Margaret Rathbun: A Leader
History 62
Oral Interview

Tape Log

Fieldworker: Joy Ann Lewis
Tape Title (Interviewee): Margaret Rathbun
No. Of Tapes: 2 No. of Sides: 3
Interview Date: 11/26/94 Time: 11:00 a.m.
Location: At her home in Baxley, Georgia

Genre/Topic: An oral history of Margaret Rathbun of Baxley, Georgia. These tapes cover her work as a housemother at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home, her years of teaching children in Vacation Bible School and Sunday School, and her work as a leader in WMU (Woman's Missionary Union). It also covers her involvement as a promoter of study course education in her church, and how she decided to go back to school at the age of 70, and how she is now working as a nurse's aide.

Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim, all other text is summarized, including the interviewer's questions.

Tape Index

Counter No. Topic
(Side A of Tape 1)
014 Born in 1921 in Ocilla, Georgia. Is now 73 years old.
038 Surrendered her life to Christ after marriage.
041 Met Jesse, her husband, on Easter Sunday, got married that August, in 1939.
044 Tells how her Grandmother influenced her spiritually, by reading Bible and praying.
Jesse had to go into the service. At that time both were working in the ship yard in Brunswick. She worked in the time-keeping department, and he was a shipper foreman on the dock.

When Jesse went overseas, she went to Fitzgerald. While there, she made a public profession of faith in Jesus.

She and her son Dick then went to Jacksonville to stay with her mother. She attended First Baptist Jacksonville, which she truly enjoyed, and influenced her mother to go with her.

Jesse came back from overseas and got a job as a mail carrier. Shortly after his return, he got saved.

His diabetes caused him to black out on his mail route. Although he was still young, his doctor told him he had to retire on disability.

They had some boys from the Georgia Baptist Children's Home visit them and both loved it.

The director of the home told them he needed house parents.

After much prayer, they accepted the job in 1961, and received a newly built cottage.

Tells about rules they had to follow: had to take the boys to church twice on Sunday and to the midweek prayer meeting.

Shares motto: "It's not where the child came from, but where he's going, and it's up to us to train him and help him."

Husbands health deteriorates and he can not do all of his duties.

He stayed on at the cottage with her after he went on total disability. Due to red tape, it was only two months from the time he got his disability check till he passed away.

She tells of the first family of children she and Jesse received at the home. They were the Futz children. She recalls all of their names and calls
them both precious and pitiful. Tells how their mother and father had abandoned them, and how they were found eating flour off the dirt.

189 It was Thanksgiving so they cooked a huge meal for the children, and later went to town to get them some clothes as they had none. Felt especially sorry for Wanda who was a baby.

196 She saw herself as a surrogate mother to them and all subsequent boys she kept.

199 She and Jesse took this family of children to Jacksonville. The director of the home had given them money to buy their "Christmas."

201 Tells how much fun she and the children had shopping for clothes and toys.

207 More boys arrived after Christmas. Many were brothers. Had 22 at one time.

218 Trained the boys to be neat. Gave rewards to boy with cleanest closet.

221 She kept immaculate records on each boy, and made pictures of each. When they left, she gave each boy a picture album. Also gave an album to Wanda Futz when she graduated.

241 With her own money she bought musical instruments for boys with musical talent. She joyfully recalled each boy by name and told what talent he had. She also encouraged others to draw. She vividly recalled what fun the boys had making music together.

262 She still keeps in contact with many of the boys.

290 Tells how one boy loved to help her cook, and how he was very smart. She encouraged him intellectually by taking him to a special class on the book of Revelations.

300 She tells how a boy from another cottage drowned while he was on vacation. She chokes up telling how she took all her boys to the funeral.
317  Tells how many of her boys have been saved through the years and how important this is to her.

338  She and Jesse took them all to North Georgia to a campground. Tells how they loved it.

350  While up there she took one boy to see his mother. You hear the emotion in her voice as she recalls how sad and pitiful it was. She says the mother was very simple minded.

361  Tells again how many keep in touch with her now, and most call her Ma Jesse. Wanda especially calls her a lot.

385  She tells how one little boy was "devilish." She felt sorry for him when he destroyed some property even though he had to be punished.

411  Jesse wanted her to retire when he got so sick because she was wearing herself out doing her work and his.

(Side 2 of Tape 1)

004  Tells of her husband's sickness in 1974 and how she had to put him in the hospital. She begins to choke up and tears form in her eyes.

008  He dies in April of 74 and she and her boys at the cottage were devastated. She wishes she had retired earlier so she could have spent time with him.

035  Tells how she called her son to come home because Jesse was so sick. She didn't know he was so sick at the time: she felt he would get better.

049  Her son was with him when he died. She was comforted though because she knew he was saved and was ready to go.

053  After staying off work a while, she went back 1 day a week as a relief worker in another cottage. Was too hard on her emotionally due to all the
memories it brought up. Her boys would come up to her and say, "Ma Jesse aren't you coming back?" She says this broke her heart.

Because she was going down physically, she retired.

Soon thereafter, she began baby-sitting my sister and I in the afternoons.

Tells about working in Bible School and how she has always taught children in Sunday School.

She began working in WMU (Woman's Missionary Union) as a young woman. She became the leader of the young women's group in Fitzgerald when she was very young. She was nervous, but got all the materials and studied. She organized groups of women going to camps. Taught Royal Ambassadors (RA's) in 1961.

In 1962 she began teaching Sunday School. In 1963 she became the WMU president at her church. Helped organize the GA's (Girl's in Action, a missions group for young girls).

In 1990 she gave up the presidency of the WMU. WMU activities were to make sure there were mission organizations for small kids, girls, and teenage girls. Helped leaders get their materials.

Sometime after 1985 she was asked by the pastor to organize church study courses. She was extremely glad to do so. Her duties were to make sure all the available courses were taught. She proudly points out that the church is 100% in all categories.

She took leadership classes taught for study course leaders.

Wrote to 5 missionaries for years that share her birthday.

As director of WMU, sent boxes of cereal, books, pencils, and diapers to these missionaries.

Helped settle a controversy in her WMU over the collection of money. Before the women collected money and kept it separate from the general church
money. She felt it should go directly to the church because they were a part of
the church not a separate entity.

Felt WMU purpose was for promotion of missions, and a tithe should go
to the church and not be duplicated.

WMU is responsible for organizing Annie Armstrong Easter offering and
Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Her church has around 125 in Sunday School
but collects over $4,000 for Lottie Moon offering. She feels all should tithe plus
give offerings because God blesses our tithes.

My sister and I got too old to need her as a baby-sitter.

Began caring for her ailing mother. Kept her for 6 years. Mother died in
1989.

Is very concerned that her sister is not a Christian.

In September of 1991 heard an announcement on the radio about the
Green Thumb organization for women over 55. You could go to school and they
would pay your tuition for you to learn a trade.

She joined the program after an interview. She loved learning literature
and math. Green Thumb gave them books and a nice dictionary.

She graduated after a year and her son came to her graduation.

Went on to get a patient care assistant degree. There were eight people
in her class.

Green Thumb gave them a blood pressure kit, and other instruments so
they could take vital signs.

She met a woman named Erlene, who she rode to school with. Enjoyed
that time together. Margaret got sick one day on the way to school. Erlene took
her to the hospital.

It was her high hernia acting up due to nervousness over upcoming tests.
She missed two weeks of class. Her son surprised her by coming to see her.
352 She went back to school.
369 Her teacher had made up a packet for her on everything she had missed. Was hard to learn it all as it was on the anatomy of the human body.
378 She studied very hard that weekend but still taught her Sunday School class as "it wouldn't be right to miss that." Stayed up until 2:00 the night before the exam. She prayed that God would supply her with strength and help her remember everything.
397 Was first one through on the test and made a 100. Was oldest in class.
417 Graduated again, son did not get to come due to his heart problems.
431 Talks about why she calls so many people on their birthdays. Tells how her mother bought her a composition book when she was a child and how she kept up with everyone's birthday in it, even back then.
443 Their home burned around the time her sister was born and she lost her composition book.

(Tape 2, side 1).
001 She had to start all over again after her book burned up. After they married, Jesse got her an organizer.
008 When she meets some she likes she gets their birthday and anniversary. She once met a lady on a bus going to Texas to see her son Dick, and got that women's birthday. She called the woman for several years.
016 Calling people on their birthday is her way of keeping up with people and it is a ministry for her. People tell her they look forward to her call. She often has to call long distance, but feels it is worth it. If she is going to be away from home she prepares post cards ahead of time.
026 She shows me her log, and tells me how it has everyone she is to call that day. It also charts the days she works.
Tells me that there are 27 at her office, and how she makes jelly to share with them all. They have given her a balloon on Valentines Day and new jelly jars.

She once threw away old journals as she sometimes writes personal stuff in them.

Tells how she has to search for people on their birthday if they have moved or changed their phone number.

A pastor recently sent her back a card in response to her birthday call and he wrote, "God bless you for your thoughtfulness." She tells how this meant a lot to her then and now.

She shares the verse from Colossians 3:23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." This is one of her favorite verses and one she applies to her life.

Two years ago her pastor urged the congregation to be fishers of men and challenged them to visit and witness to people. She realized that every one of the boys and girls in her Sunday School class were not yet saved. She told the pastor the harvest was ripe, and he assured her that she would win them.

She visited each child in their home before an upcoming revival was to occur. She told the children this was not a decision to make because their teacher wanted them to, but that it had to be their sincere decision.

She told them they could only be saved when they felt Jesus was calling at their heart. She also tells how she prays with the children during Sunday School.

She tells me with great joy that many accepted Christ at the revival. She later gave them literature and workbooks to teach them about salvation.
She expresses her concern for the children who aren't brought to church very often. She wants to call and arrange a way for them to get to come to church.

She now tells me how she and Jesse took all their boys to Disney World once. They bought all the gas. They stopped at her sister's house in Jacksonville. Her sister fed them all spaghetti.

She remembers how one little boy loved the spaghetti so much, and laughed as she reminisced about him eating so much to be so little. She also tells exactly how they organized the sleeping arrangements on the trip.

She and Jesse took one boy to Six Flags.

The boys had so much fun at Disney. On the return trip they stopped at Silver Springs so the boys could ride in the glass bottomed boat. She laughs thinking of all the fun they had.

Tells how she and Jesse spent most of what they made on the boys those first few years.

Tells how one Thanksgiving they invited all the sisters of her boys to come and eat together as families. She made pictures of the little families and had separate tables for each. "Joy, I wouldn't take anything for that."

She made each boy a cake on his birthday. On the day she took Jesse to the hospital, it was one boy's birthday and she forgot to tell her brother-in-law the cake was on top of the refrigerator. This upset her a lot, because the other boys had fun of the boy who did not get a cake. After she got home that night and discovered the mistake, she called them all to the kitchen and the boy told the others: "See, I told you she wouldn't forget."

She is now sitting with a retarded boy 2 days a week. She reads him Bible stories. His family told her she is a God-send, as the boy looks so forward to seeing her.
235 She says long ago they thought she would die when she was really sick, but every pastor in the county came and prayed for her.

241 She states: "The Lord spared me for some reason."

242 End of interview.