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E. Charlton Prather (CP): Terribly grateful that you would come and share with us some of the fascinating history of public health that comes through your family. Let me introduce to our watcher that this is Dr. John Mulrennan who is the son of a Dr. John Mulrennan, who was the first mosquito control director, indeed Mr. Mosquito of Florida. And a lot of us would say that Florida would have been uninhabitable had it not been for Dr. John Mulrennan's father, Dr. John Mulrennan. Is that a fair statement, John?

John Mulrennan (JM): I'd say that's pretty accurate, yes. I think my dad was the first entomologist with the state board of health and his primary responsibility, of course, was back when he started, was really disease control. Because, as you well know, in early days of Florida we had a lot of diseases that were transmitted by mosquitos, mainly malaria¹, which was the disease that he worked on early in his professional life; his whole career was centered around malaria.

But what I was saying about the malaria, when he first graduated from college, his first job wasn't in entomology, but, of course, he graduated in the middle of the Depression in 1932 from the University of Florida and went to work for a citrus grower down in Allengrove, Florida, which is right down in the central part of the state—north central part of the state. And, as I recall, during that time, he had just married my mother, and she was pregnant with my oldest sister. And, at the time and during her pregnancy, my mother had malaria. And there was a lot of concern that she would have—that the baby was going to have malaria when it was born. Fortunately, that wasn't the case.

¹Malaria according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is a mosquito-borne disease caused by a parasite. People with malaria often experience fever, chills, and flu-like illness. Left untreated, people may develop severe complications and die.

But I don't know that this necessarily was sort of an impetus that kind of got my dad interested in malaria, but I think it always was very much in his mind, you know, what malaria could do to people. And he had an opportunity—I don't know exactly how the word got out, but he found out, or somebody found out about him, and the Rockefeller Foundation had a position in Tallahassee for someone to come and help Dr. Marquette Boyd in the malaria research program there in Tallahassee.

And his lab that was located there where the, now, Florida State University—Florida College, State College for Women. And they had a little laboratory over there in one of those buildings. And so, Dad went over there and one of his first jobs was to colonize *Anopheles* mosquitos and that's what he did. He colonized the *Anopheles quadrimaculatus* mosquitos² and he also was the first and only person, and no one's ever done it since, he also established the colony of *Anopheles punctipennis*³.

CP: Oh, he did?

JM: Yeah. So, during those times—I know you're familiar with what was going on, but Dr. Boyd was doing a lot of work with some of the patients at Chattahoochee that, you know, the syphilitics that had, they were doing a fever treatment and infecting them with malaria. And Dad was involved in that. He grew the mosquitos, and then he would take them and feed them on the patients in the hospital that had malaria because there was a lot of malaria in the Tallahassee area, at that time. And then they would take those infected mosquitos over to Chattahoochee, to the state hospital. And then feed those on some of the patients to infect them with malaria, so they would develop a fever. And then, of course, the fever would affect the *Spirochete*⁴, and sometimes they recovered from their—

CP: True remission of the tertiary syphilis⁵.

²*Anopheles quadrimaculatus* is a genus of species commonly found in the United States, primarily in the eastern part of the country. The species prefers freshwater aquatic habitats, including ponds, swamps, bayous, slow-moving canals, and streams. Adults are most active during dawn and dusk, which is when they feed.

³*Anopheles punctipennis* is a genus of mosquito commonly found in aquatic habitats, including ponds, temporary pools, springs, pools in intermittent streams, and rainwater barrels. The females of this species feed after dusk primarily and rarely enters dwellings to feed.

⁴*Spirochete* is any of various spiral-shaped motile bacteria of the family *Spirochaetaceae*, certain species, as *Treponema*, *Leptospira*, and *Borrelia*, being pathogenic to humans and other animals, and other species being free-living, saprophytic, or parasitic.

⁵Syphilis is a chronic venereal disease caused by *Treponema palideum* and produces rashes and lesions in a course of three stages. Tertiary syphilis is the last and final stage that occurs when the infection has grown for years, causing lesions to develop on various tissues such as, bones, skin, heart, and arteries.

JM: Yes, yes. So, he was very much involved in that. And he did that till about—he left Allengrove, I think, in 1930, late '32 to '33, and went there. I was born in '34, in Tallahassee when he was there working for the Rockefeller Foundation⁶. About a year or so after I was born, the State of Texas was looking for someone to help them start their malaria program. And so he went out there in, I guess it was about 1935, early 1936, and went to Austin, Texas, to the Texas State Board of Health and set up a similar kind of program for them in Texas. And we stayed there until '38, and then my brother was born there.

And then we moved back to Pensacola, and he resumed working then with the Rockefeller Foundation and the US Public Health Service, Dr. Elmendorf in malaria control, and did a lot of early actual control type work, did a lot of the surveys. He did all of the entomological work. And Dr. Elmendorf and his staff is doing a lot of the school children surveys where they—because I remember when I was a little kid, first grade, they came to our school. And they palpated everybody's spleen, and took a blood sample from your finger to see how many of the kids had malaria.

CP: I remember so well.

JM: Yeah, but during those days my dad was doing the entomological fieldwork. He was locating where the mosquitos were, where they were breeding, and then working on the operational end of trying to develop some kinds of control programs to control the vector. And, of course, Dr. Elmendorf and his staff were looking at the control and the disease.

So we stayed there until 1941, and that's when he became—somehow during the time he was in Pensacola, he really had an association with the state board of health. And I never did know exactly how all that worked together, but I know when he first came he was with the Rockefeller Foundation, but somehow, during that time, he was also with the State of Florida. And I think some of the people that worked in those days, they worked for US Public Health Service, but they also were assigned to the state and different—

CP: Rockefeller did the same thing. They based on the milieu that they wanted them to work under.

JM: Right, right. Well, anyway, this is what happened. So in '41, we came here to Jacksonville, and then his responsibility was to be the chief entomologist for the state board of health.

CP: Into our state.

⁶The Rockefeller Foundation is a philanthropic organization and private foundation. Over the past 100 years, it has been dedication to the mission of promoting the well-being of humanity throughout the world.

JM: And, of course, at that particular time, the bureau was called the Bureau of Malaria Control, I believe it was. And then, about that time, the war started, World War II. And we had, there was a great need then, as you well know, for training of military officers on controlling malaria because malaria was a major disease in our troops in the South Pacific, as well as in the Mediterranean area and particularly in the South Pacific. So, during the whole war, my dad spent most of his time training military entomologists and sanitarians on how to control malaria in the field, how to control the vectors.

And malaria—they called it the malaria control in the war areas, war zones, or whatever and they came around in different parts of the state. And he had all of these programs set up around the military bases, all here in Florida. And then he'd have a class come in, and then he'd take them all around the different bases and show them how to do whatever was being done. And, of course, did that all during the war until the war ended. And then about by 1948, I think, was the last case of malaria we actually had in the state of Florida, down in Collier County. And we're still having a few cases of murine typhus⁷, remember they had the public health service on Mr. Bodee (sic), do you remember Mr. Bodee?

CP: Oh, remember—know Mr. Bodee.

JM: They came and worked in Dad's office. And he was the murine typhus guy. And I think there was a Mr. Flynn, too, as I recall, that came down with public health service. But by the late '40s, early '50s, those things were starting to just kind of, you know, go.

CP: They were disappearing.

JM: Under control, right. And that was when Dad started thinking, In order for Florida to really develop, we've got the diseases under control, but we got thousands and thousands of acres of salt marshes, where these salt marsh mosquitos are breeding, that'll just run you. You cannot stay in these areas after dark. And in order for this state to develop, something needs to be done.

So, he started his plan. His plan was to enable the local governments to control the mosquitos, and so he felt like the state needed to have some kind of involvement in that because the county, a lot of these counties, didn't have the funding to do this. They needed some incentive. So, he went to the legislature, I think it was in 1950, I believe was the first bill, and got some funding.

⁷Murine typhus is a form of typhus transmitted by fleas, usually on rats. It is often confused with viral illnesses. Most people who are infected do not realize that they have been bitten by fleas.

And they called it State One Money. And what they did is they gave each county 15,000 dollars they could spend on personnel or insecticides or whatever, but as you can probably recall, back in those first days, the state bought all the insecticides. And they had a warehouse here in Jacksonville. And all the DDT⁸ and everything came here, and then as the counties requested it, then it was repackaged and then shipped to the various counties for them to use however they wanted to use it.

And then part of that money could be used for them to hire personnel and that was the beginning of the Mosq—Aid to County Program. And about a year or so after that, then Dad thought, Well, this is all well and good, but this is just temporary control. We can use chemicals but that's not going to really do the job, so we need to start doing some permanent control. So then, he got something, a bill, passed in the legislature, and they called it, State Two Funding.

And that provided for ditching and training and filling and monies, and that was on a matching basis that the state would match up to 75 percent of whatever the county put up to do this type of work. And that was the beginning of the real concentrated source reduction programs in the state of Florida, particularly in the coastal areas. And from, probably, about 1951 or '52 on through end of the '60s until the environmental laws were passed that kind of put the stops on digging ditches and marshes and things like that without permits and all this kind of stuff.

That sort of ended that era of about, probably about a 15-year period of time when tremendous amount of source reduction was done. And essentially, I don't know if you recall seeing the graph that my dad used to be so proud of, where he showed the tourist dollars down here? And the tourist dollars went this way, and the '80s 10-year ranking population went this way.

CP: Yeah, I've seen that a bunch of times.

JM: If it hadn't been for getting rid of the salt marsh mosquitos, the tourists would have never come to Florida, because everybody knows, years ago, Florida was a winter tourist destination. People didn't come to Florida in the summertime. It was too hot, and there were too many mosquitos. That was all there was to it.

CP: All the early historians, the early, early writers about Florida, speak to the hoards of mosquitos and it being totally uninhabitable.

JM: And I'm not that old, but I can remember back in the '50s and being in some of the salt marshes in the state where you absolutely could not stay. Even in broad daylight, I have been in

⁸DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) is a colorless, crystalline, tasteless and almost odorless organochloride known for its insecticidal properties.

sundown around Cape Canaveral where the mosquitos would literally just drive you out of there. It was that bad.

CP: I want to insert that you spoke to your dad going to the legislature for these bills. I want to reemphasize your dad did go to the legislature and did, predominantly, all the lobbying for those two pieces of bill. And now history must reflect that it was your dad's effort that caused those two pieces of profoundly important, significant pieces of legislation for the development of this state.

JM: Yeah, I think that one thing I can say about him is he knew the system; he knew the people he needed to talk to. He had a way about him when he talked to legislatures that was believable and yet humble, not arrogant. And there's some funny stories about some of the times that he's gone over there.

One time he went for a committee and legislators, and this is when he was trying to get some money for the research laboratories, and there was a surplus this particular year. And he goes before them and he says, "You know, everybody here wants a slice of the watermelon." And he says, "But, you know what? I'm not here to ask you for a slice of the watermelon." He says, "I'm here to ask you for one little seed. And I'm going to take that one little seed, and I'm going to plant that little seed, and I'm going to reap greenbacks for the State of Florida." They gave him his money.

And another story, which is a good story, too, was he had to go before the county one time and Fuller Warren⁹ was the governor. And I don't know exactly what it was he was trying to get money for, but different representatives and different agencies had been before the county asking for money and everyone of them got turned down, turned down, turned down, turned down.

Finally, Daddy got there, he was probably about the last one, being about the lowest on the pecking order of the ones that were over there to see the cabinet. And so he comes before them and the governor says, "Well, Mr. Mulrennan, you've heard all these other people coming up here and they're asking for money. What do you think your chances are?" And he says, "Well, governor, I'll tell you. I feel like I'm up to bat. I've got two strikes on me and the next pitch is going to be a screwball. But I'm going to stand up here and swing for it as hard as I can."

CP: I like that.

⁹Fuller Warren served as the Governor of Florida from January 4, 1949 to January 6, 1953.

JM: And old Nathan Mayo¹⁰ says, “I recommend we give Mr. Mulrennan his money.” And Colin Engis (sic) says, “I second it.” And they just all of them passed it. I think he was the only one who got any money that day.

CP: Well, he’s good, and he’s honest, and he’s sincere. And his reputation preceded him. You spoke to looking for money for the research labs, speak to that some. Tell us a little bit about the research labs and your dad’s role in that and the why for us.

JM: Okay, well, after the control programs got established, Dad saw that we needed to understand the mosquitos that we were dealing with. We didn’t really understand their biology. We didn’t know that much about flight ranges. We didn’t know the things that we really needed to know about the bugs that we were dealing with. And he thought that it was a real need for us to understand the natural history of mosquitos because unless you really understand the natural history of the insect that you’re trying to control, you’re really not going to be very successful in controlling them.

So he had that kind of a vision. And so that’s when he said, “We need to set up a research laboratory to do this kind of work.” And it was a two-fold kind of a thing. Not only did we need to know something about that natural history and, so forth, of the mosquitos, but then we also needed to look at developing pesticides and other techniques and things, the source reduction techniques, and all the other kinds of ways that we can control mosquitos. So, we need to learn about the mosquitos, and then we needed to work on the applied end of the basic side of it and the applied side of it, so that we could put them both together, work jointly together for the common end of really developing a very scientifically based mosquito control program.

CP: Effective and efficient.

JM: Effective, efficient, and based on science and not based on just what if, those kinds of things. So, the first laboratory that was established was established in Vero Beach, which is now the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, it’s now part of University of Florida. And Dr. Moore W. Provo was the first director of that laboratory.

CP: Provo was Chief of Entomology at University of Florida.

JM: No, Dr. Provo never was in entomology at University of Florida. Dr. Provo was always worked for the state board of health and then when it went to HRS¹¹ [Health and Rehabilitative Services]. In 1979, the legislature transferred the laboratory from the health department to the

¹⁰Nathan Mayo was the Commissioner of Agriculture of Florida from 1923 to 1960 and a member of the Florida Senate from Marion County from 1921 to 1923.

university. During that ensuing years, that laboratory was, and still is, probably one of the preeminent laboratories in the world for mosquito research.

CP: Really?

JM: Oh yeah. It's probably one of the most well known laboratories for some of the type of work they did. And Dr. Provo and Dr. Nielsen and Tim Hagar, and it was three of the original members of that lab, did the main work on the *Aedes taeniorhynchus*, one of the salt marsh species, and its flight range, and established the *taeniorhynchus* mosquito could fly 30 miles. Which was a major finding for a control program when you're dealing with a mosquito that can fly 30 miles from where it breeds.

CP: With a wing about five millimeters long.

JM: Yeah. So, it put a whole different perspective on control programs because if you didn't control them right where they were, then they could spread over thousands and thousands of square miles of area. And so that was a significant finding, but then on the applied side after some time, Dr. Jack Rogers went there and was heading up that part of the program. And they felt like it was a little bit of a problem there with having pesticides and things, where they were trying to do natural history studies and things like that.

And about the same time they were having some major problems with the stable fly or what the West Florida crackers¹² called dog flies over in West Florida. And somebody wanted something done about the dog flies in the Panhandle, so it sort of kind of came together that they would move the applied research program to West Florida and continue to do that type of work but then also do work on the stable flies or dog flies. And, so, that's what happened. That laboratory was established in Panama City back in the '60s. And I don't know exactly when that was, I can't—about '67, I think.

Anyway—I know it was before that, it had to be before that because 1959 they were—well, anyway, I can't remember. But we could go back and check somewhere and find out when exactly that was, but I can't remember. Anyway, that laboratory is still in existence now, too, and has done, did a lot of work, did what I call some of the most significant work on the flight range, and what happens with the dog flies, and where all those flies come from that get on the beaches down there. Found out they're coming from Georgia, Alabama, and 200 miles away and could [be] brought down on weather fronts.

¹¹The Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services was created to promote and protect the health and safety of all residents through the establishment and maintenance of high quality public health standards.

¹²A Florida cracker is a term referring to both the first settlers and their descendants in what is now the state of Florida or a type of cowboy found in Florida that used cow whips instead of lassos to herd cattle.

And everybody is thinking they're breeding down there on the beaches, in the seaweed on the beaches. And for years, they used to treat this seaweed on the beaches, come to find out these flies are coming from hundreds of miles away or more on the weather fronts. Every time there would be a front come through, the weather front would just pick up flies from Southern Georgia and Alabama and just bring them right down to the beach. And the beach was sort of like a barrier and here come all these flies and then, boom, they just drop right on the beach. And of course, if there were people on the beaches, they'd eat them up alive. People would just pack up their bags and leave and go home; they didn't want to stay down there.

CP: I'm one that has done that.

JM: You know what I'm talking about. But anyway, that lab is now a part of Florida A&M University. That was transferred to Florida A&M in '92. When we were, I say we, the Bureau of Entomology was transferred from HRS to Department of Agriculture. And then, as you know, when the legislature, or somebody, thought it would be wise to downsize HRS, and they started taking programs and putting them in different agencies which was, in my opinion, an unfortunate, but nevertheless—it was just like it was very unfortunate when they did some of the things they did, when they reorganized and created HRS, and took programs that were traditional public health programs and put them in environmental agencies and things like that.

CP: In the wrong philosophic milieu. They were placed in the wrong philosophical milieu.

JM: Right. The whole traditional public health, as I knew it and as everybody else knew it and as my dad knew it, ceased to exist. As you knew it, it no longer existed.

CP: That happened in the—

JM: Seventy-six.

CP: Seventy-six. That was the coup de grâce.

JM: But anyway, back to the laboratory. The one in Panama City, now, is named after my dad. And that occurred in 1986, I guess, about a year after he died. So that's the John A. Mulrennan Sr. Research Laboratory.

CP: I'm sure I was aware of that, but it wasn't in the forefront of my consciousness.

JM: I got some stuff over there about that if you're interested in that later.

CP: We are.

JM: But back to the mosquito control. He had a way with local governments, too. And this tape that I have with George Carmichael and some of the old mosquito control directors, Wayne Miller and John Bidler, they talk about some of the things that he did and how he was able to get local governments to—you're talking about getting the legislature to get them involved and provide money for these programs and for the state to provide money to the counties, but as also you had to do some talking to the county commissioners and all to get them interested in being a sort of a partner because when they bought into the program then they, the state, had oversight into the program and what they were doing. And you know how local politicians are, sometimes they not too keen on having state people involved in their business.

CP: Like, Me paying for it, and then you boss it. They are not particularly fond of that.

JM: Right, right. But he had a way of selling things and George Carmichael tells the story. They went down to some county down state, I don't remember what the county was, but they went to this board meeting. And one of the commissioners lit into Daddy and just told him, "We're not going to do this, that, and the other. And we're not going to let y'all do so and so and so and so and so and so and so." And then Dad just sat there and listened to them. And finally, he finished and Daddy says, "You know what," he says, "I agree with you."

And then, so, he starts talking about (inaudible) so pretty soon he had to turn all away around and had the guys agreeing with hi, and darn it if they didn't agree. And finally, he passed the whole thing. And George Carmichael said later, he said, "When your daddy said that 'I agree with him,' I thought I was going to kill him. I've been down here working and working on this, trying to get these guys to do this, and all of a sudden he's agreeing with this guy that's against us." But he worked it around; pretty soon he had the guys agreeing with him. He had a way of doing stuff like that.

CP: He was superdiplomat.

JM: Yeah, he was. He was a very good politician. And I remember one time he had a bill, might have been one of those mosquito bills, and he was trying to get it passed. And he went out, and I don't know, he must have gotten 20 or 30 dollars worth of quarters, and he went to the pay phone

and he started calling every one of the legislators that he knew that he could get a hold of to support his bill. And he did that and got them to—he sat right there in the payphone and put quarters in and made long-distance calls, all these guys, all of them, had all their phone numbers written down, and called them and said, “I need you to support this bill.” And he got their support.

CP: I tell you a story on your dad. The case of Rocky Mountain spotted fever¹³, the first case that we were ever had the laboratorily (sic) diagnosed. And pursuant of that, your dad and I were very much involved with that. But somewhere in the public health service got a lot of tick data, geographic distribution of tick data, and carried it over for your dad to look at it. We were particularly interested in the, don’t remember the name of the tick, but a particular tick that we were involved with. And I carried these data over to your dad to interpret it for me and he says, “All this is nice, but I think the data we’ve been collecting in Florida for the last 15 years would be much more useful to you.”

And he went down in his desk and got out 15 years of surveillance data, which he had been spotting over the state the prevalence of a particular tick, the carrier of Rocky Mountain spotted fever. I was so impressed, and I don’t think a soul knew that he had not published on those data at all, but he obviously knew the importance, and he’d been keeping up with it. He’d been keeping up with it for years. I was so impressed with that. And he and I did some field tripping together, first time that I’d ever did some tripping with him when we went into the Ocala National Forest. He suggested it, and he and I did. Now, we drove down to somewhere one day and spent the day out collecting ticks. Your dad and me. That was a highlight.

JM: My dad was a funny guy in some ways. He operated out of his back pocket. He kept everything—really, he played everything close to the vest. He knew what was going on, but unless you asked him part, he wasn’t all that forthcoming sometimes with information, as you well know.

CP: He was a humble man. He was a humble man, and he didn’t want to push his ego onto you. He never did. Tell me about his coming around to get his honorary doctorate of the University of Florida.

JM: Well, this happened in 1971 or ’72, I believe, the years kind of get by but it was between the time that Ralph came back from Vietnam and the Navy. I came to Jacksonville, and that was in 1969, so it was right around 1970 and ’71. Of course, by that time, Dad had done an awful lot of work. He had established himself, really, as the father of mosquito control in the state of Florida.

¹³Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a tick-borne disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii*. This organism is a cause of potentially fatal human illness in North and South America, and is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected tick species.

I don't think nobody would ever argue that point at all. He was the real impetus behind the mosquito control programs as we know them today and as we knew them at that particular time.

Plus, the fact that the malaria control and being responsible for carrying out those programs that eventually eradicated malaria after World War II. Of course, the DDT coming in to an existence during the war and in being able after the war to the civilian population, and they had that program of screening houses. Of course, screening houses was going on back in '41, '40, and '39. That was one of the main efforts, as I recall.

And I remember just as a little bitty kid, but I remember Dad talking about going out and talking to people about putting screens on their houses, you know, that they could cut down on their malaria if they had just put screens on their houses, because the mosquitos couldn't get in their house and bite them. It's the same thing now we got going on in the third world countries where they're saying if the people could just use the mosquito net to sleep under at night that could reduce the number of cases of malaria.

CP: And a whole bunch of other stuff too.

JM: Yeah, yeah, just a simple thing as a net. And the simple thing is just putting screens on somebody's house. I mean, nowadays, it's kind of taken for granted that everybody has screens on their houses.

CP: Most folks today can't tell you why they got them.

JM: Right, but as you know, back in the '30s and the '20s and way back in those days, particularly out in the rural areas, people didn't have screens on their houses.

CP: I grew up in a house that didn't have screens.

JM: Yeah, and in the summer time—

CP: We had mosquito nets though, by the way.

JM: Well, okay. Well, a lot of people did. They had mosquito nets, but, of course, in the summer time, all the windows were open because you didn't have air-conditioning. And so, naturally, the mosquitos were there. There were a lot of people infected, mosquitos were coming in and biting

people, and so it was a major, major problem. But anyway, he was really into the screening of people's houses. And then after the war and the DDT came on the scene, they went back into the inside spraying of the houses and between the two things that pretty well got rid of—

CP: That was the final coup de grâce, wasn't it?

JM: Right. And then, of course, since that time most people now have air-conditioning in—their windows are closed all the time. The chances now of us ever having major outbreaks of malaria are pretty slim because of that. The conditions and situations this day and time are just nothing like they were, as you well know, 50, 60, 70 years ago, just nothing like it.

CP: They aren't comfortable.

JM: I can tell you another story though about Daddy and the malaria, though, in Pensacola. Like I said, he did a lot of fieldwork in those days and he had adult resting stations established all over Pensacola.

CP: You might tell our audience what an adult resting station is.

JM: Well, an adult resting station is—

CP: Is that the same thing as these weigh watch stations on our interstates, today?

JM: No, not really. What it is, it's a place where adult *Anopheles* mosquitos will rest during the day. They have a tendency to go to cool, dark places and rest in these areas during the day, and then they'll move out of those areas at night and feed, and then they come back and they rest. And if you know, particularly stables and underneath high houses and under the cupboards, them places are typical kinds of things where you'll find adult *Anopheles* mosquitos resting.

Well, he had one resting station under a house in downtown Pensacola. And this particular house happened to be in the red light district of Pensacola. And I don't know that he really paid that much attention as to what was going on in this particular house; the house just was a perfect house for a good resting station. It was high off the ground and kind of dark under there, and he could crawl underneath there and he could collect his mosquitos. And it was a perfect set up, as far as he was concerned.

Now, one day, he was under there, collecting mosquitos, and as he comes out, there's a policeman there waiting on him. And the policeman says, "We have a complaint against you. You're under arrest for being a peeping tom." And he said, "What?" And he says, "Yeah, the madam of this house has called and said you're underneath this house peeping on what's going on here." And Dad says, "No, I'm collecting mosquitos." He says, "What?" And he says, "Yeah, see here," and he started showing his mosquitos. So, they let him go. I know Dr. Sowder¹⁴ likes to tell that story on him because I think Dr. Sowder was over there at that particular time, working—

CP: They were there at the same time.

JM: Yeah, they were there at the same time. Dr. Sowder was in charge of VD [Venereal Disease] control—

CP: And Dr. Sowder was down in the red light district a lot.

JM: Yeah, he was at red light districts a lot, too. So Dr. Sowder likes to tell that story on him, you know what I mean. He told it a lot of times. But that was a funny story.

CP: That's good. Go back to his doctorate. I got you off onto a tangent.

JM: Well, anyway, because of the things that he had done for the State of Florida, the University of Florida recognized his accomplishments and his contributions to the state and awarded him an honorary doctorate of science degree in 1971, I think it was.

CP: Yes, I remember that.

JM: Yeah, and he was very proud of that. I think that's why—

CP: We were all proud of that too, John.

¹⁴Dr. Wilson T. Sowder was a prominent figure in Florida's public health system for over 30 years. His dedication to Florida's health began in the 1940s, when he served as a venereal disease control officer with the US Public Health Service. Under his tenure as a Florida state health officer, he developed health departments in each of Florida's counties. Dr. Sowder was interviewed as part of the Florida Public Health Oral History Project on June 24, 1997.

JM: Well, I think my dad really had a real strong attachment and feeling for his alma mater. And, of course, I think that was probably one of the highlights of his life when he received that. He's received a lot of rewards: The Meritorious Service Award with the Florida Public Health Association, very notable accomplishment; and, of course, he was president of the American Mosquito Control Association; he was president of the Florida Mosquito Control Association; he was president of Florida Entomological Society; he had been members and officers in the south—I'm trying to think of the association in the Caribbean—and the Pan-American thing years ago. He was involved in that because I know he went to Cuba one time before [Fulgencio] Batista¹⁵ was kicked out on a meeting down there. So, he had had a lot of honors in his day, all certainly well deserved, but I don't think any honor meant more to him than when he got that honorary doctorate.

CP: Was there a written presentation as a part of that? Would it be possible for us to have a copy of that?

JM: I'm still trying to find it. I've got some somewhere; you know, it's really funny. I've got the one when he got his Meritorious Service Award, and I've torn my garage up the other day going through boxes, looking for it. And I know I have some somewhere, but I haven't been able to find them. But I'm going to keep looking. We'll get them.

CP: Okay, and send them to me, and I'll get them on to the library.

JM: See I have the—this is the picture that was taken of him at the time he received his doctorate. That's in the cap, you know, he had his—

CP: Can our camera pick that up?

JM: That picture was taken when he received that honorary doctorate.

CP: Yes, and there was a special reception for him here, right at the state board. And you were here, you came. You were here in uniform that day. And I remember the day well when the board of health advisory counsel it was then called. These are great. Of the things he's accomplished, what are you the most proud? One, he's your dad, of course. Now, we'll accept that one.

¹⁵Fulgencio Batista (January 16, 1901 – August 6, 1973) was the president of Cuba from 1940 to 1944 and dictator from 1952 to 1959. He was overthrown from power during the Cuban Revolution (1953 – 1959).

JM: Yeah, well, I think he did not want to have—my dad didn't ever want to have any undue influence on his children as far as trying to necessarily force them. Well, I know what he wanted. He gave you little hints what he wanted you to do.

CP: Dads are kind of funny that way.

JM: And, of course, my dad was very much into education. And he really put a lot of emphasis on education and wanted all of his children to get a good education, particularly the boys. He thought it was most important that the boys got good education. And, of course, when I first started out in college, I started out in pre-med and went to Tulane and took two years of pre-med over there. But during the summers, though, from the time I graduated from high school and every summer for four straight summers—he gave me a job with a little nepotism there, but I guess it was all right—he gave me a job working in the lab, in his lab, identifying mosquitos. And I liked it. I liked bugs; I liked entomology. I don't think he ever wanted me to get into this.

CP: Oh really?

JM: No, no.

CP: That's shocking.

JM: No, I don't really think he did.

CP: That is very complimentary that you followed your dad's footsteps, but go ahead.

JM: But I don't think he really wanted me to. I think he was proud later that I did, but that wasn't what he really—because he saw the struggles he had, and he just felt like that he would rather me be some other profession than an entomologist. But I think he was proud later on, particularly when I went in the Navy and the accomplishments that I made in the military and all. And I know that he'd tell that he wished I had stayed in instead of getting out and coming back and going to work for HRS.

CP: Hey, you made some different contributions here, too. You and your—

JM: Well, it was a good career. He was funny about those kinds of things, but as far as the things I was most proud of him about, though, was the influence he had on me, number one, of being an

entomologist. If I had not gotten involved in working in that lab I'd probably would have never really—I always had an interest in all, I used to listen to him tell the stories about all the different things he was doing and that used to interest me.

CP: And, he was a good storyteller, too, now.

JM: Oh yeah, I can remember as a little kid him telling about some of the things he was doing, and then sit and listen to him and Dr. Rogers—Dr. Rogers used to come and visit—and Dr. Provo and different ones. And it was very interesting to me to listen to that. My brother and sisters, they could care less. That wasn't adventurous to them at all.

CP: Bugs and things to step on and all that.

JM: Right. But I was interested in all of that and really liked to sit and listen to all the stories and the things that they did, so I did have a more of a scientific interest, and so that influenced. And, I'll tell you, I've had a good career. I've had a good life as an entomologist. I have no regrets. And so I thank my dad for that influence that he had over me. But there's so many things, I think the mosquito control program that Florida has today is probably the model for the world. It's certainly the model for the United States.

CP: And it has been a good while, hasn't it?

JM: Yes, every state in this country has patterned their programs after what Florida did to one degree or another. But, everybody looked to Florida as the model.

CP: That's a happy accolade for your dad. Go ahead.

JM: And I think that the fact that he had the vision to see what needed to be done and then had the ability through his astuteness as a politician or whatever you want to say, because he did have those abilities, his ability to win people over to see the things that he wanted them to see and get that support that he wanted them to give him for whatever it was he was trying to accomplish.

I think that's really remarkable. And his legacy is still here in a big way because we still—probably Florida's mosquito control programs, by far, from a budgetary standpoint is one of the largest and it is the largest in the world. I don't know what the budget is now, but it's way in excess of 50 million dollars.

CP: Yeah, and the state county corporative effort and then some cities, they add some money too. Some of the cities, as I remember. That was entirely your dad's idea to get those governments to pool their money for a common purpose, particularly when the county was going to give their money and allocate all responsibility to the state. That's almost unheard of. We politicians don't work like that.

JM: That's true. I think that it really is a, like I say, very remarkable thing the way he was able to set it up and have it a joint cooperative effort between the state and local government. And I don't know of any other program like that in the—

CP: —in the world.

JM: Yeah. There's some programs now where the state provides grants and things to counties like the wastetower program and some of those things, but it's not exactly the same type of thing as where the controls, the law, required so many, you know, the counties had to provide reports. And, I mean, the state kept detailed records, and still does, of everything the counties did and they had to report all of their activities. How many miles of ditch they dug, how many miles of road they'd fog, how many of acres of larvae they treated, and down to the pound of insecticide they use, and all this kind of stuff.

And, they still do that. And people come to Florida and they say, "Can you tell us how much insecticide you use so and so?" "Oh yeah, here it is." And they're amazed at how much information is available, and all that's due to Daddy. He wanted that information. He felt like that was very important to know what was going on, and how they were doing it, and, again, going back to the labs and the research and those labs taking that information, and then providing it to the state, and then the state putting it out in the memoranda.

He had all those numbered memoranda he's put out to the counties telling them this is the latest findings on so and so and so and so, and this is the way you need to be doing this. And it's just, really, there's no other; it's nothing like it anywhere. So that is, to me, one of the highlights of all of his accomplishments and what he did as far as the mosquito control program, but I'll take it no one will ever—course, he came in it—he was at the right time, at the right place, but he was the right person.

CP: Yes, he was, by personality. He was the right person in a unique moment.

JM: Yeah, I don't know if anyone else could have accomplished what he did, even though they might have been at the right place at the right time.

CP: They lacked that ingredient.

JM: But he was the right person.

CP: I'm recalling your causing me to develop some mental pictures of being present with the national experts in mosquito control when we were having St. Louis [encephalitis] concerns. But when your daddy rose to speak, all these PhDs, all these high-powered pays from around the world and he'd come here to advise us, they got quiet when your daddy spoke. Your daddy carried the day and through the public health service and through the necessary of the politics. The politics was that we local folks ain't got sense enough to take care of this, you bring in the national experts.

You've been there, where it was particularly dominant in our encephalitis¹⁶ days. Your dad stood belly button above all the rest, and they all knew your dad. And your dad decided the mosquito stuff in all of our encephalitis response. Did he ever speak to you about—those were tension days, because the international media were hot on Florida's trail.

JM: Yeah, I knew that it was. There were some tense times, of course. That was back in the early '60s. I was in the Navy, then, and stationed in California. And so I was sort of far removed from what was going on a day-to-day basis, and again, my dad, no matter how tense things were, and I know he had some tense times even before that time, he didn't bring it home. He didn't bring stuff home.

CP: Good, good, good. I'll chalk up another mark for your dad.

JM: What was stuff at work was stuff at work, and what was for the family and for home was for home. And he didn't mix them up. I'll have to say that, of course, we talked when people would come and sometimes talk about things. And, of course, as I got older then, of course, I became an entomologist in the same business, certainly we talked about a lot of different things and things we had in common and so forth and so on. But back, years ago, particularly when I was living at home and as a kid, rarely do I remember him bringing things—

CP: Talking business around the dinner table.

¹⁶Encephalitis according to Mayo Clinic's definition is inflammation of the brain. Viral infections are the most common cause of the condition. Severe cases of encephalitis, while relatively rare, can be life threatening. Because the course of any single case of encephalitis can be unpredictable, it's important to get a timely diagnosis and treatment.

JM: Talking business, no. He didn't do that. But I know that, during that time when the encephalitis epidemic was going on in the Tampa Bay area he went down there and he made some observations. And I think everybody immediately, all the experts, thought, Well, this is *Culex quinquefasciatus*,¹⁷ this is a vector, because that had always been the traditional vector. And Daddy says, "There're not any of them around here. It's something else, it's another vector here." And the one that was the most prominent was the *Culex nigripalpus* and he says, "I bet you that this is the vector." And, sure enough, when they started pooling the mosquitos and they looked at the *niagrapalpus* and that's exactly the mosquito that was transmitting the virus. See, Florida has been totally different of any other state as far as St. Louis encephalitis.

CP: Total recorded history on St. Louis.

JM: You cannot compare with Florida with any other of the traditional epidemics that have occurred in other places in the country, because it's a different vector and the sequence of events that really triggers the epidemic. And we just learned this within the last few years with the work Vero Beach lab has done.

For the first time, really gotten the handle on the sequence of events as far as rainfall and the spacing of those rainfall events: the presence of virus, the number of hatchling birds that are uninfected birds that are susceptible to the virus, as well as, then, of course, the mosquito population, but those sequential rainfalls where the mosquitos have a long enough period of time to incubate the eggs and get the virus to where they can transmit it. There's so many things that all kind of have to go together when you look at the whole picture of St. Louis encephalitis in Florida, the number of things that have to all mesh.

CP: It's amazing we have any of it.

JM: Well, you see why we don't have them that often. We had a major outbreak in '61, '62, '63, round in there.

CP: Yeah, '59 to '60 to '61.

JM: Yeah. And then we had the outbreak in '77, and then we had the major outbreak again in '90. And in between that we've had sporadic cases here and there but not any major outbreaks. And if

¹⁷*Culex quinquefasciatus* is a medium-sized mosquito found in tropical and subtropical regions of the world. It is the vector of *Wuchereria bancrofti*, avian malaria, and arboviruses including St. Louis encephalitis virus, Western equine encephalitis virus, and West Nile virus.

you look back, historically, on those major outbreaks, that sequence of events of the susceptible bird population of the mosquitos and, of course, the virus having to be there to infect those susceptible birds to get that virus really generating in the mosquitos and the vectors and then, ultimately, to the humans.

CP: All that build up and spill over.

JM: But he saw that, and he went down there and looked at the situations, saw the mosquitos, and, of course, as I recall him telling the story, said, "I've never seen so many morning doves in all my life." Of course, the doves and then, of course, it wasn't the adult doves, in the mature birds, as much as how many young they may have had which obviously has—

CP: We didn't know that then.

JM: No, they didn't. But there was probably, obviously, a lot of young birds that were—

CP: There had to be. You don't get big birds except from little birds.

JM: —susceptible to the virus, that could infect the mosquitos. The older birds were immune, and they wouldn't infect the mosquitos. He made some very pertinent observations which, of course—

CP: And really guided the surveillance of the research.

JM: Right. And, of course, then that was sort of that outbreak and some of the things they found out triggered the establishment of the epidemiological research center down there. Dr. Flora Mae Welling headed that for a long time. And then that did a lot of good work too.

CP: Oh, it sure did.

JM: He's had a hand in a lot of things over the years in public health, there's no question about that.

CP: I'm amused that you highlight your attitude toward him as his influence on you, in essence, in a sidwinder sort of way, not in a direct way. What would he consider his most prideful accomplishment?

JM: Well, he was very proud of his family. Oh yeah. He loved his family. In fact, we were talking about this a while at the Kiwanis¹⁸ meeting today, and in fact, my dad was a Kiwanian. We were talking about University of Florida, talking about football tickets, and talking about getting season tickets and one thing and another, and some of the guys were talking about getting tickets to other games. But anyway, I was telling them, I said, "I have season tickets." And, "Oh, you have season—how long have you had them?" I said, "Well, they belonged to my dad before me. I inherited them." My daddy had 10 season tickets to University of Florida football games, 10 tickets.

And the reason he had so many tickets was because he wanted all of his kids and grandkids, any family that he could gather together with him, he took them to the ball game. He loved the Florida Gators; he saw them through thick and thin. The good times and the bad times. Unfortunately for Dad, he died before they saw their glory, but he loved his family to go be around him, and I know when we used to have family gatherings and all, I think he was at his happiest time I've ever seen him is when all his family and his grandkids and everybody was around him, you know. He just reveled in his kids, his grandkids and their accomplishments. He really was very proud of all of his kids and his grandkids and what they were able to accomplish.

CP: You're telling me he's a scientist, statesmen, politician, and a family man. That's not the word I want, a family man—there's something better for that, but I like that. And I saw all that in your dad. I didn't know his personal life, though.

JM: And he was a very spiritual man, too.

CP: Speak to that.

JM: Well, Dad was of Irish descent, most of his family on his father's side. His grandfather had emigrated from Ireland. And the Mulrennans, my great-grandfather, my daddy's grandfather, brother was in this country and in Florida prior to the Civil War. And when the war started, he signed on as a mercenary with the Confederate army and was in Florida during the Civil War and made it up to the rank of captain in the Confederate army.

¹⁸Kiwanis International was founded in Michigan in 1915. It's an international, volunteer-led service club that raises more than \$100 million a year to strengthen communities and serve children.

When the war ended, he was in the Tampa Bay area. And he stayed down in that area and there was some land-grant land available. He went out about 15, 16 miles east of Tampa and homesteaded a farm—this was about like 1868 or something like that—and started clearing land and planting orange trees. And he had been on the property, I guess about three years, and he died.

Well, my great-grandfather, his brother, had immigrated into New York and was living up there. And when the uncle died, or my great-grandfather's brother died, the word was sent that he had died and that they had two or three more years to—think you had to live on the property five years to get the land grant, so somebody had to come and take up the land grant. So, my great-grandfather came and brought the family down from New York and they established, took up the grant, and built a log house.

And they were Catholic family, Irish Catholic. And in those days, down in that area, there were a lot of German Catholics and a lot of Irish Catholics and my great-grandfather donated an acre of land to the Diocese of St. Augustine to build a Catholic church on that property. So one of the first Catholic churches out in that area was owned, an original one-acre of Mulrennan homestead land. And, of course, so my dad was raised as a Catholic and the church was there, but then in the freeze, this is before Daddy was born, I guess it was in the late 1800s—

CP: Eighty-nine was the freeze.

JM: Eighty-nine was when it was, and it had that major freeze. And all the groves down there were killed except for our grove. My great-grandfather went out and sawed all the trees off to the ground and his came back. And he saved his grove, but the rest of them lost their groves, and they all moved away. And the church had to close; they didn't have enough parishioners, so the Diocese of St. Augustine deeded the property back to my great-grandfather and great-grandmother. I have a copy of that deed.

CP: You do? What happened to the building?

JM: They turned it into their house. They had an old, rough-hewn lumber house that when my great-grandfather first went down there were no sawmills in Hillsborough County, so they built a log house. And then, no electricity, used to take lighter splinters like they had in lighters, stick them in the log house for light. But anyway, then they finally hauled some lumber on a barge from Cedar Key down to Tampa and then brought it out on oxcarts and built their first lumber house. And when the church left then they moved in, renovated the church, and that was their house and they lived in that until 1934.

And '34, the year I was born, that's when the house burned down. And so now the house that they're living in now they built in '41. But anyway, back to the spiritual side, my dad was very—I wouldn't say he was a devout Catholic for a long time, but then my mother and he got married. He came back and got closer and then in his later years in his life, I think, he was very close to the Lord. I think he was a very spiritual person, and he was a man who lived the way he believed. And I think he was an example of someone who had the highest standards and things like that, a man of high integrity, high ethics, high morals.

CP: You knew that when you stepped into his presence, John.

JM: Yeah, and so you had to admire him for that. I mean, he lived by his example was something that you could try to emulate and to live by, and I think that was something I could say I was very proud to say that he was my father because of his spiritual and personal life, as well as his professional life.

CP: I appreciate you bringing that up. Thanks for that. You brought us a whole bunch of stuff to help remember him with and for our future historians to look at. Tell us what you've brought.

JM: An article that was written in the *Florida Times Union* when he retired.

CP: Mosquitos won't bug him anymore.

JM: But I've got some other newspaper articles. I've got a whole envelope full of them here.

CP: Okay, a lot of clippings.

JM: A lot of clippings that date back in the DDT days.

CP: Wow. [reading] "DDT to be used in 26 counties."

JM: "Health board will continue malaria war: first package arrives by Parcel Post," and this was the Bureau of Entomology, "American dog tick specimens." "Civitan¹⁹ here, taught by state entomologist," this is in October 11, 1952. Let's see, "Mulrennan advanced to directive post in malaria control."

¹⁹Civitan International is an adult service organization that promotes volunteerism in the community. Members are referred to as civitans.

CP: I'm sorry you didn't keep the dates on all of those.

JM: Well, yeah, some of them don't have—

CP: Had to have been '44 or '46.

JM: This one here is, "Come back, Mr. Bodee," retiring there is Mr. Bodee. And then here they are spraying DDT for the war on flies, "Health board ready to open, malaria battle: insect war advance to be aired." And then this is something to do with pest control and the rats and mosquito groups to here.

CP: Yeah, you haven't talked about rats and your dad was very much involved—

JM: Well, you know, they had a big—

CP: —in rat proofing murine typhus.

JM: Oh yeah, right, right. Well, that was what Mr. Bodee and them did. Yeah, they—

CP: Yeah, your dad and I did some diddling over in Pensacola, around the last case of murine transmitted typhus in Florida. He and I were over there to celebrate that.

JM: But anyway, there's a lot of stuff here back in the old DDT days.

CP: All right. We want all that.

JM: And so, anyway, I've brought everything—this is stuff that my mother saved. I figured that the historians, the archivists can go through and use whatever they want to use. The thing is, I'd rather this be put somewhere for posterity, for somebody that's in future generations can go and look at. It'll be somewhere where somebody will know where it is, in a repository or someplace.

CP: It'll be taken care of.

JM: Right.

CP: And this is going to be electronically recorded, by the way.

JM: You might want to just stick that in there.

CP: So it won't yellow through the sulfide and disappear.

JM: This here is a resolution that was made by the Florida Mosquito Control Association following when Dad passed away, and this kind of goes through the whole history of everything he ever did in resolution form.

CP: That will be good.

JM: This is the thing on the Meritorious Service Award²⁰, still in his picture, and the write up of his biography and everything.

CP: Good, good, good. That's 1971.

JM: A letter here from Governor Graham to the family when the laboratory was named in his honor, and that was in 1986. Here's another letter from David Pingree who was the Secretary of State Commerce—

CP: Oh, they were on the same thing?

JM: No, this is when Daddy died, and he wrote his letter to me expressing his condolences. But anyway, I thought that that was something that was worth keeping. Here's a history of the West Florida Arthropod Research Laboratory, which was presented by Dr. Rogers the day that the lab was dedicated in Dad's name.

²⁰The Public Health Service Meritorious Service Award is an honor award presented to members of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Officer Corps. The PHS MSM is awarded in recognition of meritorious service of a single but particularly important achievement, a career notable for accomplishments in technical or professional fields, or unusually high-quality and initiative in leadership.

CP: Oh, all right.

JM: And then I've got some articles and things that Dad wrote over the years, and I have some speeches and some things that he published in various journals. And I thought that I would just leave all these things with you. And then there are a couple of memoranda that he wrote, which I think is rather interesting. This was in 1969 when he wrote to Senator Barron regarding the reorganization of state government, and it's kind of interesting. I think, this is—he kind of let Barron know what he thought about it. And then here is one on the reorganization of pest control, which he wrote to the members of the pest control industry. And then, finally, this is the drawing of the morphology of the larvae of the *Culex mulrennani*, the mosquito that is named after my daddy.

CP: Turn it around for the camera, and see if the camera can pick it up.

JM: He had a mosquito named after him. He also has a sand fly named after him.

CP: I didn't know that.

JM: Yeah, he has a *culicoides* named after him. But this was the one that the first Ernestine Basham—I don't know if you ever knew her, that worked in the lab?

CP: Oh yeah, yes, I do. Yes, I do.

JM: She was the one that first discovered this. This particular mosquito occurs only in the [Florida] Keys and it's one of the *melanoconion* species, *Culex melanoconion mulrennani*. And this is the drawings of the larval characteristics and the genitalia of the male mosquito; this is how they identify the adult. You can only identify the adults either through the male genitalia or identify it in the larval stage, the larval characteristics there. So that's the drawings.

CP: That is fascinating. And we can have this?

JM: Yeah. And then this is a frame of the, really, it was when the Meritorious Service Award thing. It's framed with his picture and everything. But I was going to give you that, too, because I want these things to go somewhere where they can be used. I've got them, but they're just stuck in a box. And when I go, I don't know what my kids will do with it, but, as generations pass, I don't think there's as much of a feeling for things sometimes to keep things as they are. I know I

have a greater appreciation for the historical significance of some of this information now, more so than I—

CP: As I grow older, I've become more impressed with the historic significance of a lot of stuff.

JM: Now, some of these things, I think they're two or three copies, but that's okay. You can have them all. But it gives you some perspective, too, on all of the different kinds of things that Daddy was involved in. I think we've talked about mosquitos, but he was very much involved in the writing of the pest control law, which became law in 1947, and the state board of health had the responsibility of regulating. The state had to investigate the complaints, and it was a state entomologist that investigated the complaints, and then recorded the findings to the commission, and then the commission took action on the violators.

Of course, in, I guess, 1960 something or maybe it was the early '70s, I don't know exactly when, but the legislature abolished the commission and put the whole responsibility in the state board of health. And so, Daddy was very much involved with pest control and that end of things and regulating and making sure that the citizens of this state were afforded with good, honest pest control with people who were ethical and honorable and did what they were supposed to do. So that was a big—

CP: And knew how to handle those pesticides.

JM: Right. And they gave the examinations and all that, which they still do. They're doing that to this day. So that was a—during the time in my daddy was involved, I wouldn't say that was the biggest part of what he did but as time was going on it was becoming more and more a bigger part of what he was doing. I know by the time I retired, last year, I spent more time as a bureau chief involved in pest control matters than I did on anything else.

CP: Because that was your problem son, wasn't it?

JM: Exactly, that's where it was. You were dealing with the public, with people that were doing things that people didn't like, and they had complaints of who were the people that got the complaints. So yeah, it was. And, of course, the size of the industry from the time when Daddy started till the present time, it's just grown, phenomenally.

CP: From nothing when your dad started.

JM: Right. So, he had a big, big part of drafting that law.

CP: Good. That's worthy of the record, John.

JM: I think I needed to mention that because he did have a big part of drafting that pest control law, which is, really, still pretty much the same as it always was. There's been some changes over the years, but still it's a very good law. And I think it's held up well. It's done real good, so anyway, but the other thing too, there's an article in here about aquatic weeds.

CP: Oh, we haven't mentioned that at all.

JM: No, and why would he be involved in aquatic weeds? And, of course, anybody that knows anything about mosquitos knows that a lot of mosquitos breed in areas where there's aquatic weeds, so aquatic weed control kind of goes hand-in-hand with mosquito control. So my dad was involved in the (inaudible) society and the Aquatic Weed Control Society and things like that because of the relationship there with the mosquito control. So, I mean, you look at the broad spectrum of things that he was involved in and the kinds of things it was—you think of maybe just mosquitos, but really and truly there was a lot of other things that he had to know about and to be involved in.

CP: All tangential, though.

JM: Right, absolutely.

CP: All tangential to his entomology background.

JM: But, like you said, the rodent control, as time went on, that became less and less of an importance, but back, way back in the '40s and the late '30s, it was of significant importance because of the murine typhus.

CP: That's right. We had a lot (inaudible).

JM: Yeah, a lot of that and, of course—

CP: Unaware to you, one of Kirk, Governor Kirk's²¹, great interest was rats. And he went through a little episode where he wanted rat head counts, how many had been killed since his last visit of the quarter. It became a joke, but Kirk was serious about it. He'd come by, and your dad always recorded it. And he and Governor Kirk related very well.

JM: Yeah, Daddy liked Dr. Governor Kirk. Well, of course, he knew Governor Kirk before Governor Kirk became the governor.

CP: And Dr. Sowder and Governor Kirk didn't relate at all. And I remember the times when Governor Kirk would come by for his rat count. He and his entourage would come and set up a meeting over in the state board of health conference room and all the city big shots who had anything to do with rats would parade by, tell him what we've done about rats since last time you was here, and how many we have caught. After all those were over, we used to sit around and muse and kind of laugh about what had happened with your dad. It was fun.

JM: I imagine he probably made up a few rat counts along those—

CP: I didn't say that.

JM: I don't know if he put a whole lot of importance in that. There's some things that Daddy didn't put a whole lot of importance on. He did them because the Governor Kirk said he wanted them, he would do it. But I'm sure that wasn't very high on my dad's list of priority things to do, for sure.

CP: But those were my highlights. And I mentioned two highlights with your dad. I got a lot of personal experiences with your dad and I respected and admired him very much. But he and I go into the Osceola near Ocala, we're in the Ocala National Park, catching ticks and then eating together for a sit-to with appropriate publics in Pensacola about murine typhus. And they wanted to get all hot and bothered again because a human case with the public, wanted to get all hot and bothered about that, and Dr. Sowder saw to it. And me and your dad went over, and it worked out. Me and your dad went over, but he did all the talking, you know.

JM: Well, there was one other little story I was going to tell you about working in Pensacola. Right before we moved over here in 1941, Daddy was out doing a surveillance in one of the forts. I don't remember if it was Pickens²² and Barrancas²³ or whatever the name was, the two forts.

²¹Claude R. Kirk Jr. (1926-2011) was the 36th Governor of Florida from 1967-1971.

²²Fort Pickens is a historic US military fort on Santa Rosa Island in Pensacola, Florida. Fort Pickens is included within the Gulf Islands National Seashore, and as such, is administered by the National Park Service.

CP: Barrancas. I don't know about Pickens is; I don't know the other one.

JM: Barrancas, it was one of those forts. And he was walking alone in this dark area with a flashlight, looking up at the ceiling, and stepped in a hole and fell about 15 or 20 feet into this hole on the concrete. Landed on his shoulder and broke his shoulder. And he had his, and I remember this, when we came from Pensacola to Jacksonville, he had his arm in a cast and that thing was up like this, you know, with one of these brace things and he couldn't drive. And so we had to get one of the fellas that worked at the state board of health over there in Pensacola to drive us over here to Jacksonville, or I think he drove us down to Tampa and then somebody else brought us up here to Jacksonville. But I'll never forget that. And he was so concentrated on looking for mosquitos that he didn't see the hole, and he fell in the hole and broke his shoulder.

CP: Well, that's a bad story, John. That's not a good story.

JM: Well, though, but it just goes to show you when he got—

CP: He was committed and dedicated.

JM: —when he got to looking, he was very committed and his attention was all on that one thing and not on something else.

CP: Yeah, that's great. Well, on behalf of the University of South Florida and the College of Public Health and our collection of the historic events of public health and important to dwell on public health in Florida, Dr. Mulrennan, I thank you sincerely for coming and sharing your dad with us.

JM: Well, I thank you for asking. I'm sure that he's looking down on us right now and is happy to see that this event is occurring.

CP: Yeah, and we'll tell you that your little John has done good in following your steps, big John.

JM: Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Prather.

²³Fort Barrancas (or Fort San Carlos de Barrancas) is a US military fort near Pensacola, Florida, located physically within Naval Air Station Pensacola, which was developed later around it. The fort was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960.

End of Interview