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Interview with Johann M. McCrackin

Johann M. McCrackin
SC Mother of the Year 1984

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Dr. Disney: Good afternoon.

Johann McCrackin: Good afternoon.

Dr. Disney: My name is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney and I am honored to be interviewing Johann McCrackin, winner of the 1984 South Carolina Mother of the Year award.

Johann, thank you for welcoming us into your home.

Johann McCrackin: It's such a pleasure.

Dr. Disney: We'd like to start by asking you when and where you were born and raised.

Johann McCrackin: I was born in Conway, South Carolina in the summer of 1934. My mother told me I was born on July 21st, but when I got my birth certificate in 1970 so I could get a passport, I found out I was born July 20th, so I'm a day older than she told me I was. I was a southern months child and I think I was born unexpectedly at about midnight in the hospital. My mother must have thought it was the 21st and the doctor must have thought it was the 20th and he's the one who registered it. Sometimes I celebrate both of them.

My father died a year later when I was thirteen months old, so I don't really remember him. My mother had been a secretary bookkeeper. She had gone to a business college and she was from central North Carolina, about 20 miles upwards of Statesville in a little farming village called Harmony. She went to Jones Business College in Columbia and moved to Horry County to work for Mr. H.H. Woodward, who was an attorney in Conway and was the founder of a newspaper. When I was in high school, she was working for him on Saturdays; he didn't need a full-time secretary at that point. I would go in at the end of the month to help her send out statements for the newspaper. She met my father, and this must have been in about 1914 or 15, but she married him in 1917. He was from a little farming village in Western Horry County called Gurly. It was on the rail line from North Carolina and his father was the Gurly postmaster and station agent. The story goes that he would teach all of his sons how to use the telegraph before their feet could even reach the floor. My father worked in the railway station in Conway before she married him. He was later in the State Legislature and when he died, he was a magistrate in Conway.

Growing up, I had an older brother and sister. My sister was thirteen years older than I was and my brother was fifteen years older, so I was well taken care of when I was little. They left home around 1940. My brother had joined a naval unit in Georgetown. His naval unit was activated in the spring of 1941 to do convoy duty in the Atlantic for shipments going over to England. My sister went down to Paris Island to work for the government and she later came back and worked for the welfare department. Conway was a really close-knit, friendly community during the war. I went to grammar school there and that grammar school has been turned into the county museum. I had this principal who loved to sing and he would get the piano teacher to play and we would sing patriotic songs for ten or fifteen minutes after each assembly. I still love that music. They've renovated that auditorium, but I can still remember where we sat in that

auditorium when we sang those songs. It was a really neat community to grow up in and if I had done anything wrong, my mother would have known in fifteen minutes. I grew up, interestingly, between a Presbyterian minister whose grandson is a church minister Myrtle Beach now and two Jewish families. I have a first cousin who is a Jesuit priest. My mother's brother married a Catholic lady in Chicago. I used to tell my Sunday school class that I had all of my bases covered. He was a fascinating person; he translated a Greek document and because he was studying Greek, I got interested in studying Greek in recent years and realized what a job he had. In 300 A.D., they didn't have any punctuation and you had to figure out where the sentences stopped and started. His book was published about two years before he died and he died about three years ago. I have a copy of it and it's Greek on one page and English on the other and it doesn't mean a whole lot; the sermons are kind of allegorical and they don't mean a whole lot to me.

I went to high school in Conway, also. I played piano for a little choral group in high school and I also played in the high school band. I started taking music when I was about seven years old from a lady that lived on the corner about half a block from me. She had me playing hymns by the time I was ten. She got me to play the piano for this little junior assembly in the Sunday school, so I had to be there every Sunday. It didn't hit me until about two years ago that she was a sharp woman! She was in the Baptist church and she knew my mother didn't go because she was baptized as a Christian in North Carolina and they wouldn't let her take communion. My mother sent me, but she didn't go and that was the way my piano teacher made sure I got to church every Sunday. I grew up really church oriented, all things considered. When I was fifteen, she talked me into playing a one-keyboard organ for this Episcopal Church in Conway and their minister was a British Army officer from England whose only daughter had married an American Army captain. He was just a delightful person and he quoted Rudyard Kipling a lot.

It was a very interesting childhood. I still run the prayer chain for the Presbyterian Church; I coordinate it on the computer. I guess that is where I learned prayer. When I was ten years old, we studied the old testament stories and that little junior class studied about David and Solomon and when Solomon came to the throne, he said a prayer and God said, "Solomon, I will give you anything you want; tell me what you would prefer to have." Solomon said, "Lord, I'm so young and I really feel so lacking in the wisdom and discernment to govern my people," and God said, "Because you have asked for wisdom and not for power and glory, I will give you all of them." I thought, "Ah ha! That's the key." So I prayed for wisdom all my life, but I'm not sure I ever got it. That's pretty much where I learned to pray and it's been a significant part of my life.

I met my husband at the University of South Carolina in 1953. I graduated in 1952. I had a couple of different roommates. My sophomore year, my roommate was a friend of Wendell's. He called her and asked her to go with him to the first football game and I guess she told him she had a date. So he asked her if she could get him one and she

said, "Let me ask my roommate." I said I'd like to meet him first and see what he looks like before I go with him. So he came over and we met and we started going to football games. He went to law school from 1953 to 1954. He graduated in two years instead of three by going to two summer schools; I don't think you can do that now. I still had a year to finish when he graduated. He went to Washington D.C. with the criminal division of the Justice Department, but he hated Washington. He came back to work for a federal judge in Charleston. A year after that, one of his law school buddies and friends asked him to go into practice with him in Myrtle Beach with him. So his friend, Wendell, and a retired federal judge from Maryland started a firm. Within about a year, Wendell's friend was so busy taking care of his mother's property – she was fairly wealthy – and he barely had time to practice law. Wendell decided to go out on his own and he did. He ran for the state legislature and was successful; he served in the state legislature from 1960 to 1964. It's kind of funny, really. Our three children were all born during the four years he was in the legislature. I told people we finally found out what was causing them. They'd been really a lot of fun. I guess it was when our youngest was born in 1964 and of course, Wendell went to church with me on Sundays and the children went first to the nursery and then to Sunday school. In 1966 or 1967, we had a minister named Murphy Williams and they introduced what they called the covenant life curriculum for the Sunday school classes. It was a very scholarly and well-done curriculum. Our minister taught a big class of people our age in the fellowship hall. Within about a year, he wanted to start another class of younger people and he asked me if I would teach the class he'd been teaching because I was a teacher at that point. I started teaching then and I taught Sunday school for about 40 years until about three years ago. I loved it; I still like theology and biblical interpretation.

I knew when we got married that I wasn't going to be able to go back to school and get my Master's degree to become a guidance counselor. Guidance counselors were just coming into the educational system at that point and I thought that was really interesting. I had grown up in a single-parent family when it was an exception rather than something fairly common, so I knew I would have some answers. I knew that if I married my husband I wouldn't be able to, so I got my first degree in 1956 in sociology and psychology. We got married in the fall of 1957 and I had gotten a job teaching school here in the 5th grade – the nicest grade. I still have some students around that were in that class and there's been one or two of them that have died and that really blows my mind. I had a great time. I was so excited when I saw my classroom. The Baptist church what was closest to our school had a fire in their educational building and they were meeting in our classrooms on Sundays. But I had a piano in my room and I thought, "Golly, I get to do music with my kids!" I thought I had died and gone to heaven! I bet the teachers around me could have cheerfully killed me every morning. We would start the class reading some scripture, the Lord's Prayer and the pledge to the flag. Then we would sing for fifteen minutes – folk songs, songs they knew from camp, patriotic songs. But it was

really funny – they told me at the end of the year that they really enjoyed the class. It did seem to mold them together at the beginning of the day to get rid of some of their excess energy, singing at the top of their lungs. That’s what the other teachers could have killed me for. It was a really nice year and I did that for a couple of years. They lost their public school music teacher for their two elementary schools and they asked me if I would do it. I hadn’t had any training in public school music, but they had textbooks for each grade with folk songs and recordings I could do folk dances with. I loved singing and folk dancing with the children. I did that for a couple of years until Sidney, our oldest child was born. I wondered why I hadn’t majored in public school music. It was a really nice four years; I have some really pleasant memories from that.

Then the children came along and I pretty much stayed home with them. When my husband was in the legislature, the Business and Professional Women had asked him to do a talk on what was going on and he talked about what was going on in the legislature some and what was going on at home. He said, “Johann, I’m going to have to be in Columbia that night, would you consider doing that for me?” I told him I could try and they asked me to join the Business and Professional Women’s club and I wasn’t even working then. Two or three ladies that were in it were also in a club that was a 24 women’s club that belonged to the National Federation of Women’s Clubs called the Archibald Rutledge Club. They had named themselves for the poet laureate down in McClellanville. It was like what we call now a life-long learning society. They didn’t just read books, they would pick topics for the year and study that topic and have different speakers for the topics. I have been in the Archibald Rutledge club since then, about 1966; I’ve served as president about four times and I’ve done their yearbooks for the past 35 years on the computer. I was one of the earliest people in it to use the computer; most of the ladies were older than I was. All of our retired members have died. But it’s a fascinating group of ladies and they’re the one who nominated me for South Carolina Mother of the Year.

When the kids were in high school, about 1975, I realized that within a few years, I was going to have an empty nest and I would maybe be able to do what I had always wanted to do. Coastal Carolina, at the time, had professors coming down from Columbia to teach the people that were going into guidance. I had gotten a part-time job with a psychiatrist that had come here. I had met him at some sort of cocktail party and we had talked and I’d told him that I always wanted to do some sort of counseling. I told him I was a teacher and he invited me to work part-time for him and work with some of the kids. He’d supervise me and help me learn some things. So I did and we’d do playhouses with some of the kids who were having family problems. I thought it was just fascinating how they would project their feelings onto the parent figures in these playhouse schemes. I’d ask them, “Who is this?” and they’d tell me what the father’s name was. They’d sometimes make them hit each other and I’d ask what was going on and they would tell

me. He got me to sit in on a women's therapy group and I'd take notes for him and that was really interesting.

After about three years, I told him I wanted to get involved in the program at Coastal Carolina and asked him if he'd write a recommendation for me. So he did and I did. I got accepted into the program and graduated in December of 1980. The principal retired that year and they got a new principal in. They were only entitled to two counselors by state regulation, but the guidance counselor talked the new principal into asking the council to hire a new counselor. That spring after I graduated, the bookkeeper called me and said, "Johann, you need to apply for this job!" She told me she knew everyone at the school liked me and that I'd be a shoe in. I went down to get an application and they hired me. I said, "Okay, Lord, I don't know how I did this, but I'm going to need your help!" I was so excited and I worked four years under him and then he retired. They asked me to be guidance director, so I was kind of distracted for the next ten years. The principal that came in when I was the director was a black fellow that I knew really well and he was a football coach – Coach Rainbow. We used to sing the rainbow song to him. He was such a nice person and he really believed in guidance and he believed in our mission. He wouldn't give us a whole lot of stuff and wanted us to focus on the kids. We had in-school suspension room and he would try to put kids in there but some times it would get kind of crowded. He'd call me and say, "Mrs. McCrackin, I've got a kid here who needs some help and I need you to set up a behavioral contract with him. Let's see if we can keep him in school; I don't want to expel this student." So we set up a behavioral contract and sometimes it worked and I checked on them periodically and sometimes they'd be back in my office in four days! I'd say, "Steve, what happened to that contract we set up and that you were going to count to ten before you hit somebody?" He said, "Mrs. McCrackin, I didn't even think about it when I first hit that fellow. I didn't think about it until afterwards." Sometimes you have to do behavioral therapy with them, too. It was nice. I never really run into except a couple of students that I couldn't relate to. One of them was selling drugs. He told us he was a kleptomaniac and he got us to send him to a free counseling program, but it turned out he was just a drug pusher. It didn't do a thing for him, but he was one of the few. I really enjoyed the kids. When I was teaching elementary school, I was teaching one of the kids and I laugh at this now because she has a brother who works on the county council, but he went to high school with my son and he set up a sort of rigmarole to steal the football belt from Conway High School. My oldest son said that he really worked out all of the details. This was a full proof method, but I don't think he ever went through with it. This was his sister though and I taught her in the 5th grade and she flunked science in the first six weeks and she came back and said her father had spanked her. I asked if her father had spanked her for flunking and she said, "Yes ma'am. He said that I should've been able to do that." She told me this - but I had forgotten – when we met at a visitation a few years ago and she said, "You had written him a note and you told him that you didn't

believe in people being flunked because they failed something and that was not the way to teach. If he was going to do that, you couldn't flunk me again and that wasn't fair either. You wanted to know that he wasn't going to spank me if I failed." I guess what I told him was pretty much that she was a really good student, but science was just not her strong suit. She told me when I saw her at this family visitation. She said, "My dad couldn't believe it when you told him that; he thought you were just some crazy new teacher." So I guess I shocked a lot of people.

In high school, I was at an IEP conference and I think looking back at it, both of these people were girls. The father of this girl had married a Japanese lady and she didn't speak very good English. The girl had an IEP written every year because she had a language difficulty. In this IEP conference for the next year or so, he said to me, "I'm sorry you have to do this for my child; I guess she's just stupid." I looked at him and said, "Mr. So-and-so, don't ever call your daughter stupid. She is one of the most energetic girls I know." I told him that the problem with her language problem was that the family didn't speak just English in the home; her mother speaks Japanese. She probably has grown up with both and English probably isn't her first language. She probably speaks Japanese as well as she speaks English. But I told him not to ever call her stupid because that's just a real put-down; whatever she is, she's not stupid. Later he thanked me for it. It struck me later that both of these situations involved girls and I wondered if these fathers had called a son "stupid." Particularly, the father of the girl who flunked science was a kind of old farmer; I guess that was the way he grew up. But I loved working with kids. It was a great experience musically and otherwise.

Dr. Disney: It sounds like you had an amazing career. As a teacher, you taught 5th grade; you were a music teacher; you were a Sunday school teacher; you became a guidance counselor, which was a dream you always had when you were younger. You had so many opportunities to be a role model for these kids and these parents. It must be such a reward for you as you look back on the impact you've had.

Johann McCrackin: I probably shouldn't tell you all about this, but in 1970 when the schools integrated here, there was a group of fairly wealthy parents who started a private school. They asked us to go into it with them, but I am so public school-oriented and I would feel so out of place with our kids going there. We had to stick with the public schools. Our kids all graduated from public schools and Myrtle Beach High School was a great school; it had high standards and great teachers. All of our three kids were valedictorians of their respective classes. That's incredible. People always say, "How did you do that?" I say I didn't have anything to do with it. They were just very competitive with each other.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about your three children. Tell us their names and tell us what they do now.

Johann McCrackin: The oldest one is Sidney. He's so intellectual that sometimes he loses me. He reads everything and knows a lot about history and politics and that kind of

thing; I forgive him for being a liberal. He's an attorney, like Wendell. He's a federal appeals attorney in Pensacola, Florida. He worked for two federal judges and he really likes working for appeals and that sort of thing. He has a little girl who's thirteen and is as sharp as a tack; she definitely takes after him.

Our daughter Mary Anne is I guess what you'd call a federal compliance veterinarian. She's very interesting in her own right. She graduated from Wofford College. Sid graduated, too, from Wofford College in 1983 and she graduated in 1985. She was the first woman president of the Wofford student body. They didn't even admit women until about 1976 and she was elected in 1984. I swore they elected her to shut her up. She had an opinion on everything, but she's very capable. She went to veterinary school after she graduated from Wofford and she went to Georgia. She was the president of the student body at Wofford and she was the president of her veterinary class at the University of Georgia. She went from there to California for a year to do an internship, which is where she met her first husband. She came back to Tennessee and did a three-year program on small animal surgery. She's a nationally certified small animal surgeon and the exam for that is not easy. She married this fellow and he came to Tennessee before she graduated. They got married and moved out to Montana. So they went out to Montana to live and she opened a practice in small animal surgery. She called back and said, "Mom! I'm not learning anything! All I'm doing is fixing the back legs of dogs who fall out of the backs of trucks because their owner won't put their tailgates up." She said she was going back to school, so she got her PhD at the University of Montana and taught at Georgia – at the veterinary school she went to in Georgia – for about three years. She then decided she wanted to do research. She went back to Montana and I guess that's when she got her PhD in molecular biology. It was a really interesting situation. In 2003, the University of Montana put her in the National Institute of Health Labs in Hamilton so she didn't have to drive to Missoula everyday. One woman had a son who had Wegener's Disease, where the kidney's turn to granulation. He was on dialysis and he was only about nineteen years old. Three friends of the family, including her, had agreed to be tested to see if they were a possible donor. She was the closest match and the doctor told her that there were three out of six factors matching, that he could've been her brother. In the mean time, her husband had told her that he didn't want children. She decided that the Lord was telling her that she needed to give a kidney to this boy. She had to go to the hospital one day because they had to x-ray her kidneys to see how the blood vessels were hooked up so when they took the kidney out, they would know how to do it. She saw this girl that she knew from the National Institute of Health Labs and she said, "Mary Anne, did you know that so-and-so who lived in Hamilton is in our program now?" I think his name was Dave. She said, "I know he would love to see you." They went down the hall and Dave told her that the university needs someone for the veterinarian research program and to supervise the lab. He was on the committee and had an application and wanted her to apply. This was in May. They did the kidney transplant in June and the

doctors told her that was the best kidney transplant they had ever done; it started working right away. Two weeks after the transplant, they called her from Missoula and wanted to interview her for this animal lab research program. She went over and on the first of August, they called her and told her she got the job. She looked in magazines and on the computer, but that job was not advertised anywhere. If she had not gone and gotten that x-ray for the kidney transplant, she would have never heard about that job. That really got her started on her career. She got certified as an animal lab supervisor in the process of the next two years. Then she and her husband were divorced after fourteen years. She called me one night and said, "Mom, Mike's not going to grow up as long as I stay with him. I'm leaving." I told her to do what she thinks she has to. A couple years later she married a really nice fellow from out there who had already raised a couple of kids. He had been divorced because his wife had been an alcoholic and on drugs, so he raised the kids when he was in his late twenties. He is so nice. Anyway, sometime later, she heard about a job at Virginia Tech and went there as an animal lab control person. There were some professors there who didn't want to chance their methods and she wanted to get them synced; they said they've been doing these same things for 25 years and they weren't going to change. Her boss wouldn't back her up, so she heard about a job in Charleston. Now she's down there working for MUSC and she's working for the animal research lab there. They work mostly with rats and mice and guinea pigs – no cats and dogs. It's really interesting; she has to make sure the researchers follow federal guidelines and don't abuse the animals. I can't imagine abusing rats and mice, but if you make them suffer, that's not good.

Our youngest son is a tax attorney here with Nelson, Mullins, Riley, and Scarborough. The interesting thing about that was that Governor Riley is the governor who presented me with my mother of the year award. So now my youngest son is in his law firm. He likes his job.

All three of our kids were divorced. Mary Anne and our youngest son remarried. Our youngest son here married a girl from New Hampshire and I sort of sensed it at the time that she didn't quite have the same values that we did. They'd been married nineteen years when I guess she had a mid-life crisis and got interested in somebody else. He was pretty crushed for a while. A friend introduced him a girl. The fellow of the couple was a friend of Jim's and the girl was a friend of Wendy's. Wendy and Jim got married last summer; they've been married a year. Wendy's father's first name is Wendell and her mother's maiden name is my maiden name! They're from the other side of the county and her mother's grandparents lived three miles from my grandparents with the same name! We haven't found a connection, but there may be one. So I have two lawyers and a veterinarian.

Dr. Disney: You must be very proud.

Johann McCrackin: They've done very well and I'm not sure I have much to do with it, Jennifer!

Dr. Disney: Oh, you must have!

Johann McCrackin: I think the secret of all this learning is – my mother believed in education. She thought that was the path out of – we weren't poverty-stricken but she didn't have a whole lot – but that was the path to success. It really was for my sister. My sister never had children so my children were like hers. My sister really made some great decisions in her lifetime about investments and property and that kind of thing. She left my brother and his children some money, but she left most of her estate to my three.

They love to learn, though. I love to learn. I've got a stack of those learning channel tapes over there on science. Right now, I've got a kick on the brain. I'm fascinated with what the brain does. You know, they used to think the heart was the center of the body, but it's not – it's the brain. I've got one on the spiritual brain that's really fascinating. It's really funny how things work out because I don't think I had a lot to do with my children's success. I think they inherited a competitive drive that they honed on each other. I remember when Mary Anne first took the SAT, she was so mad because she didn't match her older brother's score! She had leadership qualities that he didn't have.

Dr. Disney: What does motherhood mean to you?

Johann McCrackin: Motherhood means nurturing. Hillary Clinton, I think, wrote a book on it and said it takes a village to raise a child; well, I was sure raised by a village. The Archibald club had nominated me because I had gone back to school to get a degree in counseling and I was working with teenagers and my own children. I think they thought that I was more than a mother to just my kids and I guess I was.

Dr. Disney: I was thinking about that the whole time you were talking about your career – that you had your kids, but your students were also your kids. You were a teacher and perhaps a role model to those kids.

Johann McCrackin: I retired in 1995 and I've been retired for 20 years. It's funny how things have changed; I never imagined anybody walking through the door with a gun. It's crazy! Also, guidance counselors have gotten so much more paperwork. A young lady told me recently that to see her guidance counselor, she has to make an appointment. Kids just walked in and talked to us and it didn't mean that we were busy, but that's what Principal Rainbow's secret was. He thought we should have time for kids and I was very lucky to work under him.

Dr. Disney: How were you able to balance everything you were doing? In the community, as a student, as a teacher, with the clubs you were involved in, raising your children, raising your family – how were you able to balance the work you were doing inside the home and outside the home?

Johann McCrackin: When my kids were little, I did have some help. I had a couple of different maids that came in maybe a couple of days a week to clean house and help me wash clothes and whatever. I don't know if I would have been able to do that if I hadn't had a lot of help. They were really nice ladies, too, and they were good with my kids. It

was so funny and how I got a couple of them was really interesting. I guess having grown up with prayer, I really believe in prayer. I think prayer is the answer and that's why I coordinate the church prayer chain. People keep telling me that there's something interesting about the Presbyterian Church prayer chain and that's it so successful, but it's not us, it's the good Lord. It's sort of funny how things sort of work out that you want to have happen. Maybe what we do sort of sets the process in motion. I've read stuff that says when you really want something you ought to write it down, but I've never had much success with that. I really do believe that when you focus on a goal and focus on what you're going to do and what you need. I used to tell my high school kids this: in order to achieve this goal, what do you need you need to do and what do you need to know to make it happen? We would talk about classes they needed to take and sometimes they wanted to be a doctor and realized they couldn't get there because they needed to have a scientific bend. So you'd have to have them look at the other things they could do in the medical field or what other things they could do with that. I don't know, it's just sort of strange how my life has worked out in a lot of ways.

Dr. Disney: Did you have a great teacher that inspired you?

Johann McCrackin: My music teacher. She kept me hopping all the time; she was always presenting me with new challenges. She pushed me into memorizing eighteen pages of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue for my senior recital. It's funny – my daughter said that she doesn't have the kind of mind Sid and I do. When we hear something over and over, we can remember it. I can still quote – my mothers read me poetry when I was a little girl before I ever went to school and I found the book after years of searching and it's called "The Small Little Red He." But I remember that and I can still play parts of Rhapsody in Blue. Those poems my mother read to me before school, I think, fostered a sense of rhythm. In college when I was taking experimental psychology, I was the one who could remember the longest list of nonsense syllables and numbers because I made a rhythm out of them. That's still a memory secret; if you can create a rhythm, you remember it longer. Then I was the poet laureate of the South Carolina Women's clubs from 1971 to 1974, so I've written some poetry, too. I really believe in trying to do what's right. In relation to modern mothers, fortunately our son saw the importance that our grandchildren got to church. They've been given awards at church after graduation for their work with younger children. I think fostering a sense of values, of productive values, is really important with children. I guess mine got it because they had to go to Sunday school, too.

Dr. Disney: What did it mean to you to be named the South Carolina Mother of the Year in 1984?

Johann McCrackin: I couldn't believe it! I thought, "Me?" it was kind of incredible. I almost couldn't believe it. The interesting thing was that my husband had kidney stones that spring and I had to go to New Orleans for the National Mother's Convention in May and he couldn't go with me. The doctor didn't want him to go because the doctor was

afraid the travel would shake up his kidney stones. My sister drove to New Orleans. Some of the things they had set up for us and the sight seeing trips were fascinating. Meeting the other state mothers and looking back, all of us were just ordinary women. You had to take something that represented your state and your community – some sort of gift with you – so I took sand dollars and the sand dollar poem. The mother from Alaska wrote me about fifteen years later that she had a necklace made out of sand dollars and she was on a trip to Hawaii and somebody had stolen it. She asked if I had another sand dollar she could have. Fortunately I did; I had some left over from that trip. I still have some mementos from the trip.

Dr. Disney: What was that year like? Do you have some other memories from that year you were the state mother? Were you able to go to the Governor's Mansion and have a tea?

Johann McCrackin: Yes, we had a tea at the Governor's Mansion. The special thing about that was that it was Governor Riley that presented it. I thanked him at the presentation for what he was doing to reform education. That was in 1984 when he was just reinstating and introduced the state test. As many times I dealt with it, I should remember! That was really special and he's a really special governor. I never would have predicted that his wife would have died before he did. He's still kicking pretty well. I see him periodically when he comes to Myrtle Beach for things.

Dr. Disney: That's great. I want to ask you a few broader questions so you can share some of that wisdom that you've prayed for and received. What do you think are the most important issues facing women today?

Johann McCrackin: I think it kind of depends what part of the country you're in, Jennifer. I really love the South and Southern values. I don't mind saying that I had two great-grandfathers who lived on the other side of the county that fought in the Civil War. I think a lot of the most important things going on with women today is how to work. A lot of women work and I never really worked when my children were growing up. I was lucky enough to stay home with them and get them where they wanted to go. I think a lot of mothers today have to figure out how to balance work and their children's activities. I think women are really lucky when they work for an employer who is willing to help them do that. I never heard of abortion until after I had been married; that was just not something you discussed. I think women today are inclined to put off children for their careers for almost too long. I think that balance in life and the ability to decide when to give priorities to work and when to give priorities to children are important. I think always there needs to be some arrangement to give the child the priority; your child is just a child once and that is just such an important time.

Dr. Disney: You were talking about how in some points in our history; a one-income family would provide a family wage. I think today, the two-income family is more common. Do you think that makes it harder for women to balance the responsibilities of working outside the home and inside the home.

Johann McCrackin: Definitely, especially if the husband doesn't help some with the responsibilities in the home. Men can be very different now. My husband was work-oriented in terms of priorities. He grew up on a farm on the other side of the county where the husband was pretty much the master of the house. It had nothing to do with religion. There were times when I had to say some hymns because this was important for me and I'd like for him to help me with this if I needed to go somewhere or go out of town or something. It never ceases to amaze me that two people who have grown up in such different environments can come together and make a family and make a home and somehow make it work. It's amazing.

Dr. Disney: In some ways, I think today men are more willing to help in the home than they were in previous generations. Two people working together inside the home and outside the home is hopefully becoming more common.

Johann McCrackin: I think so. And I think it really depends on the husband's job to some extent. It seems to me that the world is a lot more complicated now even though I grew up during the war. It was still a little less complicated living then than it is now. Of course, I don't know if we've gotten away from war; it seems that we're still kind of stuck in that mental frame. Priorities were different then.

Dr. Disney: Do you think women's roles as mothers and women's work as mothers was adequately recognized when you were coming up and then today? Do you think society recognizes women's work and women's roles today?

Johann McCrackin: Less than they did when I was growing up. There seems to be a lot of emphasis on women who go out into the world and achieve. I sometimes think about my daughter and wonder if she would have done all of this if she had had a child. She's a lot freer than some of the women she works with. Her husband is just a delightful person; he's raised two of his own kids and they come to visit now and then. They have their own lives and he's very understanding of her work. It's great.

Dr. Disney: What does feminism mean to you?

Johann McCrackin: I associate feminism with the movement that started in the 1970s by Gloria Steinem. I didn't quite understand it at the time. The women's suffrage movement was kind of the same way – it had to be sort of one-sided. You kind of had to over-emphasize the values to bring attention to them. I think the movement for feminism was almost the same way. Some things were over-emphasized in order to bring attention to them. I think feminism, to me, means to be who you are as a woman; not some fictional character that has all sorts of super personality qualities. I think feminism means to be who you are and to be a nurturing person. I almost sound like Pope Francis. There's a lot of truth in what he says. When he was elected, I was interested that he was a Jesuit because my cousin is a Jesuit so they share some of the same values. I've got a Saint Francis statue on my mantle and a Saint Francis prayer that I crocheted. I think feminism and what it means to be a woman is to be a nurturing person loving not only children, but people. I was a volunteer at the hospital for thirteen years before I had my back surgery.

When I got out of the guidance department, I had so many skills that I need to use somewhere and that was something I needed to use. I had a lot of nice experiences with that, too.

Dr. Disney: You said something earlier that I want to get back to. You said that when you got married, you kind of knew that you wouldn't be able to be a guidance counselor and you wouldn't be able to pursue that dream. Say a little bit more about that. I think I know what you meant in terms of the time and history. But just say a little more about that.

Johann McCrackin: When we got married, my husband had first started practicing law here and he jokingly said to me, "I'll be a good husband, if you make me a good living." We really did live off of my beginning teacher's salary for about three years. The first spring after we were married, he ran for probate judge. It didn't hit me at the time, but that was the way a good lawyer had to get known so people would come to him. He didn't get elected, but that got his name out to the public. Two years later he ran for the state legislature and he got elected. That really brought in a lot of business. But those three years my beginning teachers salary was \$3,600 per year in 1957. It was split up into nine months, but in essence, that was less than \$400 a month. Things weren't as expensive then as they are now. We didn't go out to dinner every weekend; we went to eat Sunday dinner with our family.

Dr. Disney: You knew you would have had to go to advanced education to become a guidance counselor and at that time, you needed that salary to support the beginning of your husband's work.

Johann McCrackin: Yes. I wanted to help him get started. Once he got into the legislature and things picked up, I remember telling him that if we had enough money to get him elected to the legislature, we have enough to start our family. Sidney came in May and he came the day after the legislature ended their session. In fact, I drove myself to the gynecologist in Conway. Mary Anne was born about two years later and then James was born about thirteen months after her. They've all been delightful. They've competed with each other, but on the other hand, Sidney got interested in sailing; James got interested in flying.

Dr. Disney: You lost your father at a very young age; you grew up in a single-family household. Your mother must have been an incredible woman to help you get through that time.

Johann McCrackin: When you asked me about feminism, she was an incredibly strong person. We never knew much about her family. She prided herself on doing anything a man could do. She would order these pieces of furniture that you had to put together and I would hold them in place while she nailed them together and then we'd paint them. I had this desk that I gave to one of my nephews that was really well done. She wrote three novels. She didn't have a lot of education, but she had a good mind for plots. Her characters were a little stereotyped, but the first one I really helped her with was about a

family who lived in the South after the civil war. Then she wrote two more about where she grew up in North Carolina. There's a little bit of literary in us.

Dr. Disney: You've had such successes in your life – raising three children, many careers, and many activities. One of the things we want this project to do is to have a intergenerational conversation between women. What advice would you give younger women today, looking back on what's been helpful for you in achieving all of the wonderful accomplishments you've achieved?

Johann McCrackin: Find out what your strengths are. Be realistic about what your strengths are and what things in life you really like. Try to be sure that when you pick a vocation, you pick something that's a lot like things you like because it's a lot less work and a lot more like fun. That is so important. When you end up with something you don't like, you end up with more stress and all of these things that make you unhealthy. I was very fortunate that I was able to fall through on my strengths. I still play music. I play the piano for this worship service at a health care center where my sister lived. I try to keep up with it. My fingers don't always do what I want them to do, but I think it's important to keep up that facility. I love everything I do. Everything about the world is very fascinating. Science is just discovering so much. Before I got into guidance counseling, the church had a guidance program for high school students. They actually had a curriculum and it talked about God's gifts to us are our vocation and we serve God through using the gifts he has given us. That's why I said it's very important to do things that you have strengths in. It was a 12-week curriculum and I would teach it and have them sort of evaluate themselves. I did that for about five or six years. My own children went through it and one of the things they told my daughter was that she had a lot of strengths in science. She didn't want to be a scientist, she wanted to be a Christian educator. At Wofford, her science professor sat her down and told her she was great in the sciences and told her she'd excel in some sort of medical profession – people or animal medicine. She told him that she gets irritated with people, so she'd rather keep the animals and send the people home. She did volunteer work with Dr. Brown in Spartanburg for a few years.

Dr. Disney: I can see three generations of women in your family that have each left their mark – your mother, you, and your daughter. It's a beautiful thing.

Johann McCrackin: That's really touching.

Dr. Disney: It's your life story and it's really moving. I think it's going to be very inspirational to the generations of women that are going to watch and hear your wisdom. Johann McCrackin: I've never thought about that.

Dr. Disney: I think there's a strong line of feminism and feminists that run through your family.

Johann McCrackin: My oldest granddaughter is a junior at Wofford this year. My second granddaughter, who graduated this past spring, is going to a college in Boston. Her mother's family is from Southern New Hampshire, so she had relatives up that way.

Mitchell, Jim's youngest son, is a high school senior. Mitchell's been playing soccer for five years, so this year he decided to go for kicker on the football team. I think he's trying to paint his resume a little bit.

Dr. Disney: What was it like when your husband was in the state legislature?

Johann McCrackin: Like I said, I had help during the day. I don't remember it being a difficult time. It was a very interesting time with the three of them. I still went to church and took them to the nursery and Sunday school. But I still had help. There was a lady who, if I had a meeting at night, babysat for me. She could have been a mother of the year, she was a really nurturing lady.

Dr. Disney: As the wife of a state legislature, I'm sure you have things you had to do or places you had to be.

Johann McCrackin: I got invited places and I went to places with him. The legislature ran from January until the end of May. Wendell was there when they voted to put the confederate flag on top of the Capitol building and he remembers all of that very well.

Dr. Disney: I had forgotten that you were a Byrnes Scholar. Tell us where you went for your education and any experiences from the time you were a Byrnes scholar.

Johann McCrackin: The way I found about those scholarships was in the tenth grade when a history teacher made us write a paper about a famous American. I chose James F. Byrnes because he was a very distinctive figure in the late 1940s. I learned that he had established scholarships for students that had to have one or both parents deceased because he had lost his father at a young age. I wrote my paper about him. The next year, my junior year, my mother wrote to him and asked him for an application they told her that I needed to write for my application and to wait until my senior year. So I wrote for it, got an application, and applied for it and the fellow who was in the legislature for Horry County at that time was named Henry Buck and was a descendent of the Buck family that began the ship building industry down in Bucksport. I think he spoke to Byrnes and told him that he knew my family and that I was a good student. But I got the scholarship and he first invited us to his home in the Isle of Palms for a weekend and that was fascinating. Then, the scholarships were only given for four years and they gave about twelve per year and there were about 50 of us at that point. He invited us every year after that and when he got to be governor, he invited us to the Governor's Mansion and that was really neat. After Wendell got into the legislature, I thought we needed a better state song and I told Wendell that he needed to commission someone to write us a better state song, something peppy. He kind of said, "Oh why don't you write one?" I thought I'd show him because he didn't think I could do that so I wrote a song! I dedicated it to Governor Byrnes when we started having luncheons in the mid 1960s.

Dr. Disney: Do you have any questions you'd like to ask us or anything you'd like to share that you haven't gotten a chance to share yet?

Johann McCrackin: Gosh, I don't think so. I feel like I've talked forever. The thing that kind of blows my mind when I think about it is that I'm 81! How did I get to be 81?

Some of my father's family didn't get to live very long. My father and three of his brothers died from high blood pressure so they watch my blood pressure like a hawk because I inherited the genetic tendency. I'm just so happy to be from South Carolina and Horry County. There's just something very distinctive about this part of the United States. Archibald Rutledge said in one of his books that Americans thought about conquering the wilderness as the wilderness to the west, but when you think about it the settlers who came to Charleston had to conquer all the wilderness around Charleston and make it come to life. They built beautiful homes there and gardens and it's really fascinating. It still has a reputation as being a more gentle, softer aspect.

Dr. Disney: I think that the city of Charleston and the community you're talking about certainly demonstrated this past summer with the horrible events with what happened with the murders in the church and the city response, I think they really demonstrated to the nation an amazing sense of peace and calm and strength and love that came from the city of Charleston after that. It was amazing to me to see that people who lost family members say, "We forgive you." It speaks to something special from down here.

Johann McCrackin: The South has the reputation and I read this article recently that Charleston is still the most polite city in the United States. It really is a beautiful place.

Dr. Disney: I want to say thank you, Johann McCrackin, South Carolina Mother of the Year 1984, for giving us time in your home today and we really appreciate it.

Johann McCrackin: You realize it's been 31 years?

Dr. Disney: Since you've been Mother of the Year?

Johann McCrackin: Yes!