

Oral History Project
Interview of Jacqueline Young
June 5th, 2019
Interviewer: Ashton Peterhans

AP: Alright, my name is Ashton Peterhans and that's spelled A-S-H-T-O-N P-E-T-E-R-H-A-N-S. And your name please?

JY: Is Jacqueline Young and I'm J-A-C-Q-U-E-L-I-N-E Y-O-U-N-G.

AP: All right, Jacqueline.

Off camera: I'm not gonna have you look at the camera, sorry I forgot to tell you that.

JY: Where is the camera? Oh, okay. I'm looking at Ashton.

Off camera: Yes.

AP: All right Jacqueline, so I understand you moved to Colorado when you were young, and you attended the Emily Griffith Opportunity School before you moved to Grand Junction. Can you please talk a little bit about your experience at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School?

JY: I worked at the Denver Dry Goods Department Store during the day. I could not afford to go to college, so I did take classes at Central Business College and at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, downtown Denver. Because I could get off work and then go to classes at school there. I did take the IBM key punch, where you took the little cards and you wrapped them around a barrel, that's how far back I went. But yeah, I had business courses there and I just did that after I would get off my day job.

AP: So, it was night classes that you took?

JY: Night classes, yes.

AP: Right and while you were working the various jobs and attending the Emily Griffith Opportunity School at night, when were you contacted by the Atomic Energy Commission?

JY: It was the summer, I believe, of 1964. I had just got back from San Antone, I had a rode a bus all night, I was helping my sister come back and bring her children and when I got back home, my guardian at the time said that there was someone from the Atomic Energy Commission was calling me about a job. And I was so tired, and I was so tired of walking the streets trying to find jobs where people would say, "well, if you had the experience, then you know, we would hire you." But nobody wanted to give you the experience. So anyway, he encouraged me, my guardian that is, encouraged me to go ahead and meet this person. So, they were holding interviews at the Brown Palace Hotel, downtown Denver, and the person holding the interviews at the time was Hazel Henderson and I was the very last candidate or applicant to go in for the interview. And we sat down, and we had just, you know I was tired anyway, so I was just wanting to relax, and we sat down and

there was really no pressure and we had the most comfortable interview and I thought, oh well, okay, we'll see. And she said, "Well okay, we'll be in touch. You do know you'll have to pass a security clearance?" And I thought well let's see I don't know, I don't see any reason why I couldn't do that, but anyway for about the next six months or so there were neighbors coming up, "what have you done? The people are coming-the authorities are coming by asking questions about you" and all that and I thought well I don't know what that's all about and so anyway long story short, in December of 1964 I entered on duty with the Atomic Energy Commission and my life just started. You know, I met Don Erickson, the Director of Personnel and they thought that would be a good place for me to start and I was in there with Aretha Dunn and Ariba Croft and that was, you know, bringing the mail to all the different departments, so I got to meet everybody on the compound, yeah.

AP: So, were all the names you just mentioned, they were all personnel who worked in the mailroom as well?

JY: Yes, Don was the Director of Personnel, so he was across the hall from us and there, you know, their little thing with Max, Max Welch, I think he was in there as well, and we were over on the other side and of course we were in charge, or Aretha was anyway, she had the tailings or the records and things back in the vault, back there where we worked so, but you know, the job was just to take in the mail and route it to all the different divisions and departments and I have to tell you, that was challenging at times. I knew nothing, I think I was 19, I knew nothing about, you know, all this engineering and metallurgical and geological. I didn't know a lot about that, so it was challenging but I mean, you know, everybody was so helpful and I just really, I just really appreciated, you know, their help and their kindness and so that was that.

AP: So, before you moved to Grand Junction, had you ever heard of Grand Junction or did you know anyone who had lived here before?

JY: No, I knew no one who had lived here before, I might have heard of it maybe on the news or something, I didn't know anything until Hazel told me where we were and so I really didn't know about Grand Junction, so everything was new to me, the job, the city, you know, the people, everything was all new to me.

AP: So, when you first came out here, who did they... where did you live, where did you find a place to stay when you first came out to work for the Atomic Energy Commission?

JY: There was a couple here, a black couple, and they were Booker Taylor, Booker and Zenobia Taylor, and he had just passed, you know, recently and so she was widowed and living by herself and so they 3 made arrangements for me to get a room at her house and she was okay with that, so we just immediately formed a bond and a relationship. Her name was Zenobia and I thought that was kind of a long name and I called her "Sweetie Face" and so she really thought that was kind of silly at first but everybody started calling her "Sweetie Face" but they were... that was where I stayed when I was so appreciative that I didn't have to come in and have to try to find a place to stay or, you know, not knowing the neighborhoods or where to go so it was it was a blessing. It really was.

AP: Did the Atomic Energy Commission set that up?

JY: They did, they did, I did not know her before I moved in with her. Yeah.

AP: All right, so you mentioned that your first position with the Atomic Energy Commission was in the mail room.

JY: Right.

AP: Afterwards, what other positions did you work on the compound?

JY: Well, while I was in the mail room, I was also the relief switchboard operator for Maxine Bennett, who ran the switchboard full-time and she also did the teletype, so I had to train on the teletype, and I did the switchboard and the teletype, but it was all clerk typing as well, you know, and eventually then I was moved over to the mining division. Gordon Peck, I started working for him, Fred Facer, and some of the other engineers over there. Yeah.

AP: So Gordon Peck and Fred Facer, they were engineers in the mining division?

JY: Yeah, over in the mining division.

AP: Okay, what kind of work did you do for them?

JY: I was a clerk typist. I was just, did all their secretarial stuff.

AP: I understand you were nominated for federal employee of the year. Could you please talk about that experience and who nominated you and how that all came about?

JY: I guess after I had been there for a while, Don Erickson approached me about that, and I thought *are you kidding?* You know, I just got here, and well, I had been there a few years and so, but he says, "let's sit down and talk about it." He took down some of my information and he thought that I would be a candidate. So, I got the nomination, but I didn't win the award, which was fine with me and, but I guess there were some of the topics he said that I that I could, you know, win. He thought that I was okay, that I would be a good candidate, you know, for leadership, for demonstrating public service, the different things that I did in the community, and with the church and so I said okay. So I let him go ahead, but that was Don Erickson in personnel who initiated that and I didn't know anything about.

AP: You mentioned your community work, what kind of work did you do in the community here in Grand Junction that Don Erickson highlighted?

JY: I was a volunteer with the community action agency here in Grand Junction and the neighborhood center, which was a branch of the community action agency. I also worked with the African American Episcopal Church, the AME church down on Second and White. I was not a member but I attended regularly and we had different plays, programs, fundraisings, and you know, whenever there was like a Martin Luther King, we had a pretty good celebration for him when he passed away and I think it was, Marjorie Taylor who was like our choir director and got us to, you know, sing, and we learned about some of his, Martin's, favorite songs and so we sang those but we had a very nice program and it was just like, kind of spur of the moment, but it was that and

then also, I met this guy from up at the Collbran Job Corps Center and his name was John Henry Young Jr., and so I also got involved... he worked with underprivileged children from the ages of 16 to 24, and I got involved with planning picnics and programs and socials and dances for the kids up there to taking them to Aspen and other places and exposing them to things outside.

AP: Were you involved in the community with Mesa College on campus or the campus here in town? Were you involved with college?

JY: I took classes there in the evenings as well and I remember Sergeant Atencio, which taking a fun class was one of the things I did was Judo, and some kind of way I got roped into the drama department and they put on a play *In White America*, and I was one of the cast members of that. In February, I believe it was for brotherhood week, we had a play we put on a production of *In White America* at Mesa College.

AP: Alright Jacqueline, what was the work like under the secrecy of the Atomic Energy Commission and were you aware of Grand Junction's previous role in the Manhattan Project?

JY: Ah, not really, that was not something that I was privy to, that was not something that we were working with when I was there and so no and the secrecy, or the privacy I mean, it was just a matter of who came in that gate and whether you...-and things haven't changed it's the same way you check in and I think back then, the guard would walk you to wherever it was that you said, you know, had a meeting but no I didn't notice. I just know the badge, we went in and out. You had to have it, if you didn't you better sign for it or something, you know, and know your badge number whatever, but no I didn't. The Manhattan Project was way before my time. I think even some of the people that were there before had nothing to do with it so, yeah.

AP: Working in places like the mail room or even in the mining division, were there any documents that had to be locked up or kept more secret than other documents?

JY: I think there were classified documents and you knew how to handle that, but I don't think that I had anything to, you know, really be worried about as far as dealing with classified documents. I think things really changed a lot, you know, when I got there.

AP: Changed from under the Manhattan Project into the AEC?

JY: Well, I'm not even going to talk about the Manhattan Project because I do not know about the Manhattan Project but I'm just thinking that things were not. I was even told things were not as strict and as stringent as they were back, you know, before I think things were are a little more relaxed. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

AP: While we're sitting in the Atomic Legacy Cabin right now, tell me a little bit about the cabin's use as the employee credit union during your time in Grand Junction.

JY: Well, I can speak for myself, I got a loan to buy my first brand new car and it was a Maverick. I don't know if you've even heard of a Maverick, but anyway, I did get the approval for a loan. I was a member, you had to be a member of the Colorado Federal Credit Union, we called it CFCU, and so you also... I did serve as a member, I

served as one of the officers. I was secretary for a while. You had to do, you know, your part and so I did do the secretarial work for them, reporting and then read the minutes of the meeting and things like that but yeah, we had to walk from the building over here you know, it wasn't like it is, is now you know.

AP: Yeah, the cabin was separated.

JY: It was, it was, it was if I remember correctly, it was separate, yeah, and they just set up an office in the building there and we all had to go there and, and I think it was just open to the members of the government, of the Atomic Energy, I understand now that it's kind of open to everybody.

AP: Yeah, today it's become the Colorado Federal Credit Union.

JY: Okay.

AP: Still in town, yeah.

JY: Everyone, but I think back then it was just for our use, you know, and we had different functions and things even at as a credit union we would put on different events.

AP: I guess kind of wrapping up a little bit of our interview, what was the work environment like on the compound? Can you share any interesting stories with us about some of your coworkers or, you know, kind of the relationships that you formed with them?

JY: Oh yeah stories, okay. We used to go on our lunch break we would run into town. We would hit the consignment and thrift stores in town. We also would go over to the cafeteria over here. Chris used to make the best coconut cream pie and that's probably why I look like I do today, but anyway, Ozzie, I remember in finance, I can't remember his last name, but he had a really nice car, I had this car that I had bought for \$300. I had gotten it when I first moved here and I needed transportation out here because Lorraine Swanson in personnel, she was bringing me back and forth so I got a car as soon as I could and I was stopped at the stoplight up here and Ozzie had this really nice car and for some reason he just hit me in the back and so I just thought it was funny that there was not a scratch on my old raggedy car but he had like \$250 worth of damage on the front of his and, back then, that was quite a bit and so I always thought that, I always thought that *Ozzie now what are you doing tailgating* you know what I mean *why are you following me so close?*

But anyway, we had things like that. I had got married and the whole compound was a part of it, I think. We had baby showers. Gordon Peck, who I worked for, his wife gave the baby shower for me at their home and all the girls. I've got pictures where we were all there at the baby shower and Lucille, who worked in the library, Betty Erickson, I believe she was in finance, had a position in finance and she was one of those, she came to visit me at the hospital. She knew the person that was in the room beside me and she arranged, after the children were born, she arranged for us to get together and I thought that was so nice and then Lucille, at the library, I don't know, people kind of thought Lucille had different ideas, but she was so nice to me and she invited me and the baby out to her home and so I was very much a part of things. When Betty was working at the Sentinel, she has twin boys, David and Darren, and so she ran into a situation where she had no one to

babysit the boys and she, we said, "we'll take them," and so John and I took care of them, you know, while she went to work that weekend. So that's what you did, you just pitched in and you helped if someone had a problem and like I said, they just, we were all kind of living close together and we were all helpful. Pete Perroney lived right across the street from me, he was one of the engineers and I remember we were all talking one time and I backed out and backed right into the neighbor, bumper to bumper back there, and they would come by and they would just tell you funny stories about being out in the field. I remember Pete Peterson, he was a huge guy, and well I said, "boy, how tall are you anyway?" He said, "Yeah, I look like a big guy, but I only wear two and a half," and I said, "Two and a half?" He said, "Yeah two and a half cow highs" and I just never forgot that he was talking about his shoes and I just never forgot things like that. There were people, Louise Oliver, I always thought that she set the tone for us there. I mean, she was such a classy lady and her husband, Bob, worked with John up at the Collbran Job Corps. But when I got married, I remember that the different people pitched in and they did the groom's cake, they did the announcements, they wrapped all those little things. I remember Climbers Dairy up here, that they donated the punch and things, and I used to spend a lot of money up there for lunch, and I also, I think they had Sweet Briar's downtown, which I bought a lot of clothes too, and so they just all pitched in and I think my wedding dress and my veil was only \$45 because I'm a bargain shopper and we had the most magnificent wedding and I didn't bring the pictures but the whole audience was filled with people from the Atomic Energy Commission, some from the Bureau of Reclamation, because that's who John worked for, and then the Lucid Picking, I knew some of the people over there and it was all the group and we all came together the only thing I can remember about, the guys were really mad that I had it on November the first, because they said "Why did you have to have it on the first day of hunting season?" I thought, *oh I'm so sorry, I don't keep up with hunting season*. But that was the only thing, but they sacrificed, and they did come to the wedding and so it was it was really nice, and I'll forever remember the Atomic Energy Commission. This is where I met my husband, I married my husband, we had two beautiful daughters, very successful daughters, and recently, 2016, I lost him. We were married 47 years. This is where everything started. I mean, I was in Denver, but I came here to this little town and this is where everything happened for me, so I never forgot it. Then he naturally had a career in civil service so we moved with Job Corps programs all over the country and so each time we moved, then I would try to get into the community. I went to other colleges when I moved, I did other things just to try to get along to meet people to be in the community to be a part of the community and then of course, when you have children you have no choice, you are in the schools the system and so that was pretty much it. There's a lot little things that probably wouldn't be of interest to anybody else, but I remember one time, we were going out to lunch and Betty and I have corresponded all these years, we just never stopped and also up until Fred Facer died, he sent my family Christmas cards every year and it was like we couldn't start Christmas until we got his card and so when he passed away, we were all very distraught, we were sad to hear that had happened but I remember Betty and we were in a car and Maxine, there was Yvonne, Maxine, and Betty and I went out for lunch and we were in a car and she let Yvonne get out first and left Betty back there in the backseat and I told Betty, "You get up here in the front seat," and she said, "Well, why?" and I said, "I'm not driving Miss Daisy," and she just said... well did you know the movie?

AP: I've heard of it.

JY: Well anyway, "I'm not driving Miss Daisy," I said. "You get up here in the front seat," and so we always chuckled about that you know, but we had a lot of fun and we just were a family you know.

AP: That's what it sounds like from the start when you came to Grand Junction, welcoming and just throughout it sounds like you guys were very close.

JY: Very close, very close, and later on there were other people that came to the Atomic Energy Commission, African American and they were, I have to mention, Janice Moore, Roberta... I believe her Neptune something like that. I'm sorry I shouldn't have said that, and then I believe Barbara Anderson, she's still here I understand and lives in Fruita, but there were others that came after I did. Okay, I don't want to bore you guys, you know what I mean. That was it. There's a lot of things that may be a little risqué, X-rated, so everything wasn't always you know peaches and cream, but as far as working with a group of people that I didn't know because I didn't know whether I come here, whether it was going to be them against me or, you know what I mean, but it wasn't that way at all, you know there were some people that probably had some ideas, Honey Child said that they had taken a little training on how to treat, you know, diversity and how to treat people and she turned out to be one of my best friends. I mean she was amazing. I have a book that she gave me, and I think I told you, its 72 years old now but it was a secretarial handbook and she wanted me to have, and it said, "To Jackie, who I raised," So, she was just that close, so she was a very, very nice person and so was Aretha. Aretha I remember, we were so close that her son was out on the dating scene and we were looking to find, she wanted to really find a nice girl for her son and of course you know me, I was young then, I was back in clubs and I was at the one club that we had here but were doing the clubbing and I would run into her son from time to time and she did not really care for the girl that he was dating but I thought, you know well, she's okay, he's a grown man, he dates who he wants but you know how parents are, nobody's ever good enough for their only son, and so anyway, it was that was really something we all worked through that, and I think it turned out okay, and we did that. There was a lawyer that had come to work for the Atomic Energy Commission, and I lost my mother. We moved here in '58 into Wiggins, Colorado, and in '59 on Columbus Day, I lost my mother and so we were moved to Denver, that's how we got to Denver and we had a court appointed guardian, so there was my mother and I had three sisters and so the older sister married, but the two younger sisters and myself were there and we were wards of the court and so after the death of mom, well then we moved to Denver and after I was there a while I went to Annunciation High School, Catholic school, and I graduated and then worked for a while and then moved here to Grand Junction for this job. When I got here, I found out the two sisters that I had left in Denver, Colorado, were not getting the supervision that I thought they needed and so I talked to the lawyer and since I was only 21, I didn't think they would give me custody and so anyway, he helped me and wrote letters and helped me to get... I got my two sisters over here and then of course, I had to find an apartment and a place to live for all of us and I did, and they started going to school. They graduated from Grand Junction High, and they also attended college, Mesa College, and so the one sister is, my baby sister had passed away and then the other sister is still here, and you couldn't get her to move out here, she's still here, but you should have heard her kicking and screaming when I said you're moving to Grand Junction whether

you like it or not and they did, and so their life is here too. I've got nieces and nephews and great nieces and nephews and all that so yeah, we have quite a family here now.

AP: So, Grand Junction was, you could say, a big part of your life?

JY: Oh, most definitely. It saved my life probably, I don't know what I would have done if I stayed in Denver. You know, I really don't know what I would have done. I thought about going in the military, but I was discouraged about that, so I really didn't know and then I didn't know about student loans and all that kind of stuff, and you know I just didn't prepare for that and so, you know, when you're by yourself you don't really have people advising you as to what the best path of your life is so you just kind of have to feel your way and so when I came to Grand Junction, when Hazel asked me at the interview, "would you be willing to relocate to Grand Junction and take a job there?" I said I would go to China if there was a job and so I let her know that it was fine with me to go and still be in the state of Colorado, that was fine with me, and the rest is history.