

Marshall University

## Marshall Digital Scholar

---

0064: Marshall University Oral History  
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

---

2005

### Oral History Interview: Eve Mahone

Eve Mahone

Follow this and additional works at: [https://mds.marshall.edu/oral\\_history](https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-824, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact [zhangj@marshall.edu](mailto:zhangj@marshall.edu).



# Oral History Donor Form (Restricted)

I, EVE MAHONE (name of narrator), hereby give to the MARSHALL UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (designated repository) as a donation this interview recorded on NOVEMBER 15, 2005 (date). With this gift, I hereby transfer to the MARSHALL UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (designated repository) legal title and all literary property rights to the interview, including copyright, with the exception that the MARSHALL UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (designated repository) shall allow access to the interview until NOV. 22, 2005 (date) only to those persons having the written permission of EVE MAHONE (name), his or her heirs, and his or her designee(s) as specified below.

I understand the interviews may, after this time, be made available for research and such public programming as the MARSHALL UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (designated repository) may determine. This may include use of the interview material in live or recorded programs for radio, television, cable, or any other forms of electronic publishing that is not for profit. The interviews may not be broadcast, cablecast, or electronically published for commercial purposes without my written consent.

Narrator's signature

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Date

Specified heir(s) or designee(s):

(Please see interview master file for complete information)

Interviewer's signature

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Date

Interview Date

Page 1:

1. Eve Mahone's personal information, including age and where she has lived.
2. Mahone's memory of night the Silver Bridge collapsed.
3. What Mahone remembers about the appearance and stability of the Silver Bridge.

Page 2:

1. How Mahone learned about the bridge falling.
2. What her father did to aid in recovery efforts.
3. What Mahone remembers about stories of the bridge's fall.

Page 3:

1. Mahone's memory of community organizations helping in the recovery.
2. Mahone remembers visiting the bridge collapse site.
3. Who Mahone remembers dying in the collapse.
4. Her father's busy time with the recovery.

Page 4:

1. Mahone remembers the feeling in the community following the bridge's fall.

2. Mahone remembers rumors of Mothman and Chief Cornstalk causing the bridge's collapse.
3. Mahone remembers using the ferry to go to Ohio.
4. Mahone discusses her fear of the Kanawha bridge in Point Pleasant following the Silver Bridge's collapse.
5. Mahone discusses what she had heard caused the collapse.

Page 5:

1. Mahone continues to discuss the causes of the collapse.
2. Mahone recalls the bridge's constant use.
3. Mahone does not remember President Johnson speaking about the bridge.
4. Mahone remembers talk about bridge inspections and the inspection of the St. Marys bridge, which she inaccurately refers to the St. Marys bridge.

Page 6:

1. Mahone discusses lasting impression of the Silver Bridge on herself and the community.
2. Mahone discusses what younger people may know about the bridge and its fall.
3. Mahone discusses a recovery diver's story about the bridge.

Page 7:

1. Mahone discusses how the bridge has had a lasting impression on the way she feels about bridge safety.

2. Mahone remembers memorial ceremonies.
3. Mahone begins reviewing the victims' names.

Page 8:

1. Mahone discusses the bridge site again.
2. Mahone does not remember lawsuits.
3. Mahone remembers how the bridge collapse still affects her in her recreational activities on the river.
4. Mahone discusses what she tells visitors about the bridge.

Eve Mahone  
November 15, 2005  
Point Pleasant, West Virginia  
Silver Bridge  
By: Jeremy Jarrell

JJ: If you would give me your full name, age, and date of birth?

EM: Eve Mahone, I'm 50 years old, my date of birthday is August 6, 1955.

JJ: How old were you in...you lived in Pt. Pleasant for most of your life, right?

EM: yes.

JJ: What do you remember about December 15, 1967, the Silver Bridge collapse? What do you remember about that day?

EM: I was getting ready to go to a Christmas dance, I was in junior high.

JJ: It was on a Friday evening right?

EM: Yes. I just remember getting ready for the dance and hearing a lot of commotion. There were a lot of sirens and, you know, every kind of commotion you could think of. We did hear a loud noise, but obviously at the time nobody knew what it was, I mean in this end of town.

JJ: How old where you at the time?

EM: I believe that I was 12.

JJ: Twelve years old?

EM: Yes.

JJ: What do you remember about the bridge itself? Do you remember what it looked like?

EM: Yes, I always remember that I always felt like the lanes weren't wide enough for the cars to go past each other, you know? It always scared me. Bridges still do.

JJ: The bridge always scared you? What scared you about the Silver Bridge?

EM: Probably that it was high. I thought it was high.

JJ: That it was high off of the water?

EM: Yes.

JJ: Do you remember the way it looked? Was there anything about the Silver Bridge that stuck out in your mind about the way it looked?

EM: No, not really.

JJ: Besides being afraid of going across the bridge did you use it often?

EM: Oh, yeah.

JJ: Did your family have the same fears about the bridge that you did?

EM: No, not really, it was just me.

JJ: Let's talk about when it collapsed again, was the dance cancelled?

EM: I believe it was.

JJ: Tell me what you remember about that evening, the next day, and what you were hearing about what happened.

EM: The investigation, or all the people or any of it that I remembered?

JJ: Yes.

EM: Well I believe it was my grandmother, who lived obviously closer to where the bridge fell, still several blocks away but she was closer than what we were. She, I believe, called my mom and said that someone had called her and telling her that our bridge fell. And then, I don't remember exactly how the chain of events went, you know? It's been several years ago, but I do remember my dad was a sergeant in the National Guard and I do remember him being called out and that was our National Guard – which is the 3654<sup>th</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Ordinance Company – and they went up to the armory. I don't remember who all they got a hold of, I'm sure it was a good many of them. And I remember they had to set up the cots. They had to rearrange things up there and what they did was they individually started bringing bodies up there kind of like a make-shift morgue. I don't remember if he said that families of people that they thought were on that bridge were coming up there or not. Something tells me that is the way it was. I know he talked about the look on some of the people's faces.

JJ: How did he describe them?

EM: Horror. Petrified, scared to death. He talked specifically about a child and it took him forever to get over it. He said it had its little eyes open and its arms reaching out like it was trying to get either out or to reach its mother or father or whoever it was with.

JJ: Before I forget, in what capacity did your dad serve?

EM: My dad was a small arms weapons specialist, full time for 33 years.

JJ: Tell me a little more about what your dad's job was that night and what he told you.

EM: It seems like it was a community deal that everybody was down there to see what could be done and what was to be done at this point. I don't remember seeing it but I remember people talking about seeing Christmas packages floating in the water, the end of semi that you could see that was partially still under water. I think there were three semis and one of the guys got out. I don't know who it was and I don't remember but I remember but somebody was on the bridge who was starting to Gallipolis and said they could feel the bouncing, not really at that point the full swing of it because from what we understood afterwards from people that saw it – it would just swing back and forth and when it would go up some of the vehicles would go off of it but, somebody saw that obviously something was wrong with here and they hit the gas pedal and through it in reverse and knocked several people back off of it.

JJ: The bridge itself, when you crossed it did you ever feel it shake or move or notice anything like that?

EM: No, I never really gave it a thought. I do now though.

JJ: Let's go back to a couple of days afterwards, you said there were a lot of people in the community helping. Can you remember any organizations helping? What was the feeling in Point Pleasant afterwards?

EM: Disbelief. What a tragedy, I mean really, it's not everyday that you see something like that no matter what age you are.

JJ: Did you ever visit the site yourself?

EM: Yes.

JJ: What do you remember about being down there?

EM: The metal, I remember metal. I remember huge chunks of concrete. I remember thinking how odd it looked to see the ramp to go and then totally nothing and then you could see the ramp on the other side. It was just like here, a big blank, then over back over there - like it never existed at all, like it just vanished. Kind of like they started it and finished it but they didn't do the middle of it.

JJ: Was it surreal to see that many people here?

EM: I don't remember those type of things, I kind of remember a lot of people here, but I was 12 years old, what would I understand if I had heard that the FBI was here? I wouldn't have really at that point thought a whole lot about it. I know I had a school teacher that she told us her husband, who evidently taught here in West Virginia, also, they lived in Ohio, he was on that bridge and had made it out of his vehicle was swimming to the Ohio side and that somebody saw him and knew who he was and about that time one of the beams came down and got him and took him right back under. I believe their last name was White.

JJ: Did you know anybody?

EM: No.

JJ: Do you remember any names specifically?

EM: No, well Jimmy Joe Wedge, that's about it.

JJ: Let's talk again about what your dad told you about it. Was he incredibly busy at that time for awhile? Did you see much of him?

EM: No we didn't. It seemed like constantly there was something going to be done or something that had to be done. It seems to me like there was just families. It's almost like a puzzle for me I can't put it all of it together, you know what I mean. I remember people standing and looking, not necessarily right at where the bridge was but just in the general area, and people crying. Maybe they didn't even know who was on it, it was just such a... it was just horrible. It was just horrible.



JJ: So your dad's busy with the National Guard, did your grandmother or mom volunteer or anything?

EM: Not that I remember, my mom probably didn't because she wouldn't have left us at home by ourselves.

JJ: What was school like? Did they cancel school?

EM: I believe they did for a few days anyway, but see we were on I'm thinking that we were on Christmas break anyway. But I know there was a lot of quiet moments with people. They just weren't open and you know – there selves. Nobody was there self. Everyone was kind of guarded, nobody really knew what to say, how to act or what to do.

JJ: So would you say that the community was stunned almost to a point of silence?

EM: Yes, could have been. And no, we didn't see Mothman either.

JJ: I was going to ask you about that too, unfortunately there was a ton of speculation that Mothman or Cornstalk was involved. Do you remember that starting? Anyone starting to say that?

EM: No, not then. I did remember Cornstalk being brought up, the curse of Cornstalk, because supposedly that is every seven years and it so happens that it was on the seventh year. Because we had a fire that destroyed, oh, tons of property, the bridge, and several things after. But Mothman, I have lived in this area my entire life, and you know what? I have never seen Mothman, ever. I know somewhere I read an article where they talked about somebody spotted Mothman flying around. Well, you know what? I don't know what those people were smoking but the people that weren't smoking never did see Mothman. That was wild, totally wild.

JJ: What was it like getting to Ohio?

EM: It was ferry. You used to have to wait forever because it obviously when it all first started was just so slow because everything was 'gosh, we hope this works' and you know we had to get the cars back off once we got them on and so forth and so on.

JJ: And that was about two years, right?

EM: Was it two? I thought it was much longer but your probably right.

JJ: Did it kind of constrain you from going to Ohio?

EM: The thing of it was you had to go across the Kanawha and catch the ferry in Henderson to go to Gallipolis.

JJ: So you had to go across Kanawha on the bridge?

EM: Yes something I didn't want to do at all.

JJ: Was that a feeling that 'Hey, that happened over there, what's the probability that it would happen here?'

EM: Yes, always. And those were things you never thought of on a bridge until that happened. And, I don't know, but all my life I've always heard that what caused that was just nothing more than what they called an eye-beam, is what I've always heard. S, I was

like is this thing an eye-beam? Your looking up at the structure and every piece of the structure you can look at and I wouldn't know an eye-beam if it came down and hit me. It was just a feeling that it gave you.

JJ: Do you remember what the speculation of what caused it before you heard about the eye-beam?

EM: Well one thing we heard was that it was too much weight. Because at that time if I remember correctly several people said that that bridge was bumper to bumper traffic. It wasn't only Christmas shopping and so forth, wasn't right after work?

JJ: It was about 5:15 in the evening.

EM: So you would have had rush hour traffic on that bridge. Which a lot of people from Ohio were over here working and people over here were over there working. So it was a constant. There was constantly traffic on that bridge. I can remember semis; I remember a semi scarred me to death on that bridge because I always thought the lanes weren't wide enough, always. And I still feel that way on a two-lane bridge which there aren't that many of.

JJ: So your going across the Kanawha bridge to get on the ferry, where there people refusing to get on that bridge even?

EM: I don't. I don't remember. I remember people saying that when they were starting to get up that bridge they would pray until they got off of it.

JJ: The one across Kanawha?

EM: Yes.

JJ: When you heard about the eye-beam, did it seem strange to you that that one little piece may have caused that whole bridge to fall down?

EM: Probably not, I wasn't old enough, Jeremy, honestly I wasn't.

JJ: Do remember President Johnson addressing the Silver Bridge collapse?

EM: No, but if I did, I'm sure I was a part of that. But I have a way of blocking some of those things out.

JJ: Do you remember any results because of it that changed bridge design or inspections?

EM: Oh yea, I remember about them talking about bridge inspections.

JJ: Tell me what you remember about bridge inspections.

EM: Just that I don't remember if it was months before that that someone was looking at that bridge. I don't remember if it was because of its unique kind of structure. I don't know what it was but I do remember people talking about they needed to inspect it, and they inspected the Mason bridge along with it, trying to decide what our chances of it happening here since they were so similar.

JJ: Do you remember anyone blaming the state or anyone for not properly inspecting that bridge?

EM: No, I honestly don't.

JJ: What was the lasting impression is of that Silver Bridge disaster at least on the community and on your self as well?

EM: Oh gosh that's a tough one. For me, since I have lived here my entire life, it's like you don't go there now without thinking about it in one sense or another. You just don't. You either make the curve downtown and you think we used to go straight right here to get on the bridge, or you think of families that were ruined and will never see loved ones, or Christmas packages. I think that bothered me, that here is somebody's Christmas presents out floating in the Ohio River.

JJ: Is that one of the most signifying memories you have?

EM: Yes, I think that was due to age and Christmas, you know. Packages symbolize Christmas for everybody as far as that goes. But I think that it was partially the age I was that those are the things that stood out.

JJ: In Point Pleasant, did it take the community a while to come back to itself?

EM: Yes.

JJ: I'm sure there was a period of shock, it seems like there may have been a sense of deep loss, am I on point there?

EM: Yes, definitely.

JJ: Do you think your kids know much about the Silver Bridge?

EM: Probably not, not deeply enough to discuss it with somebody. Well that's what I say I was 12 years old at the time close to 13. What does a 12 or 13 year old that thinks they have life by the horns...other than remembering my dad being upset, remembering my grandparents being upset, and of course my mother being upset and well, everyone you talked to was upset. How does that effect a 12 year old?

JJ: Well, how did it affect you?

EM: I remember being upset because my parents were upset. I remember being upset because my dad was so torn up. You know to see your own dad, thinking that here this guy is, your own dad, and he's reduced to tears. That's hard.

JJ: Did it give it you a sense of your own mortality?

EM: No, not really. You think that that's something that happens to somebody else. I'm trying to think if Van O'Lin lived next to us. I remember him, I think he volunteered because he was a Navy Seal and they needed divers to look for bodies.

JJ: He was a Navy Seal? Tell me what he said he saw down there

EM: Yes. I remember him saying that it was dark and there were catfish as big as men down there. It did me in for fishing or doing anything down there. It was hard to spot anything down there because it was so muddy. You were practically right up on it before you know what it was. Specifically, I don't remember if he found a body or anything.

JJ: How do you think that has affected you to this day?

EM: I still don't like bridges at all, any of them. New, old, two-lane, four-lane or anything I just don't like them.

JJ: Is there ever a bridge you go across that it doesn't cross my mind?"

EM: If it doesn't it's because I'm asleep and don't even know I'm going across. And if you are stuck in traffic on one I always think about that person who put that car in reverse and hit the gas peddle. Yeah, I do think about it.

JJ: The one that went across the Ohio, they just replaced it a few years ago right?

EM: Yeah, they said it used to move but they say they have to give a little bit.

JJ: Doesn't make it any easier does it?

EM: No, it can move all it wants to as long as I'm off of it.

JJ: Did your mom, grandmother, anybody have those kind of feelings about bridges?

EM: Yeah, I think my grandmother felt the same way about it. I don't think that we ever really said anything about it because I didn't want to hear what she would have to say and she didn't probably want to hear any of my fears about it because it would just make it worse.

JJ: Do you remember anything else your dad said about working in that condition?

EM: That it was cold, that the bodies were cold and he was cold and that everyone that came up there was cold. That one little girl, just that she was nearly frozen stiff. Makes you wonder just how cold it was to do that to a child.

JJ: Did you attend any memorial ceremonies?

EM: If I did I don't remember. I probably did but its something that I probably put out of my mind. I'm sure there were plenty

JJ: Have you seen the eye-bar joint over in Ohio?

EM: Yes, I've seen it.

JJ: What did you think of it?

EM: I didn't think it was enough, honestly.

JJ: Is there anything in Point Pleasant?

EM: Yeah, I think there is something, close to the Iron Gate, a plaque or something with names on it. I wish I could see those names.

JJ: Let me jar your memory a bit (handing her a list of victims).

EM: James Alfred White.

JJ: Was that the teacher?

EM: Yes, and here's Kathy Bias. She played softball, not on the same team I was on, but I think they still give a Kathy Bias memorial scholarship in her name.

JJ: Do you remember Mr. White? Was he a teacher of yours?

EM: No, but it give me goose bumps seeing these names.

JJ: Anything else?

EM: Lots of lights on, people just driving down and keeping their lights on because it was so dark, just trying to help. Ambulances, fire trucks and all the people...I remember that now.

JJ: Do you remember anything about settlements or anything like that?

EM: No, to young, once again.

JJ: Do you remember anyone that lost anyone?

EM: No just Kathy Bias, and just because we played ball against each other. Nothing else really comes to mind. I can remember now that my dad said he didn't want us to be down there to see any bodies being pulled out. We did go several days later though. Even now, even this many years later, to be out on the river, not the Kanawha I don't think about it there, but on the Ohio you can't help think about it when we are on our jet-ski's going underneath the railroad bridge that was right beside it and still there, about finding a body or something.

JJ: Have you ever had visitors or met somebody that asks about the bridge?

EM: Yes, they either ask about the bridge or the Mothman. I tell them the bridge did fall there but that I was 12 at the time.

JJ: Do you know about any of the national consequences because of that bridge falling?

EM: No, I don't. I know there is still things that bother me because of it, though. It seems like it take forever to get from point A to point B.

JJ: This started after the bridge fell, not before it?

EM: No, it never crossed my mind before it. But you can ask Lee (her husband), anybody that is in a car with me on a bridge...if we get stopped for any reason on that bridge, like the Mason Bridge, if we aren't moving within five seconds I will get out and walk. And the one that replaced the Silver Bridge, the Silver Memorial Bridge, I'm not about it either. I think it went up to fast. They could have an inspector standing on it and I'm not going to like it.

JJ: Is there anything that you would like to add, anything that I haven't asked that might help you remember anything else?

EM: No not really.

JJ: Thanks, you have been a lot of help.