

Oral History Project
Interview of former AEC Compound Workers
June 22, 2017
Interviewer: Lorena Davis

[Music]

Lorena Davis: This is Lorena Davis, and I'm here filming with videographers Caleb Quimby and Bryan Wells, and we are speaking with a panel today of individuals who worked at the AEC compound. It's June 22nd, 2017, and we have, viewers' left to right, Louise Oliver, Betty Learned, Caroline Retolaza, and Jean Barry Meehan. Now, if you ladies would just introduce yourselves.

Louise Oliver: Okay, my name is Louise Oliver, and I'm a retiree from the Atomic Energy Commission. I worked there, and for retirement. I worked in several different offices and with the men that were drilling in the fields for— core for uranium. And I— I took some trips to the hills and brought back the cores to the office, to be ch— cut up. And that was what my job was. Okay.

Betty Learned: My name is Betty Learned, and like Louise, I worked in several different divisions, secretarial work, 'til I left and went to Kansas City to work. Came back, and worked in Grand Junction again and— until they disbanded in 1983, I think. You know, we made a lot of friends there and lasting friendships. And I want to thank you guys, really, for— for doing this because we kind of had a hard time getting the group together. But I appreciate it. And you know, I keep thinking that I know I'm getting older year by year by year — but I didn't ever think I would be in a museum, [ladies laughing] and here I am. But, you know, we had some fun times, but we did our work, and it was just a good group to work with. Pass it on to you, Caroline.

Caroline Dekleva-Retolaza: My name is Caroline Dekleva-Retolaza. I was Dekleva when I started working at the Grand Junction office of AEC on February 2, 1952. My first job was working in a steno pool. The lady who was our boss was named Geraldine Martin. And it was my understanding that she had worked for General Groves, who was head of the MED Project back when it started. And I must say, she was real— one real tough taskmaster. She was very formal. She arrived in the morning with her hat and her gloves, and she looked around to make sure that everybody was there. She called everyone by Miss or Mrs. and she insisted on being called Mrs. Anyway, I survived her — despite some tears that I had. But anyway, after that, I went to work for a gentleman by the name of Ambiche, who was an engineer. And thereafter, I worked in the security division for a gentleman named Max Welch. Our main function there was to get— issue security clearances for all the employees that had to come to work. And my main job, at one time, was to review personnel security questionnaires, which were nothing but a summary of your entire life: where— when and where you were born, where you lived, where you worked, what agencies you belonged to, and so on, and so forth. After working there, I went to the

manager's office, and I— that was the beginning of my long career serving managers. I started with Sheldon Winfam [?] and worked for managers through 1981. Jean?

Jean Meehan: I'm Jean Barry Meehan, and I came probably before either— any of the other ladies here. In fact, I think I gave tests and hired many of them. I trans— Well, I didn't transfer, I came out here. I had worked in Oak Ridge, Tennessee when it was under the Corps of Engineers, which preceded the AEC. And I worked there on three different occasions, starting when there was just a very muddy compound and one office building attached to the log cabin. And then I transferred from there to Idaho Falls AEC office, and came back from there. And that was my second go at the Grand Junction compound. And then later I transferred to Cincinnati, Ohio, and then to the headquarters in Maryland, and then came back and ended my career at the compound in Grand Junction. I worked in the personnel office and ended my career as the director of personnel and security.

Caroline: I remember Jean. When I went back to Washington, to Germantown one time, you were there, and they treated me to dinner and drinks before and a very, very rich lobster something. Anyway, when I got back to my room, I didn't feel very well. [ladies laughing]

Jean: It was all my fault.

Caroline: It was, but we had a wonderful time. [laughing]

Betty: Well, we had a lot of nice times. We did. We— we worked hard, but by golly, we had a lot of fun times, too. And somehow or other, those are the ones I remember. I do, you know, I got to tell you, though— and this is about Roger Maitland, when I worked for him, because it's kind of a funny story. He— one day, I was at my desk and a mouse ran across my office, and I knew it was a mouse. I told Roger, “There's a mouse. He went into your office.” “Oh, no. It's your imagination.” And so here comes Bill Chenoweth to the rescue with a mouse trap. And he set that sucker right in Roger's office. It wasn't very long we heard a click. Bill comes out with it and he says, “Do you want this?” And I said, “No, put it back on Roger's desk. Let him know what my— what my imagination looks like.” And I don't remember what Roger did, but I think I got my point across. There was some fun times. You know, we didn't— we didn't differentiate between just regular workers, and the supervisors, and directors — We were all friends.

Caroline: Oh, I know.

Betty: I can't ever remember—

Caroline: Yeah—

Betty: really— except Jerry Martin. I mean –

Caroline: Yeah. Did you work for Jerry?

Betty: Yes I did, and you stood up

Caroline: Did you?

Betty: —and almost saluted.

Caroline: Did you catch the de— Yeah, I know, every day. I was in the ladies' room in tears many days. Elaine Green saved my life. She'd say, "Caroline, don't worry about it. You know, it's gonna be okay."

Jean: Elaine...

Caroline: Green.

Jean: Jerry Martin was on her case a lot.

Caroline: Worse than mine.

Jean: She was not the most punctual person around. And she'd go out for lunch and she'd be— invariably, be late getting back. And Jerry go on her case, and she said, "Well, I'd like to see you go home and get lunch for your husband and get back in an hour." [laughing]

Caroline: Right. To tell you what it was like in the steno pool, we all had a desk, and we had our supplies, and there were several girls working there. Our typewriters were manual typewriters, and we were taught how to arrange the correspondence and who was who, and— and all the various copies that we did. In those days, we had manual typewriters. We also, when we typed a document, any kind of a letter or a memo, we had to make multiple copies. So that means— that meant that you would put the original, and then you had to have yellow: put a carbon in there; green: put another copy in there; and then several whites and several pages of carbon work. So if you made an error, you had to erase it, fold back each one of those pages to erase it. Well, needless to say, after so many of them, you just went, [making tearing sounds] you know, to start all over. And it was pretty frustrating. We learned how to do the travel, but mainly, she would say, "Ms. Dekleva, would you get your book and please come in?" [laughing]

Louise: Oh, I remember,

Caroline: So, I would do that, shaking.

Louise: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: One day, I did all my work, put it in her basket, and I thought I'd really done a good job. And she said, "Ms. Dekleva, would you please come in?" And so, when I walked in, she was tearing everything apart. And she said, "Hasn't anybody told you that I have a phobia for small clips?" So, that's all her problem was. And I had used some small paper clips that were given to me in my—

Louise: Oh, I remember that.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: So.

Louise: I remember.

Betty: You do, you remember?

Caroline: But we had—

Louise: I remember that.

Caroline: We also learned to do dictation on a Dictaphone. Have any of you heard of a Dictaphone? No — that was a little thing, a console. And the dictator would speak into a microphone. It would be recorded on the— well, you'd call it a disk today, but it was like a little record. Anyway, then we would put the earphones in and transcribe all the dictat— dictation from the Dictaphone. We also took dictation by shorthand. I did a lot of that. And, let's see, we had no copy machines to speak of. We did have a printing plant on the compound. And when we had contracts — and this was further down the line when I was doing contracts — they— we had— we would send all the— we had a special paper that we typed on was called a multilith — multilith? Yeah. It was kind of a waxy finish. And then that's what we sent to the print shop and copy— multiple copies could be made of those documents. But the telephone system, nothing like it is today. No copy machines, no nothing. And like I said, the typewriters with all those copies, when you had— today, with computers and word processors, you can— you can do all sorts of things with documents.

Jean: It corrects your spelling. [laughing]

Caroline: I know. It does everything for you. Anyway, that was a real experience. No kidding.

Betty: And it took us longer than they do today. But we had to work harder, didn't we? =

Caroline: Yes. Yeah, I certainly did.

Betty: It was—

Jean: You were talking about the telephone switchboard. And we all remember Maxine Bennet.

Betty: Yes.

Jean: Who recognized your voice, if you've been gone for— transferred out and came back and called in to connect with your friends, she would recognize your voice. She immedi— you didn't need to know a phone number, Maxine had it in her head.

Betty: The whole phone book, huh?

Caroline: Yeah.

Betty: Yeah.

Jean: She was a real joy.

Caroline: Speaking of the phone operator, those of you who are familiar with the log cabin, you know, there's that little cubbyhole as you come up both steps. And Maxine started there. The switchboard was there when she first started, and then it was later moved downstairs. But when I went— first went to the manager's office, Sheldon Winfam was the manager, and we talked to the headquarters people in Washington just multiple times each day. But, we would have— one of us would have to go in there, put the earphones on, or just hold the phone, and take notes of all those phone calls. And then he— we had a little three ring binder. So, we had a record of whatever happened, and we had to highlight certain things that, you know, we were supposed to do. But that really kept you efficient and up on your— on your shorthand. It was quite an exper—

Betty: And then they don't even teach it anymore.

Caroline: They don't even. [laughing]

Betty: You find a shorthand book, you think you've got something out of the archives. And that's true.

Caroline: And then we transcribed a lot of the documents from the Dictaphone. You know, that was sitting right by your desk all the time. So...

Betty: But, remember some of the fun times? Do you remember Pete Barone's retirement party. Jean does, don't you Jean?

Jean: I remember many conversations with Pete. He said he'd worked for the federal government for, what, 30 or more than 30 years? I was the only personnel person that he was not afraid of. [laughing] In fact, when he retired, he brought me a really nice pair of earrings.

Caroline: Oh, that's sweet.

Betty: He was a nice person. He really was. Was—

Jean: I had to counsel him on protocol of your bathroom activity. If he went on a field trip with a woman mining engineer, which we had recently hired. [laughing]

Caroline: Speaking of that, there were very, very few female mining engineers.

Betty: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: Geologists. If you were a female geologist, you were really, you were usually hired to do report writing. But you didn't really get to go out in the field because this was a man's domain, you know? But—

Jean: USGS had a number of female geologists working on the compound. When they shared office space with the Atomic Energy Commission.

Caroline: Yeah. The USGS did work with the AEC people out in the field, and they were— they were located— their offices were located right there on the field. In fact, Jean's sister was married to Dick Fisher, who was the boss of the USGS.

Jean: Yes.

Betty: I didn't know that.

Caroline: Speaking of Dick Fisher, he and Jack Cumbo, who was chief counsel,

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: started the Geological Society in Grand Junction, which is still active to this day.

Louise: Oh.

Betty: That's good.

Caroline: Yeah, I think it is too. They also— Hank Wardwell, I think at one time I was told that he was instrumental in starting the first country club in Grand Junction, that's located out

Louise: Mhm, mhm.

Caroline: in the north.

Jean: Was Hank Wardwell in that crash?

Betty: Did you know that? I didn't know that happened.

Caroline: That was Paul Diverchie.

Jean: No, no.

Louise: Well, because—

Louise: We had just, with my husband, we did a lot of that with the—

Betty: Geological survey?

Louise: Yeah.

Betty: Did you?

Louise: Mhm.

Betty: Cause he could, huh?

Louise: Yeah.

Betty: I did a lot of those things.

Louise: Yeah.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: I think one of the most interesting things that we had at the compound was the AEC Air Force. Remember those?

Betty: The Air Force? When— when they went up to Glade Park. Is that what you're referring to?

Caroline: No. When they—

Jean: Tom Boyle?

Caroline: All the geologists, Tom Boyle and—

Jean: Bill.

Louise: Yeah. Bill.

Betty: They had all those folks out there.

Caroline: They—

Betty: Maybe I was gone then.

Caroline: You might have been.

Louise: Yeah, you were gone.

Caroline: They flew small planes, low level planes— and through the canyon walls and so forth. And if they would get any anomalies of some radioactivity, they would come back. And then the AEC would post maps of all these different locations. They would put them in post offices and they would put them at the gates at the AEC and wherever people went to get some information. But they— they really were a special group of guys.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: And I think they were very courageous to— to fly some of the areas—

Jean: Tom Boyle and—

Betty: I remember Tom.

Jean: Bill Seapno.

Louise: Bill Seapno.

Jean: Technical people, Bill was a

Caroline: Geologist, uh huh.

Jean: A geologist.

Louise: Mhm.

Jean: I think Tom was a mining engineer. But the reason they had this, it turned out to be much safer. They, on at least one sad occasion, used a contract flying service. I don't know where, I forgot where this incident happened, and a young geologist, who was not really oriented on safety procedures, of how— the canyons and all. And they crashed and killed both the pilot and the gentleman.

Caroline: Oh, I didn't know that.

Jean: But they never had an incident, and they were very careful about when they flew, and had absolute control over whether it was safe to fly.

Caroline: You know, we had a lot of geologists out in the field living out in the boonies, and they lived in trailers.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: And I think they were pretty rustic. Believe me.

Louise: Yeah.

Caroline: I don't think there was any air conditioning on any of them.

Louise: Oh, no.

Betty: Probably not.

Betty: And they were in the desert.

Caroline: They were in the desert.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: And they were out for two-week stints. And Louise, now I remember you on the radio down the hall all the time. With that radio would start squawking and you'd run in and answer the calls.

Louise: Yeah, right. And I talked on the radio with all the field offices, and they'd come— Then they would come in every two weeks and have several days off. But I always kept up with them on the— and, well, lots of stories. [laughing]

Jean: They built the airstrip—

Betty: If more of them could come to mind, huh.

Jean: at the same time.

Betty: I'm glad we all got together.

Louise: Yeah.

Jean: I remember Paul Derierge [?] who was one of our geologists.

Louise: Mhm. Jean: Really neat guy. He opened this airstrip. He went in and tested it before anybody else did.

Caroline: Paul was quite a character. Was a Harvard graduate, a geologist. Very bright but absent-minded as can be, right?

Betty: Closest thing to a genius and an idiot, right?

Caroline: He married one of the local girls, Joanne. And they were taking off for their wedding trip, and they ran out of gas right on the airstrip. Or maybe they'd taken off. I don't know, but that— I know that they— they ran out of gas.

Jean: Well, I remember we were at a bridal shower for Joanne, and they— she didn't make it back because they got caught in a Midwest snow storm or something. I also remember Paul losing these checks. He had a penchant for doing that. And so he was walking down the hall and he put his check — paycheck — right in his back pocket. And somebody found it on the floor.

Betty: Jean, if you had been next door to him, if you had opened that metal drawer, it was full of checks he hadn't cashed. I mean, it really was.

Jean: Well, he lost one on a trip when he was flying across country some time, but we just didn't understand it. He just went into a public telephone booth and he laid it down on the counter and then — disappeared! [laughing]

Louise: Some of the geologists were not too bright.

Jean: We found that check— [laughing] that he lost—

Betty: Well, they were smart. Yeah.

Caroline: Well, they were focused on their job, you know. [laughing]

Louise: They were smart in their own—

Caroline: Paul also played the clarinet

Louise: Yes.

Caroline: He was very musical. And there were several of the other fellows. Now, these were young men just out of college.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: I mean, they were very well-educated, and they had come from

Louise: Mhm. All over.

Caroline: some of the best known schools in the country. And, this being out here in the West was a real— whole new experience

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: for them. But they did get together and they played music and they had a wonderful time. That was about the time that Aspen was just going, too.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: In the early 50s. And, I remember— Jean, do you remember going on a trip to— A whole group of us.

Jean: Well, if I remember, I think I was the driver. [laughing]

Caroline: We had— we had borrowed skis and we— our— our skiing attire left a lot to be desired. We didn't know about getting up on the lift, you know, so we were just trying to walk up the hill and then slide down.

Jean: We were on the bunny hill.

Caroline: It was— it was not too fun. [laughing]

Louise: No.

Caroline: Well, it was fun, but I mean, fortunately, we never did show up in Aspen looking like that again, but it was fun. It really was. But Aspen was a fun place.

Louise: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: It was where all the young guys were going. Presley, or Persely, Jack Persley –

Louise: Jack Persley.

Caroline: John Patterson, and a lot of those fellows. Speaking of John Patterson, he ended up going to headquarters and also working for the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] in Vienna.

Betty: Oh, okay.

Caroline: We also had one other fellow, Murray Hanson, that was a geologist that did, quite a term in Vienna. In fact, he still lives in Austria.

Louise: Does he still?

Caroline: Yeah. I used to hear from him.

Betty: Does he— is he full time there now? He, well when I was in the post office, he used to come in every six months because he came back to keep his citizenship.

Caroline: Yeah.

Betty: And, I just wondered. I hadn't heard anything about him.

Caroline: He's still there. But I don't think his health is very good at all. But he's still living in a small town in Austria, so, there were people from all over the country that, visited our office and—

Betty: Well, and there were so many of those people that went on to— to things that people remember. Pete Mycat, he's got that dinosaur hill named after him.

Louise: Yeah, he died.

Betty: You know,

Caroline: Pete passed away recently.

Betty: Yes he did.

Louise: Yeah. Mhm. Yeah. And Paul Diverchie came from New York, I think it was. And he had a plane, and he flew his plane out here, and he was in our division. And he wanted to know where to go get something to eat. And so we gave him some different restaurants and everything. And he came back, and he— we— he just gave all of a— he never saw so much crap in his life was here in Grand Junction. [laughing]

Betty: He didn't like our restaurants?

Louise: No. Oh, no. Paul was— but he was something. But he was from back East.

Betty: Yeah, you couldn't help liking—

Louise: Oh, I thought a lot of him. We— and we— we were different because they were in the field, and they would be gone for, what, ten days and then come in and be in here.

Caroline: Oh, that was wonderful. When the crews came back in, they rotated.

Louise: Yeah.

Caroline: All the new guys had come in and you—

Louise: Yeah.

Louise: you had the La Court Hotel, which was located, where the Two Rivers Convention Center is, too.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: They had— it was a hotel. They had a green room which was upstairs. And this is where we had our dances and our parties and all sorts of fun activities. They had a bar in the basement

Betty: Jungle Bar.

Caroline: No, that was the Caravan. This is the La Court. And they had the— those piano bars were really popular at that time. But everybody would come and— oh, and then there was Marx McCongin [?] and the Monkey Bar. But, I mean, the Jungle Bar.

Betty: Oh, yeah, that was the Caravan.

Caroline: I always called it the Monkey Bar. It was there. And, they had the— the flame room. I don't know why they called it that, but it had— they had a fireplace. Maybe that was it. But we all spend a lot of time going to party on Saturday nights in particular. Yeah, wonderful steak dinners. I don't know how we ever ate that much food.

Louise: We were younger.

Caroline: But there were a lot of cocktails. And in those days, a lot of cigarettes. Right?
[laughing]

Louise: Yeah. Right, you bet.

Caroline: And, then they had to get rid of the monkeys. Probably they weren't too healthy, but there were a lot of big deals made down at those bars. You know, promoters were in town. They were all over the place. There were all sorts of people who— out prospecting for uranium. And it was extremely exciting because Grand Junction was such a quiet place before their arrival.

Betty: Mhm.

Caroline: It was— I looked up one day, and I think in the early 50s, the population around the city limits of Grand Junction was about 13,000, and I think the county was around 15. So when all these new people started coming to town and they were building homes and doing all sorts of things, it really— it was a big, big turning point for

Louise: Mm, yeah.

Betty: It was.

Caroline: Grand Junction, it really was.

Jean: It's surprising how many of those people have stuck around Grand Junction.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: Well, the saying goes that once you've lived in Grand Junction and you leave,

Betty: You always come back.

Caroline: you always come back.

Betty: You always come back.

Caroline: You know, there must be something to that.

Betty: An old Indian legend, huh.

Caroline: Yeah. Old Indian legend, that— right. We— I'm trying to think. We had a lot of people in the— during the boom, selling penny stocks. And, gee, you could go downtown and in the bar, especially, there were all sorts of wheeler-dealers and promoters, and usually they didn't have too much to go on, but they still sold stocks. And I bought some. [laughing] Such a deal with, you know, just pennies per share. And—

Jean: I didn't know about that.

Caroline: That's how I got so rich. Anyway, Mr. Winfam, this is when I was still working in the security division. He called me upstairs and he said, "Caroline, there's a gentleman here by the name of Mr. Ed— Edmonds." Do you remember Mr. Edmonds?

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: Sam Spade, we called him, he was with the division of, what was it in Washington?

Jean: The inspector—

Caroline: Inspector general's office. Yeah.

Jean: He'd be so upset if he knew that on an assignment when I worked in headquarters, one of the assignments was to read all of the darn reports that were written about those field inspections, but

Caroline: Anyway, he was sitting.

Jean: which would be his.

Caroline: Excuse me, Jean. Are you through?

Jean: No, I'm through.

Caroline: But he did call me upstairs, and there was Sam Spade, and he said, “We've been told that you're buying some uranium stocks.” And I was dating my boyfriend, who I later married, and he thought this was really exciting and fun. And so because of him — it's all his fault — [laughing]

Betty: Of course.

Caroline: I ended up buying some penny stocks, which, of course, I didn't make any money on. But it was fun and exciting and I ceased buying them then, because it— it was considered a conflict of interest. And— but it was fun. Everybody—

Betty: Well, they didn't put you in prison, so that was a good thing.

Caroline: Right, right.

Louise: And Charlie, Charlie Steen he's the one that had all the uranium out in Utah.

Betty: In Moab, yeah.

Louise: In Moab.

Betty: I remember going to his restaurant. Murray Hanson took me and Linda Penry. well, we visited the Salmon mine and went underground.

Louise: Mhm.

Betty: And I could not get used to not looking at a person with those lamps. I mean, I had to look at them, and I kept blinding them, and they kind of got mad at me.

Caroline: Oh, With the miner's lamp, yeah.

Betty: Yeah. You're not supposed to do that. But, then he took us on into Moab and we went on the hill and visited Charlie's restaurant. Two of the— I mean, the biggest pair of boots I've ever seen in my life in that door as you walked in.

Caroline: He probably had them bronzed, did he? Were they bronzed?

Betty: But they weren't his.

Caroline: Oh, weren't they?

Betty: They were made big. [laughing] I mean, it was— it was like, "Wow."

Jean: It was part of the decor of the restaurant.

Betty: You know, the Jolly Green Giant.

Caroline: Yeah. He had a huge, huge party down there one time, and Jess Johnson came from headquarters.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: And, I think, Hel—well it was Winfam and probably before Winfam left and Alan Jones had arrived — but they were all there. He had a mariachi band and, really, he'd come from Texas and had a lot of association, I think, with the Mexican culture. So, he really liked the Mexican music. But, you know, there have been so many stories about, Charlie staying in his big deposit. He was down in Lisbon Valley, which turned out to be one of the biggest deposits.

Louise: That's right.

Caroline: We hadn't really got things going.

Louise: Mhm.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: And, then that brings up Vernon Pick.

Louise: Vernon Pick. Yes.

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: Vernon Pick, also. Vernon Pick came from Minnesota, I think originally. And he'd had a fire and whatever his— he was on a river and I think the whole little family that he had there was all self-contained. And then they had a fire and destroyed everything. So he took what little insurance money he had and came back—came out to Colorado to prospect. His first encounter was with Dr. Raser. You worked for Dr. Raser, didn't you, Louise?

Louise: Yes. Mhm. For a little while.

Caroline: Yeah. Before he died. Yeah. Anyway, he ended up making a very big discovery in Temple Mountain, just south of San Rafael swell. It's I think it's north of Hoyt [?]. But, the interesting part of it, as far as I was concerned about what Vernon Pick is, in the 1950s, we had a— we had a Miss Atomic Energy contest. And this was a big celebration that year the uranium ore producers had set up and the— the Chamber of Commerce was involved. And so, Sheldon Winfam was the manager then, and he said, "Caroline, we've got to have somebody, you know, represent us." And so I went. [laughing] Anyway, I did not win. [laughing] But there was a lovely lady from Denver and she had attended University of Northern Colorado at Greeley and she was

"miss somebody" several times, and she was really a lovely girl, and she was very poised and so forth.

And so anyway, Vernon Pick said he was going to take some of the ladies that also ran, I guess, on a trip to— over the plateau to visit some of the uranium mines — I mean, just the area. And so, he had, as part of his payment for the mine that he discovered, he was paid \$10 million for it, minus the airplane that he inherited from Floyd Odlo [?]. Anyway, we took his airplane ride to go over the plateau and then somebody said, "Let's go to Las Vegas." So, they radioed the station here in Grand Junction and we headed for Las Vegas. We had the limousine meet us there. And he gave us a little money to play the slots, and then we had dinner. So— and then returned to Grand Junction the same night. But that was pretty exciting.

Betty: You bet.

Caroline: We thought it was really exciting, and I was thinking today, when I was driving in, Vernon Pick had built a home after he got— became rich in Grand Junction, and it's on Vista Grande on the Redlands. And, I don't know if you're familiar with that street, but, it's the second house on the northhand side. It's a brick house. And in the 50s, that was considered a very, very fancy home. Nothing like the homes at the new golf course.

Betty: Yeah, yeah.

Caroline: Anyway, those were exciting times to have all those things happening in Grand Junction and I've been doing a lot of talking, Betty, why don't you? [laughing]

Betty: You know what? I'm learning things that I've never heard of before. [laughing]

Caroline: Oh, really?

Betty: Yeah. I was really intrigued with your contest. But that's when you told me about it the other night. I really was, I didn't know that, so I must have been gone then, since I came and gon— went and came.

Louise: Yeah.

Jean: You came and went, I came and went.

Louise: Yeah. You two did.

Betty: But it was always kept b— good to come back to Grand Junction, right? Yeah. It was a good place to work.

Louise: Yes, we—

Caroline: You stayed all the time, though, Louise, didn't you?

Louise: Yeah, I stayed the whole time.

Betty: Yeah she did.

Louise: And I worked with the geologists and the engineers in that division. And one time they took a group of us out to Stein— Stein, is that— mine. And we went into— and went into his mine, and uranium like this all along. And like that.

Betty: In the vein, you mean?

Louise: In the mine, and we got to go. And the— everything was huge. And we walked right up to it and we all got a little piece of it. Well—

Betty: I remember having a rock garden with all the samples

Louise: Me, too.

Betty: outside of my home.

Louise: And my kids—

Caroline: We all did, yeah.

Louise: Yeah. And I took a lot of it home, and my sons took it to school to show the—uranium

Betty: Show and tell.

Louise: and how great it was.

Jean: Did they have a Geiger counter?

Louise: They had no business. I had no business doing that. [laughing]

Betty: We had no idea about that.

Louise: I didn't know that it was that.

Caroline: Well, I don't think anyone did, would— did— for this — the government, of the state— or federal health agency, I think, was trying to— to get some work done out of here. But it took several years before they finally concluded that the radioactivity was bad.

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: So.

Louise: Yep.

Caroline: But we ended up then with uranium mill tailings program and the cleanup. You know, one of the things: Grand Junction, as I said, was a very small community — the whole valley was. And we had most of our economy depended on the fruit growers and the railroad and then the supporting businesses in town. We had very few black people in town. And when we— there was a movement that equal employment. I don't know whether with this— what year this was, but we were urged to— to hire some black people. Well, there was not really anyone to choose from. There were a couple of families in town. But anyway, Hazel Henderson was the administrative assistant in the manager's office at that time. And she was sent to Denver to a place called the Opportunity School and— to find somebody to come to Grand Junction. So she brought back this young lady named Jackie Brown. And Jackie worked with the two of you, right?

Betty: Jackie is still friends with me.

Caroline: That's wonderful.

Betty: She calls me every year.

Caroline: And Jackie was going to the opportunity school, and I think she was responsible for two sisters.

Betty: Mhm. She was.

Caroline: And she was very young, but she was very responsible. Anyway, when she came to the office, this was kind of a real oddity for all of us here.

Louise: Yeah.

Caroline: We had a couple of ladies that had grown up in the South, and at first they were— they were not too happy about this, you know, they didn't know that they should be using the same bathroom and so forth. And maybe I shouldn't say that, but it was true. As it turned out, Jackie— she turned out to be a very delightful person.

Betty: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: Everyone enjoyed her and liked her. And— and really admired her.

Betty: I got to tell you something that happened with Jackie and me one day. We used to go into lunch. In— during— into town. And Jackie was driving and she had— she had Melanie at that time, but she wasn't there. But when we got in the car, here was a car seat, and I said, "That's

okay, Jackie, I'll just sit in the back.” She turned to me and she said, “I'll be damned if I'm going to drive you around town.” [laughing] I just cracked up. But we have been friends, such good friends, for so many years.

Caroline: Yeah. She used to make a lot of references to being in the back of the bus, it was kind of— and she joked about it, but, she was really quite an interesting gal. She married a gentleman that was working with the Job Corps, right?

Betty: John died in January.

Caroline: Oh, he did? Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Betty: Yeah, yeah.

Louise: What was the other girl's name?

Caroline: The sister?

Louise: No, not the sister. The other black one that they brought.

Betty: Barbara?

Louise: Barbara. She lives in Fruita.

Betty: And what was Barbara's last name? Barbara...

Caroline: I don't know.

Louise: And she's married

Betty: Dickey. Barbara Dickey.

Louise: Barbara Dickey.

Betty: Remember Barbara Dickey? I do.

Caroline: Well, the Dickey family lived here in town.

Betty: Yeah, they did.

Louise: And she married a fellow from here.

Jean: I had an assistant who was black. [inaudible]

Louise: And they lived here. She called me one time.

Jean: Last I knew, he was.

Caroline: Well, thankfully –

Betty: Just to visit?

Louise: Just to visit.

Jean: [Inaudible]

Caroline: Thankfully, things have changed, and that's— that's all good. We— we also started the Coloramo Credit Union at the compound. And this was, I think in 1953, we had— you couldn't do it as an agency, but we had a club called the Coloramo Club, and the "Coloramo" was derived from the Colorado Raw Materials Office, which was one of the offices in the early days. But the— we set up— they set up the— the credit union just wherever there was extra space. Was Marge Mannheim the first manager? Do you know?

Betty: I don't remember her. I remember Marilyn Heller.

Louise: I think maybe Marge was, yeah.

Caroline: She preceded Marilyn, for sure.

Betty: Did she?

Louise: I think Marge was the first one.

Caroline: But—

Jean: Were they out in the guard house?

Caroline: Well, they were at the guard house at the north gate. Oh, and another thing I remember from when we really started, do you remember we had two badges?

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: We had one badge and we would enter at the north gate. And then when we got to the gate we had to exchange it for— they

Louise: Mhm.

Caroline: had all these other badges.

Jean: They had a badge rack and they put it in the middle of the driveway when cars could drive onto the compound at that time. And one of the guards we always called "Fumbles," because [laughing]

Caroline: But there was always a big rush in the morning, everyone rushing to get to the office.

Betty: Trying to get to work, huh?

Caroline: They waiting for the guard— guards to pick up your— your— exchange your badge. We— I— in those days, we wore the high heels, you know, with—

Betty: Oh, yeah.

Louise: Oh, with the—

Caroline: with those tiny little heels. But I went through a lot of shoes. I don't know about you—

Louise: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: — but [inaudible] step in them. Oh, and then another thing. Remember, we had to wear dresses, all the time.

Betty: Yes, we did.

Louise: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: The era of the pantsuit arrived after Betty Friedan's book came out and all things started to move along. So I think I was the first one to wear a pantsuit. I had a navy blue. It was polyester, [laughing] a two piece. And I was walking into to the office, came through the gate, my phone started ringing and everybody said, “I saw you this morning. You’re wearing a pantsuit!”

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: So it was it was really something. Can you imagine?

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: Anyway, then they said— Jim Westbrook came out and he said, “Well,” he said, “I want to make certain that the ladies wear pantsuits and not just jeans, you know.”

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: Like that. I wonder what he would do today. [laughing]

Betty: Isn't that true? Wow.

Caroline: And believe me, there was no cleavage, no nothing. You know, it was

Louise: No.

Caroline: covered up. Mrs. Martin scolded Mary Solatino once for wearing a blouse that was cut too low, she thought. And Mary is a nice Catholic little girl.

Betty: Yes she is.

Caroline: who was very conservative.

Betty: Yes.

Caroline: So, you know. Yeah, there're all sorts of things that happened over those years. I don't mean to be taking over the whole conversation.

Betty: No, you've made notes, the rest of us are kind of just trying to remember things.

Caroline: But I think it would be nice to talk about some of our management people that we had in Grand Junction. I arrived in Grand Junction on February 2, 1952, and there were two entities. One was called the Grand Junction Exploration Branch and the other was called Colorado Raw Materials Office. And one reported to New York City to Phil Merritt. The other one reported to Washington, D.C. to Jess Johnson. I guess it was. Anyway, the program — the exploration program — had been going on since about 1947 and '48, and this was 1952, and headquarters was kind of concerned that we were not going to meet the requirements for military uses. So, Jess Johnson, who was the top man for the Raw Materials in Washington sent a gentleman by the name of Sheldon P. Winfam to Grand Junction.

Jean: He was my next door neighbor at one time.

Caroline: Was he? [laughing]

Betty: Yeah.

Caroline: Sheldon was quite a unique individual. I think. He— he graduated from a mining school in El Paso, Texas. He was a marine— a former marine. He was about 40 years old when he arrived in Grand Junction. Well, this was when he became manager, but he came— Johnson sent him out early in 1952 to see if they could get things going a little faster out here. And so, he prepared a white paper, went back to headquarters, and was pretty critical of the way things were going. The bottom line was that Jess Johnson sent him out to Grand Junction to straighten things out and getting things going. And, so by the end of 1952, or it was November, we had become the Grand Junction Operations Office, and, Sheldon was the mana— appointed as manager. And the first thing that he did was to combine the two offices that we had had, you know, reporting to different places. And we had then, at that time, we began to report directly to headquarters. But as I said, Sheldon had graduated from a school in El Paso, a mining school,

and he had worked in the Philippines and in South America under several U.S. mining companies. He was 40 years old when he came here — very handsome looking guy, I thought. Did you think he was? You didn't know—

Betty: I don't think I knew him.

Caroline: Did you know him Louise? You did, Jean. Did you think he was nice looking?

Jean: Oh, yeah.

Caroline: He always smoked a pipe.

Jean: Those are not the things that I remember. [laughing]

Caroline: Gee, I— I must have been the only one looking at all the guys.[laughing]

Louise: Well, you were the only one in the hedge [?].

Betty: Well, you were exposed to a lot more than we were in the branches.

Jean: I don't know whether it's— whether it's pertinent, but that exploration group was where I worked the first, and a man named Wally Fetzer was the manager

Caroline: Oh, oh!

Jean: of that. Oh, before Ernie Gordon?

Jean: Yeah. And then Ernie was the—

Caroline: Oh, I see.

Betty: See, we're all learning things today. [laughing]

Caroline: Right. Anyway, to describe Sheldon, he was a real aggressive person, very energetic, and a total extrovert. And, I think he was the kind of person we really needed at that time because we were trying to get the, the raw materials going real fast. And when he was appointed manager, he was given some very broad authorities, and he could execute procurement contracts, and he could do capital improvements. And he was— he just was so energetic, I mean — I think Don Hill described him once as galloping up and down the halls — but he always had his pipe. And he would stop at anybody's office and want to know "Who were you and what is your job, and do you like it?" and so on. And, he called everyone by their first name, and he was also this way with industry. He was out there. He loved the publicity and the program and the authority that he was given, I think were so influential in really getting the whole program off the ground. So he stayed until he became manager in 1952, and he left in December of 1955.

And the gentleman that succeeded him as manager was someone by the name of Eleny Jones [?]. And Jones' personality was just the opposite of Sheldon. Jones was quiet, soft spoken. Just—he didn't like the real big crowds, and he didn't like that sort of thing. But he—he was—I thought he did a really good job in promoting what his work at the time. He had been—he had grown up in California and started in college, I think it was in Oregon. Somebody said California, but I remember when he first came, I was filling out some forms, and I said, "You haven't completed this section. There's a form about where you graduated." And he said, "I didn't graduate." I—"You didn't?" He said, "No." He said, "I graduated from the school of hard knocks." It was the depression. He said "I had to leave college." So, he went back to California and he was—he operated a lot of mining, independent mining and tungsten operations and became quite an expert. So, after World War II we were getting a lot of our product from—from foreign countries, namely South Africa. So anyway, Jones was recruited to go to South Africa and handle those procurement contracts there.

So he stayed there for quite a few years until when he came to Grand Junction in '56. By then we had been very, very successful in finding uranium, and we really were becoming fearful that we were going to have too much. [laughing] We had contractual commitments until 1962. And we were concerned about putting more money and more contracts because we were making new discoveries. So there was the Stein, the Vernon Pick, and then Wyoming came online, and big deposits in Gas Hills, Crook's Gap, and then the deposits down in New Mexico. So there was quite a bit of concern about slowing things down. I think Jones was—he was kind of—I think he was such a contrast to Mr. Winfam that people thought –

Louise: Yeah.

Caroline: "You know, I don't know about this guy." He just— because he was aloof.

Louise: Yeah.

Caroline: Of course, he'd lived among the Brits and the South Africans and everything, and maybe that could be attributed to that. But, he was in Johannesburg for a few years before he came here. They brought him back to the U.S. and so he succeeded Winfam as manager. And we realized that beneath that quiet exterior that he had that he was really a pretty tough character and a no-nonsense guy. And he had the reputation of being a very, very skillful— skillful negotiator. And that proved to serve us all well, because at the time he arrived, we were trying to figure out—"we," I'm speaking for the AEC. And I shouldn't be held responsible for all these things that I'm saying, I— [laughing] They're— they're my impressions. So anyway, we were trying to slow things down, and so, it seemed like he was forever renegotiating contracts and the, AEC came out with one of the major policy changes, dated November 24, 1958. And you girls should

remember that because it was changing everything and made a lot more work for you doing all your allocations and the dossiers and all that sort of thing.

Anyway, the— the meat of that was that the AEC would not purchase any more uranium that was— that was discovered after November 24, 1958. So this was a major, major policy change. And it did make it necessary, then, to redo a lot of contracts to change. And we had the term call the stretch out of the contracts and that— this is actually what we were doing is trying to stretch out the production that we were committed to— to— from 1962 to 1966 and then from 1966 to 1970, at which time the DOE — we were DOE then, I guess, yeah — at which time, no— it was the AE— still the AEC. Right. At which time the buying pro— program had ceased, there was no more government purchaser of concentrates.

Anyway, Mr. Jones stayed until the end of 1970. I think he stayed until June of 1971 and retired. But I do think that— the his reputation for having been a good negotiator, it held true because I used to hear a lot of the— the— the companies representatives that came in to do negotiations would talk about him and they'd say, "You know, this— he's really pretty, a tough guy." But he was highly respected. And, I— I enjoyed working for him. He— he was very thoughtful. I think he— he could— he— he knew how to think about the future and what was going on. But he was very quiet. But he would call me in for dictation and he'd sit there some time with a pencil and just keep hitting the desk.

Betty: Drive you nuts?

Caroline: And he'd turn the other way. [laughing] So, and he— but he— he would dictate memos that I loved because I called them his poison pen memos. And he would— he was very blunt about what he thought about policy and so forth. Then I would take it into him, a draft, and he would— he would redo it, and it would come out to be a very nice piece of work. He softened it a lot, but I always got tickled because he'd— I'd— he'd give me that sly grin because some of the expressions that he used in his memos, the poison pen things, drafts, were, I thought, very funny. Anyway, I missed him after he left, but we had— we were then succeeded by Elton Youngberg. And all of us knew Elton really well. Elton had grown up in the northwest, in Oregon. He attended Linfield College. He had a twin sister, and they both were valedictorian in the high school. He attended Linfield College, was, was in McMill— McMinnville, Oregon. And then, he eventually graduated with a mining degree from Montana School of Mines. And after that, he spent, oh, he spent some years working from—

Betty: I'm sorry.

Caroline: No, that's okay.

Betty: I, I was just admiring her for remembering this.

Caroline: Oh. Well, I had to dig some of this up, I mean, I don't remember all of that. He— he became— where was I? Oh, he's— after he graduated from School of Mines, he worked for the USGS in Spokane, and I think he was also with the Department of Minerals or something like that with the state of Oregon. But he went to Washington about in 1952, and apparently went to work for Jess Johnson, who was head of Raw Materials. And then he came out to Grand Junction in 1954 and was the assistant mana— assistant to the manager, which was Sheldon Winfam at that time. And, Mr. Youngberg, I think was just a wonderful person.

Betty: He was.

Caroline: Just, he was very bright and I think he— but he was low key, and they kept changing— he'd be the director of the mining division for a while. Then he'd be an assistant to the manager. And then he was back in the mining division. But I think he contributed, immensely to some of the policies and the development of our of our Raw Materials program. Anyway, he was appointed as— he served as an assistant manager for operations under Mr. Jones. And when Mr. Jones retired, Mr. Youngberg became the manager. And that was in 1971.