. So I looked over at her a lot.

Mark Junge: Could you describe the two of them? What they looked like?

Jamie King: She had big hair. She kind of had tan skin. It looked like just a perm that she'd had, that she'd combed out. Her hair was big to me. She was probably five-five, five-six. It's interesting 'cause I remember her more than I remember David. I did not look at him much. I just remember sweat. That's all I remember about him. Very tense, very stressed. I don't remember much about him.

² The incident was detailed in the book *When Angels Intervene to Save the Children* by Hartt and Judine Wixom, which formed the basis for a CBS made for TV movie titled *To Save the Children*. In 2006, the Cokeville Miracle Foundation compiled a book of recollections about the day from parents, emergency workers and former hostages. The story was also featured on *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Unexplained Mysteries*. *Wikipedia*

Mark Junge: So you smelled the gas. Did you get sick?

Jamie King: Yes.

Mark Junge: Did you have to throw up?

Jamie King: No. I did not leave my little corner the entire time.

Mark Junge: In the book you write that you thought you were going to die. This was it.

Jamie King: Yes.

Mark Junge: You really thought that?

Jamie King: Yes. In fact, when David had to go into the bathroom, and he gave Doris—slipped something on her wrist—and then when she got distracted and pulled it, and when it went off, I actually went back into the corner. There was a wall that had carpet on it and then there was the painted wall. I actually went into the corner and lifted up my hands and covered—I went just like this back in the corner. I was not running. I was not looking for a door or a window or a teacher—I was face first!

Mark Junge: But, all the kids had been trained by previous fire drills to do what they were supposed to do to get out. Did you forget about that?

Jamie King: When he told me that we were now going to be his, or whatever—I don't remember him saying a plan—I remember him, you know, we were in his—he was having control over us, power over us. I believed him! I didn't think about a fire drill! Because I really thought when the bomb went off, we were dead!

Mark Junge: What was it like when the bomb went off? Like a firecracker? Like black smoke?

Jamie King: I remember the smell. I remember—before I ran into the corner, I looked up because I was coloring, I looked up and Doris's arms were spread out, and she was on fire! Her whole body was on fire! And then I turned around and I just went in the back. I don't remember a noise. I don't remember the smell and it was black. And I thought we were dead—dying. I didn't hear screaming children, I wasn't in a panic, I wasn't running around.

Mark Junge: How far away were you from Doris?

Jamie King: Quite a ways.

Mark Junge: So maybe the concussion of this thing maybe made you go temporarily deaf? You didn't hear anything?

Jamie King: I do not remember noise. There was noise! There was noise in there! I don't remember the noise.

Mark Junge: So then what? You sat in the corner and then what happened?

Jamie King: Somebody grabbed me and threw me. Someone grabbed me by the back of my shirt and threw me. And the next thing I knew I was head first out the window in the front of the school. I remember thinking that I'm not dead! I don't know—I must have an issue with dying. I mean I do. I have had an issue with dying. But I remember standing up and there was black faces everywhere. Just black faces! And I started running and I ran across across the street—I'm still in the school area, though, I ran across the street and I was on the sidewalk, and my dad came running toward me on the sidewalk, gun in hand, to go kill David. But he stopped. I was one of the last out of the room. There was ambulances there, a lot of the children were out, but I approached my dad, and I said, "Dad, I'm so sorry, but my shoes are in the room. Do you need me to go back and get 'em?" Because we didn't have money, and so my first thought when I went to my dad was, "Oh, I'm going to be in trouble!" Because I didn't have my shoes on. I had taken them off!

My dad loved me, gave me a huge hug, but I remember going ouch! And my right arm—I was severely burned on my right arm from around my thumb, clear up almost to my elbow. I can kind of see an outline—but I remember the police officer stopping my father because after he knew that I was alive and okay, he was heading toward the school, and he was stopped. And it took a few to stop him. I don't know at that point if they knew that he [David Young] was dead, or that she [Doris] was dead, I don't know that.

Mark Junge: And you didn't know that either.

Jamie King: I didn't know that. I had seen Doris on fire. I remember someone else came and grabbed me and they took me to the ambulance that was in the middle of the street, and they said, "You need to get in here and we're going to take you to the hospital." And I said, "No! I will not get in that ambulance." I didn't want any attention drawn to me, I didn't want—I don't know if I was in shock. I remember them wrapping a blanket around me, trying to warm me up, but then they kept telling my mother—well, I remember—

Mark Junge: Tell me about your mother. This is funny!

Jamie King: As I was walking down the sidewalk, I remember looking up and seeing my mother in this outfit. She had on—it was cream with pink, big pink flowers, and bell bottoms, and I went, "Oh, Mother!" I remember thinking, "Why would you wear that today?" (Laughs) And barefoot! She was barefoot and in this *outfit*!

Mark Junge: This whole thing was very embarrassing to you!

Jamie King: Yes! Disregard what just happened! *Mother!* You needed to be dressed fashionable!

Mark Junge: "Don't you know how to dress for a bombing for crying out loud?"

Jamie King: It did not shock me that my mom was barefoot. Because I know that my mother, whatever she was doing, she would have ran. The people were telling my mother, you've got to get her to the hospital. I went in somebody's car, I'm not sure whose car I went in—over to Montpelier, to the hospital for my burn. That is where I went from Main Street. I went from Main Street directly over to the hospital.

Mark Junge: You mention in your writing that other people had seen angels, and you were a little—you felt guilty because you didn't see angels.

Jamie King: Yes! I was mad! I was mad for a long time! Because I felt like I had been—maybe I was a naughty little girl and maybe I didn't deserve to have the comfort that they received. Because the people that I had visited with, quite a few of them had—their grandma was with them, or their grandpa was with them, and they'd

received this comfort. And that made me angry that I hadn't had a comforter come to me. It's okay now. My faith pulls me through. I don't need to see angels. I realize that now.

Mark Junge: How did you get through this? Didn't you have a friend that helped you through this? Tell me about that.

Jamie King: After the bombing, my sisters would stop for interviews. I actually remember—my Grandma Peterson lives a little ways out of town, just by the Flying-J, and she has a very long lane. And I remember I had rode the bus up to her house and I was walking down the lane one day, and there was a car—I don't know if my mother had told me earlier that we were going to go out to my grandma's because there was going to be reporters there, but this car started coming down the lane and I ran and ran and ran to another corner of my grandma's house so they wouldn't find me. And my sisters were out on the tramp[oline] jumping and waving at 'em and letting them know they were ready to be visited.

But I remember for years and years being terrified of dying. I've had a real issue with dying. It had stopped me from doing things. Like, I wouldn't take road trips. My family would go do something and I would stay home. I didn't want to do a lot of traveling. And I was at the store, yeah, and for some reason this was affecting me, and I was visiting with a friend, and she said, "Jamie, you *did* die in that corner. You have let—David has won! You have let him take over. You have got to start living!" It was so interesting to me. It must have just been how I handled it. I like to kinda—everything will go away if I just cover my eyes. It'll all go away! I love her for that. 'Cause she said, "You have to come alive. You need to live your life. You have five kids. Get in your car! Go! Go do things. Go make memories with them."

Mark Junge: Oh, so this just happened recently—not that long ago?

Jamie King: Yes.

Mark Junge: So you lived with all this for years?

Jamie King: Yes.

Mark Junge: So in effect she was right, because when you were in that room, you were scared to death! You say you're afraid of death, but you were actually scared to death and you had to live with that death until she said what she did. Now you said you have an issue with trust. Do you still have an issue with trusting people?

Jamie King: Yes. I do have an issue with trusting people.

Mark Junge: Do you trust us?

Jamie King: Yes, I do! Yes. My mom moved to Utah. We lived in Cokeville. Ty graduated from high school, me and Jenny. I had two sisters in the bombing with me. I was in third grade, Jenny was in second grade, Jolene was in first grade. Then they moved to Mountain View, Wyoming, with my dad's work, and then they moved down to Spanish Fork, Utah. I've been down several times and Mom's like, "Come here with me." Or, "I want you to meet this person." Or, "Let's go do this." And I just have a very hard time trusting people.

Mark Junge: Up until just recently?

Jamie King: I still have a hard time trusting people.

Mark Junge: Now, you mentioned that, when you were in that room, time stopped. What's that like? I can't imagine how time stops.

Jamie King: I don't know. I guess because I thought it was the end. I wasn't thinking about the future. I wasn't thinking about the escape. When I was talking to my sisters they would see the door and they would figure out how they were going to get to the door, you know—I gotta go around this person—I've gotta go around that chair—or that bathroom that he went into, there was a way out that way too. And then there were the windows, and so it had never crossed my mind to get out of that room. Ever. So time really had stopped for me because I thought it was over.

Mark Junge: Has this experience done more to harm you or done anything to benefit you?

Jamie King: Benefit me.

Mark Junge: Really? In what way?

Jamie King: I can say that now. There has been several times I've called my mother and said, "I wish I would have died in third grade." Life is very difficult, like, I wouldn't have had to make all the mistakes I've made. I'm very grateful for the experiences, but I've made quite a few choices in my life that have just made my life harder than easier, and—'cause my mom calls me every year on May 16th, and she tells me, "Jamie, this is a day of miracles." She has never missed, and I am 33. This is a total day of miracles for her that she has her three daughters, she has watched us grow up. I have five children, Jennie has five boys, Jolene has five children.

Mark Junge: Would you rather that she not call you up?

Jamie King: No, I need to hear her say that.

Mark Junge: Sort of strengthen you or reinforce what you believe.

Jamie King: Yes, I need her to call me. And I don't say that near as often as I used to. But several times I would say that, because I'm so scared of dying. How I'm going to die, when I'm going to die, am I going to leave five young kids, am I going to leave five old kids, and I just thought, well I was already there! I was already prepared! I was already there.

Mark Junge: Yeah, what worse could happen to you? What could be worse than to be in a bombing incident where you came out alive.

Jamie King: Leaving my kids, that makes me sick.

Mark Junge: Well, what about the Mormon belief, or the LDS Church belief that all families will be reunited once again?

Jamie King: I believe that! With all my heart!

Mark Junge: But how could you if you're worried about losing your kids?

Jamie King: Just not being here for them.

Mark Junge: Oh, while they're alive!

Jamie King: Not being their mother.

Mark Junge: Oh, okay.

Jamie King: I love my kids forever! I want to be their mother. I want to go to my boys' football games. I want to buy my daughter's prom dress. I want to go out there when she gets her wedding dress. I want to be a part of their lives. I don't want anyone else raising them.

Mark Junge: You're a strong mother.

Jamie King: I want to be a strong mother. Yes. That's my goal.

Mark Junge: Well, let's finish up on the bombing and then we'll call it quits. But do you think that this event has any real significance, or is it just one of those things that just happens and hey! You lived through it. Did it shape you as a person? Did it affect the way you think?

Jamie King: Yes. It has great significance to me because I believe in miracles. I believe there's a god. I believe he loves me. The reason that I—it means a lot to me that somebody got me out of the corner. If it was an angel, if it was my teacher, if it was a friend, that means to me that I am worth something. I wasn't just left there. I mean, I could have been, maybe, the one child that didn't make it out. Because I was not looking for the exit. I do have an issue with trust and I have had a fear of death. But I also know that I am loved.

Mark Junge: So that was beneficial?

Jamie King: Yes, very beneficial. It helped me get through a lot of hard things. I've had a lot of hard things that I've brought on myself, choices that I've made that I'm now trying to—

Mark Junge: Live down?

Jamie King: Mm-hm.

Mark Junge: Well, we all are, that way. Every one of us.

Jamie King: But I know I have worth, I know that. And I know that I'm meant to be here right now, and I'm going to make the most of it. I'm going to be the best mom that I can be and then try to be the best wife that I can be, because it's almost like, kind of a second chance at—

Mark Junge: Did the bombing cause that, or was it the series of events where you got yourself in a jam and it was your own fault?

Jamie King: Hm.

Mark Junge: Because you obviously have a whole changed attitude about, you know, this is a second chance. The bombing have anything to do with that?

Jamie King: Yeah. I feel that we all could have been taken at that time. And I feel like our community would have—they would have been okay through it. Just because of how we believe. It would have been a very, very hard thing. But I believe that things like this happen all the time now. There are people that die, and some of them are very tragic, but I look at all of them and it's so fun to see what every one of them has done with their life. Everyone is so important.

Mark Junge: Do you stay in contact with these people?

Jamie King: I know a lot of them.

Mark Junge: Do you think your reaction is any different than yours? I know everyone sees this in a different light.

Jamie King: Well, my husband—it means nothing to him.

Mark Junge: Really! And he was in it?

Jamie King: Mm-hm.

Mark Junge: And it means nothing to him?

Jamie King: He's like, it happened, it's over, he doesn't believe God had anything to do with it, he doesn't believe—he thinks the angel thing is bogus, doesn't want to talk about it, it's over, get over it!

Mark Junge: Do you guys talk about it?

Jamie King: No, we do not!

Mark Junge: Because you know where he stands, and he knows where you stand?

Jamie King: Mm-hm. There's a lot of people—there's names that I hear, like Amy Bagaso, I think that she likes to stay up on it. You know, I think if anyone ever asked her to do anything or say anything, she would jump on that kind of an opportunity. There's a few people in town that because of what they saw and how they believe—

Mark Junge: So you just thought time stopped. You didn't have an out of body experience or anything like that. You saw no angels, didn't see any white lights, and does your husband think that angel that was sort of formed on the wall, was that just an accident?

Jamie King: Yep. He was actually jumping over the line, you know, like I dare you to hurt me.

Sue Castaneda: Did they do anything to him? Obviously they didn't. Slap him or anything?

Jamie King: Nope. I was amazed. I didn't know there were bullets in that cart. I didn't know that there were bullets that could've, you know, went straight out. That was very interesting to me about how they went straight up and out.

Mark Junge: You went down to Spanish Fork for a little while. Got another look at life from a different angle and came back. How would you describe this community, Cokeville?

Jamie King: How would I describe Cokeville? Peaceful. Cokeville's very special to me. But thinking of words that would describe Cokeville—

Mark Junge: The people in Cokeville?

Jamie King: My aunt once said, she was talking to a group of people and she said, “When I leave my home, I can leave a note that says, ‘kids, in an emergency, call 279-blank-blank-blank-blank’ you could call anybody in this town and they would help you. Anybody would help you. Religion is not a factor, politics is not a factor, you help your neighbor who is all 500-some people because you care about ‘em, you appreciate them, you love them. That’s what we do for each other here.

Mark Junge: That’s a beautiful statement.

Jamie King: I feel very grateful. It was interesting—Brandy Prouse, who lives down the street, was the first person that was in the bombing to send a child back to Cokeville Elementary. When I heard that, I thought, that never has crossed my mind. That I have got four children in that school. Because if it did happen here again, we would get through it. I don’t think that it will happen again, but this is such a remarkable community. I am so grateful my children are being raised here. The teachers love them, the janitor loves them, the principal loves them, they know each other, they help each other.

Mark Junge: Well, one thing we know is that Cokeville is not insulated from the rest of the world by this incident that took place. Things can happen even in a wonderful community, small community, stuck between two mountain ranges in a peaceful valley, and that has got to have an effect on everybody that was in there. If they felt the same way you did about the community, that there was a lot of love, there was a lot of, let’s say, camaraderie besides that, they’ve got to be able to feel that they were pretty lucky being here in this valley.

Jamie King: I feel blessed, that I got to live through something like that. ‘Cause, like you said, my kids are like, “What?” I really haven’t talked to my kids much about this. I don’t know why. I have a daughter who would probably be too scared to go back to school. There will be a time that will be right to talk to them about it. But it was interesting when you said, “What could you be afraid of now?” I mean, things that happen now in relevance to what happened then, it really isn’t that bad.

\Mark Junge: Nothing could be that bad.

Jamie King: Yeah. But from a child's mind? I would have hated to be an adult in there. I have a feeling that that would have affected me a lot worse than being a third grader because I probably wasn't afraid to die when I was in third grade.

Mark Junge: They knew the significance of life.

Jamie King: They knew the significance of life, and some of those adults in there had children! I mean, I cannot fathom being in there with my children thinking, "My hands are tied, how am I going to save not only my children—" those teachers in there, all of us were their children. The Bennions—the grandmother and then her daughter-in-law, her son's wife, was teaching that day, and they had at least two children in there, maybe three.

Mark Junge: Who was the hero in all this? Was there more than one?

Jamie King: Mm-hm. Yeah. I wish that I knew everything that went on. I wish I knew everyone that served. The police officers, the EMTs, people from surrounding communities, our parents. I have always thought, though, as Cokeville being my family. I've always felt like that. It doesn't matter who moves in or who moves out. I think we're as strong now as we were then, we have new faces and we have old faces.

Mark Junge: Do you ever want to leave here?

Jamie King: No. And for me to say that, when you can't financially live here, very well—if you *want* to live in Cokeville, you have to be a schoolteacher, or work at the mine, or you have to go find work elsewhere, and there's several women in town that have no husband for two weeks. So you can sacrifice that, or in my case, we see Bill a lot, and we have no money.

Mark Junge: Because he's in construction?

Jamie King: Yes.

Mark Junge: And the economy's down. So does he have to go out of the valley to get work?

Jamie King: A lot of the time! He works with Stuart Peterson who is Carol Peterson's son. He does beautiful, beautiful work. My mom and Stuart are cousins. Tub, Uncle Tub, who is Carol's husband, is my grandpa's twin brother.

Mark Junge: We're going to need a flow chart on this! Do you mind? Do you have a genealogical chart? Thank you so much!

Jamie King: You're welcome.

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.