Joanne Gailar 2005 NETS, LLC

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K-25 Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Joanne Gailar

Interviewer: Bart Callan

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**[1:00:12]**

Callan, B.: Easy question to start out with. Go ahead and say your name and spell your name for me as you would like to have it spelled out and preserved. From this point on with this particular recording. Who's beeping?

Gailar, J.: Not my name!

Callan, B.: (laughing) [crew talk]

Gailar, J.: My name is Joanne Gailar. J-0-A-N-N-E G-A-I-L-A-R.

Callan, B.: And if you want to give us your date of birth and how old you are.

Gailar, J.: Well, I'm 80 years old. I was born on January 30th, 1925.

Callan, B.: Where were you born at and please expand upon that if you'd like to.

Gailar, J.: All right. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and I was a fifth-generation New Orleanean. And lived in New Orleans until I was 20 years old, when I first came to live in Oak Ridge.

**[1:01:25]**

Callan, B.: Well, again, you were obviously living in New Orleans prior to coming to K-25 and Oak Ridge. What kind of work did you do prior to working at K-25?

Gailar, J.: Well, I was only 20 years old and the only jobs I had in the past; I worked in a settlement house in New Orleans, Kingsley House. And that's the only job I held. That was a summer job where I worked with 7 and 8-year-olds in a settlement house in New Orleans, in the Irish district of town.

Callan, B.: Where did you attend high school at and what year did you graduate?

Gailar, J.: I went to high school in a private school, Isidore Newman School, college preparatory school, and then I went to Newcombe College, and I was at Newcombe for three years, got married, came back for half a year, and then came back to Oak Ridge to join my husband and didn't really finish school until 1965 when I got my Bachelor's degree.

**[1:02:17]**

Callan, B.: So you attended a college, a university. What degrees did you get?

Gailar, J.: When I went to Newcombe, I majored in Psychology and minored in Sociology, but when I went to the University of Tennessee since I had to have a 45-hour resident requirement, I switched my majors -- major -- to a subject that interested me a lot more, English. So I majored in Literature, English Literature; got a Bachelor's degree in English.

Callan, B.: Just a few questions about family life. Do you want to discuss any aspects about family life at Oak Ridge, what that was like?

Gailar, J.: Family life in Oak Ridge? Well, when I came to Oak Ridge, I worked and I did not live on the area to start with because my husband was a G.I. in the Special Engineering Detachment. He was a chemical engineer, my childhood sweetheart, had graduated from Tulane University, and came to Oak Ridge to work at the K-25 plant, and this was after he had worked at -- on the Manhattan Project at Columbia University.

**[1:03:21]**

Family life in Oak Ridge? It wasn't until I lived at Oak Ridge that I really became familiar with family life 'cause when I worked at K-25, we had to live off the area, as they called it then. We lived in a tourist court. Today, you'd call it a motel where 17 G.I. couples lived 'cause there was no -- there was no provision for the wives of the members of the Special Engineering Detachment. So we had to find a home as best we could. Some people boarded, rather, rented a room from other couples and the 17 couples that we were, were Cove Lake in -- and we commuted to K-25, those of us who worked at K-25. Some of the women did, too; a long commute. There were no interstates back then, at least not between -- there were interstates, but not between Cove Lake and K-25. It took us almost 2 hours to get to work. But you were saying -- I'm not answering your question about family life. That will come later because of -- we didn't really live in Oak Ridge. We had our own community in Cove Lake.

**[1:04:17]**

Callan, B.: We're going to get into questions right now. We're talking about K-25, so to start that off, tell me, why did you come to work at K-25? What attracted you to come? How had you heard about it?

Gailar, J.: Well, I needed the money. (laughing) My husband was, as I said, was a corporal in the Special Engineering Detachment. I might not've said he

was a corporal -- that's what he was -- and he didn't really make very much money, so we knew ahead of time that I would have to work. So he already -- months before we were married in June '45 -- he had arranged for me to get a clearance at K-25 so that I could work there. So he had already paved the way for me to come work and my clearance had come through. So when I came to work at K-25 -- I guess it was middle of June -- I already had a clearance waiting for me.

**[1:05:03]**

[crew talk]

Callan, B.: What were your first recollections when you arrived here?

Gailar, J.: In Oak Ridge?

Callan, B.: In Oak Ridge and the first time you saw K-25.

Gailar, J.: Well, the first time I came to Oak Ridge, we arrived by bus. And my husband had arranged for me to have a resident's pass -- a pass so I could come to Oak Ridge. Everybody who was 12 years old and older had to have a pass or badge, identification, to be in Oak Ridge. So when we first came, we came by bus and we were stopped, of course, at the gate. We came in Elza Gate and we -- there were armed guards at the gate who came and looked to make sure we had the proper identification, and my first recollection when the bus first pulled out of the -- away from the gate -- was the cloud of dust we were in. There was dust everywhere. We breathed in the dust and I didn't pay much attention to it then, but later, maybe a month later, I got a terrible cough that lasted just about all summer, and when I saw the doctor, he said, "Oh, honey, you just have the Oak Ridge croup." So dust was a common problem it was everywhere. It was such a raw new town, there was mud and dust, and when it rained, the dust turned into mud and it got on your shoes and the people in Knoxville were complaining -- the stores -- of Oak Ridgers who would drag the mud from Oak Ridge into their department stores. Mud and dust. That was part of the outlets.

**[1:06:25]**

Other things I noticed were the bus terminal. The bus terminal was very crowded. It was -- I don't know -- was the third or fourth largest bus

terminal in the country, and there were buses coming in and out all the time and long lines. There were lines for everything. You stood in line to get a bus; you stood in line at the grocery store to get meat; you stood in line to go to the movies; you even stood -- well, sat -- in line to get medical attention in Oak Ridge. When I had that croup, (laughing) and I went to see the doctor, and you didn't see the doctor of your choice. You might go three times and see three different doctors. They were all Army people. So the lines were another thing.

**[1:07:02]**

And something that was very strange were the trucks that were carrying houses, flat-tops and other pre-fabs, to their destination. You saw trucks with houses on 'em around town, and that was very peculiar, too. And the signs, of course; there were security signs to keep your mouth shut about project information. I don't remember most of them, but one I do remember was: "What you see here, what you do here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here."

So those were some of my first memories of coming into Oak Ridge.

Callan, B.: And they had these signs just kind of all over the place?

**[1:07:40]**

Gailar, J.: Everywhere. They had them on the buses; they had them in the recreation halls -- they had recreation halls in Oak Ridge where they held dances on Saturday night -- just about anywhere you went, was some sign telling you to -- not to talk about what you saw.

Callan, B.: What years did you work at the K-25 site?

Gailar, J.: Well, I worked at K-25 then, only 3 months, and that was in the summer. I'm going to sneeze, sorry.

Callan, B.: And then after that, did you transfer to some of the different facilities or?

[crew talk]

Gailar, J.: We'll begin with that. You can ask me that again.

Callan, B.: What years did you work at the K-25 site?

**[1:08:29]**

Gailar, J.: Well, I worked at K-25 when I first got here in June, and I worked from June until September when I went back to New Orleans briefly for a half a year school before I came to live at Oak Ridge permanently. And I will talk -- I'd like to talk about K-25 because that was very interesting, those three months, the whole process, but I did return to K-25 later on in 1974 -- 197- -- I guess 1976 when I became the Affirmative Action Coordinator for all four installations. I would go back to K-25 then.

Callan, B.: You've talked a little bit about it, but tell me a little bit more about how did you commute to and from work and what that was like. Did everybody travel by car --

Gailar, J.: Oh, no!

Callan, B.: -- by bus?

Gailar, J.: The cars -- gas was rationed. This was wartime; gas was rationed; shoes were rationed, sugar was rationed; meat was rationed. And there were signs around: "Is this trip really necessary?" when it came to driving automobiles because of gasoline. We rode on a rickety bus from Cove Lake to the K-25 plant, and as I said, took a couple of hours to get there and a couple of hours to get back.

**[1:09:36]**

And we worked 6 days a week, a 48-hour week, very tiring. We didn't -- we got up at 5:30 in the morning, got ready to go to work about 6, didn't get home until about 6:30 in the afternoon, and then on Sunday, well, we had a -- I had to make sure the clothes were clean and the room was straight, and do household chores.

Callan, B.: If people inquire today about the work that was done here, how would you describe that work?

Gailar, J.: The work that I -- what work? I be --.

Callan, B.: The work that was done at K-25.

Gailar, J.: Oh!

Callan, B.: How would you describe it now? Some would say, "Well, what did you do?" Or, "What did he do at K-25?"

**[1:10:12]**

Gailar, J.: Well, it became the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant. But it was only known then as K-25 because the fact there was a gaseous diffusion process was not -- was not known at that time. And I had a very low-level job. I was a third-class clerk, and that was about as low as you could get. But I was very grateful to have a job because I was employed, and working there, I'd like to talk about that if I may, about my experience at K-25.

Callan, B.: Go ahead.

Gailar, J.: Well, the whole thing was weird. I felt like Alice in Wonderland from the beginning of it. During the -- I thought when I went to work, I would be given a desk and assigned to a job. No way. They asked all kind of questions, questions that amazed me such as: "Do you get drunk often? Seldom? Or never?" "If your husband, father, or brother revealed anything about what he was doing at work, would you tell anybody?" "Would you ever belong to an organization that wished to overthrow the government?"

**[1:11:15]**

Those were some of the questions we were asked. They didn't ask us if we would tell on our mother or sister or daughter because women didn't have very significant jobs out there at the time. So that was the first step in getting hired. And then, from there on, it got even stranger. While our picture was taken, we were fingerprinted. Not just our thumb, but every finger on both hands was fingerprinted. And we were asked then to wash our hands and come back and get our picture taken and come back in a few days to get our permanent badge. But from then on, we were a number, more or less, and -- rather than a person.

From there, we went to an auditorium. There were about 50 of us hiring in. They were still employing a lot of people at K-25, and we went to an auditorium where we were shown a movie about the sadistic nature of our enemy, how our enemy would stop at nothing to defeat us. And after that, a man came in and -- I don't know, must've been FBI or CIA, I don't know what security agency he was from -- but he told us to be very careful, very guarded about what we said about project information. But

he wasn't just outright about it, not forthright. He said there was Mabel or Jane or somebody and she wrote home about a piece of machinery she saw at the plant. Oh, what's going to happen to her? And then there was Jack whose wife played bridge and she repeated some information at the bridge game. And then there was Mabel -- all these people seem to be women (laughing) -- who mentioned the number of dormitories she saw. Even the number of dormitories was kept quiet; nobody wanted to know about -- they didn't want anybody to know about the number of buildings or the number of people that worked at Oak Ridge.

**[1:13:07]**

And after we had the man who frightened us with the kind of -- the-goblin's-gonna-get-you-if-you-don't-watch-out sort of talk -- he read the Espionage Act and we were all quite chastened and serious when the next man came in. And that was the company man, the man from Union Carbide Chemical Corporation. We each had a little pamphlet we were given about Union Carbide, what it made all over the country -- except in Oak Ridge -- the number of people it employed, and about the plans it had. Plan when -- plans when you were sick, health plans when you were sick, retirement plans when you were old, savings plans so you wouldn't be broke, and the man told us if we were asked what we made in Oak Ridge -- after telling us what they made everywhere else -- he said to tell them that you're making the lights for lightning bugs or the holes for doughnuts. That's what he told us to say if anybody inquired about what we were making.

**[1:14:01]**

Well, the last part of the hiring in process was probably the strangest of all. The women were told to go into the smaller room where we would have a personal, confidential talk with Miss Ransom. And I described her -- when I wrote about this two years later -- mind you, I wrote about it two years later, then I was 22 and I wrote that Miss Ransom was a well-preserved, peroxided blonde between 45 and 50. That's what she seemed to a 20-year-old.

**[1:14:36]**

She gave each of us a pamphlet titled "Between Us Girls and the Gatepost". And she read every word of that pamphlet to us. Three things that I especially remembered when I wrote about this a couple years later were these: that women should be well groomed (that meant covered, no

midriffs, no short skirts, certainly no shorts), industrious on the job, not take too much time away to get beautified, and not to take advantage of those difficult days that women have, and finally, to have the proper decorum (not to flirt with the men and distract them from their very important jobs).

Well, at this time, 1945, essentially, women just were able to have such professional jobs as nursing and teaching, but even for the times, what she said, I thought, was a bit much. Now the guys, the fellas, our husbands, they sure got a big kick out of "Between Us Girls and the Gatepost". That made for a lot of laughter.

After that, I went to work. I was -- finally I was assigned to an office with a desk, at last.

**[1:15:44]**

Callan, B.: Do you need a drink of water?

Gailar, J.: No. I'm okay.

Callan, B.: You gave me a lot of vivid relations about the time before you became 25, but what did you like most about working there?

Gailar, J.: Nothing, really. I didn't like much about working. I'll tell you, oh, I liked riding a bicycle, but K-25 was a bizarre place! The building was one -- was a U-shaped building as I'm sure other people have said, 1 ¼ mile from one end of the U to the other. It was hot; no air conditioning in the building.

The sights were strange. From one end to the other, there were groups of women working around pipes and where there were panel boards. Three to five women around each panel board and the pipes got narrower and narrower as they went from one end of the building to the other. And we -- the way we got around at K-25, we got around on bicycles. Each office had its own bike in front of it and they were all women's bikes. I don't know whether the army, the government, got a good deal on women's bikes so they thought, "Well, everybody can ride a woman's bike," but we had a bicycle. And that, to me, was what I especially liked, riding a bicycle.

**[1:16:58]**

I had a very menial job; I folded papers and I filed documents and I typed. I typed meaningless data; much of it was classified secret, but it was all coded and I didn't understand anything I was typing. It was very hard to type. And I would love being the errand girl. If there was anything to be delivered, I would always volunteer to deliver it, and they'd let me go. That was fine. I could go deliver stuff. And occasionally, I'd ride by to see my husband and he was usually busy. But I'd ride the bike a little while. You'd take the bike and you'd take it into the bicycle lane. You'd walk it to the lane that was around the periphery of the building and then you'd ride it. And I remember one time; I saw this man that my husband said was a wheel. That was his word - a big shot. And he had an old -- you wouldn't know he was a big shot -- he had an old felt hat that he wore. And I was on my bike and he was coming toward me on his and he tipped his hat and he said, "Good morning, Mrs. Levy." Well, I really felt like Alice in Wonderland. I thought, "What would my momma and daddy say if they could see me now?" It was so peculiar!

**[1:18:00]**

And there were other odd sights, too. Every once in a while, you'd see a -- an obstruction around a place in the floor where the cement had given way; it was crumbling and they didn't want anybody to walk there or trip. And that was another strange sight.

I might add one thing about the women working around the -- on the panels -- around the pipes. They didn't all listen to Mrs. Ransom. I saw midriffs. I saw some clothes that were not really what you'd call appropriate, and believe me, they flirted with the guys. There was no way she could stop that. (laughing)

Callan, B.: What were some of your biggest dislikes about working there? And you mentioned it was hot.

**[1:18:44]**

Gailar, J.: It was hot. I know it was very hot, uncomfortable. The days seemed long. There wasn't a great deal to like about working at K-25. It was a job, I got the money, but it was not interesting at all.

Callan, B.: Have you stayed in touch with the people you worked with at K-25? After working there?

Gailar, J.: Well, not very many of them. One of the men that I worked with, Ted Shapiro, is still in Oak Ridge. His wife started the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. It was instrumental in being -- making it what it is today. But not the other man, no others in my group. I don't know what happened to most of them. A lot of people left Oak Ridge when the war was over.

I know my most memorable day. I was at my desk the day that the -- atom bomb was detonated over Hiroshima. And that day was memorable. It stands out from, naturally, all the other days. And for once, all work stopped. There was a feeling in the office, as you might imagine, of exhilaration and excitement and celebration, and people were just very proud of it.

**[1:19:53]**

But also, a lot of them had felt quite serious about it, too. I remember one man came by and he said, "Well, now the genie is out of the bottle." The implication being how are we gonna get it back in? And my reaction, since I was just 20 years old, I felt a lot of the awe, pride, fear, and my first thought, really, was the war was gonna be over. Now I can go home.

We didn't go home (laughing), but that what's it -- that's what I thought at the time.

Callan, B.: Let's talk about the working conditions and work environment a little bit. And you mentioned that they had some screening questions and whatnot before you came to work at the facility, sort of background checks being completed. Were you aware of the background checks being conducted prior to your coming to work?

**[1:20:51]**

Gailar, J.: No. I don't know whom they asked. I know when my brother came to work a few years later at Fairchild, NEPA [(Nuclear Energy Propulsion for Aircraft)], where they had nuclear energy for the propulsive aircraft, he told me that a schoolteacher -- in Newman School where we had both gone to school, our high school -- one of the teachers was -- had a man from the FBI interrupt her while she was teaching class to ask about my brother, Henry Stern. And she was amazed. She wondered, "What was Henry doing that they interrupt my class to ask me questions about him?"

But I don't know anything about the checks they made on me. Nobody said anything to me.

Callan, B.: How did people communicate, the fellow workers in the secret facility? What was the communication like between people?

Gailar, J.: It was pleasant. It was pleasant.

Callan, B.: Were you allowed to discuss classified information --

Gailar, J.: No.

**[1:21:41]**

Callan, B.: -- amongst each other?

Gailar, J.: No, we didn't -- I didn't hear anybody discussing classified information. I don't think -- sometimes one group didn't know what another group did. I mean, I don't know how much anybody knew and I really didn't know anything. The stuff that I worked on was all in code and didn't mean anything to me.

Callan, B.: And how did people, as well as yourself, communicate to family and friends?

Gailar, J.: Well, we could write letters home. We just couldn't describe anything about Oak Ridge that would give any inkling of the size or the scope of Oak Ridge. But we could write regular letters. And when we did -- and we could phone our families, too.

Callan, B.: You mentioned the physical working conditions, I think, quite a bit. Is there anything else we need to talk about there? You said it was very hot.

Gailar, J.: K-25? No.

**[1:22:23]**

Callan, B.: Yes.

Gailar, J.: It was -- I guess that's really about it for K-25.

Callan, B.: Okay. You mentioned some of the rules that they gave you. Were there other kind of strange rules and stuff that were important to follow when you were working there?

Gailar, J.: I can't think of any other than not discussing -- well, that was really drummed into us, so nobody said anything, you know, when they got off -- when they got off work; they didn't talk about anything at all that was classified. That was no problems in that area at all that I can see.

Oh, I will say something I think is very interesting. One day -- we rode the bus, as I told you, from Caryville to K-25 -- and one day, the Knoxville Journal had an article in it and my husband -- we would read the Knoxville Journal on the way to work -- and my husband didn't say anything, but when we got back home into our room at Cove Lake, he shut the door and pointed to the article. And the article was mentioning the possibility someday of making an atom bomb. And that was in the Knoxville Journal.

**[1:23:21]**

Callan, B.: And that was before?

Gailar, J.: That was before it was known. It was before the bomb was exploded over Hiroshima. I might say, I did know what they were making. I mean, what they were trying to do. My husband had told me, but I was so afraid about this that even when I wrote about two years later, about my experience at Oak Ridge, I didn't say that I knew. I didn't put it down then and I acted as if I didn't know. But I never told a soul. But I did -- I did know what they were trying to do. But I never -- he knew I wouldn't tell anybody and I didn't. But he knew when he got here. (laughing)

I'll say something else kind of interesting. When I was -- I think this was interesting -- when I was married, I picked out green Essex china as my china, by Lenox and they told me I couldn't get the green Essex because the green was being used -- had uranium in it and the uranium in the green was being used in the war effort; which, in retrospect, seemed very strange to me that -- that they told me something like that. I never did get green Essex; I got red Essex. I remember when the green got back into the Essex. And I thought that was interesting.

**[1:24:24]**

Callan, B.: That is! (laughing) What was your supervisor and your co-workers like? Did everyone pull their weight?

Gailar, J.: Yes. Everybody was friendly. It was a nice gang of people.

Callan, B.: Obviously, everybody ate on site.

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: There was a cafeteria you mentioned. What was the environment like in the cafeteria?

Gailar, J.: It was pleasant. Course, there were guards all over. They had security guards when you got on the bus to ride to the cafeteria. They looked at your badge. When you got into the cafeteria, they looked at your badge. Your badge was checked again and again and again. The food was pretty good. In fact, my husband and I had our main meal in the cafeteria at lunchtime because nobody felt much like fixing a big meal when we got home at 6:30 in the evening. Well, we had to get up the next morning at 5:30 and something like that to go to work. So we had our main meal in the cafeteria.

**[1:25:15]**

Callan, B.: Did you normally eat with the same people every day?

Gailar, J.: I don't even remember. I don't -- I think I might -- might've met my husband for lunch some of the time.

Callan, B.: Were there health facilities available to you at Oak Ridge and at K-25?

Gailar, J.: What kind of facilities?

Callan, B.: Health facilities. Health care.

Gailar, J.: Oh! Well, they had dispensary. You didn't feel well, you -- I don't remember having to use the dispensary. I know I did have this cough, but I -- they -- they did have a dispensary if somebody didn't feel well. They had health facilities. In fact, one of the women who lived with us at Cove Lake, one of the G.I. couples, the -- the wife was a nurse (indiscernible) Heath (phonetic sp.). Her husband was one of the engineers and she was a nurse.

**[1:25:55]**

Callan, B.: Were you given a physical prior to starting work at the facility?

Gailar, J.: Yes. I was -- I didn't talk about that, but part of the hiring in process did involve getting a blood test and getting a physical.

Callan, B.: [crew talk]

Gailar, J.: There's really not a lot more to say --.

**[End of Tape, Begin Tape 2]**
**[2:00:14]**

Callan, B.: There's a lot of things that you're saying that I haven't heard before and you have a unique perspective on things.

**[2:00:20]**

[crew talk]

Gailar, J.: The same thing. (laughter)

Callan, B.: -- the same thing over and over again and the kind of things that you say are really, really interesting.

Gailar, J.: Well, I do want to mention -- one reason I remember this had I -- because I wrote about it just two years later and that's why my memories were as fresh that I mentioned --.

Callan, B.: Okay. Mention what you just mentioned again. The way about why you remembered these things so well.

Gailar, J.: Was that -- did I mention that earlier? I don't know that I did.

Callan, B.: I don't think that you did, so let's just do it right now 'cause we're rolling.

Gailar, J.: Oh. Are we? Okay. Okay.

Callan, B.: Yes.

**[2:00:50]**

Gailar, J.: One of the reasons -- but -- that I remember so well the things I told you about the questions we were asked and the points that Miss Ransom tried to get across about how we should behave ourselves -- one reason I remember is because just two years after I experienced all of these things, when I was expecting my first child -- awaiting the birth of my first child -- I was aware that I had witnessed another birth. I had been a witness to the birth of the Atomic Age and I wanted to write all of this down so this child that I was going to be having would know about what it was like to come to Oak Ridge and to -- I -- I titled the first part of this "A Boy, A Girl, A Bomb". That was the first part of this book, when a boy, a girl -- we called people girls and boys back then, we were pretty young to work on the A-bomb -- so that's one reason that my recollections are as clear as they are.

Callan, B.: We're going to get back onto some health questions. There are categories that we're going to go over again.

**[2:01:48]**

Gailar, J.: Health questions? (laughing) Okay.

Callan, B.: So it seems like we're kind of jumping around here, but how much emphasis did the company and your supervisor place on safety? And was your health regularly monitored while you were there at the facility?

Gailar, J.: Not to my knowledge. We had badges. As far as I know, my health was not regularly monitored. I don't remember having to go to Medical or I don't remember. Later on, once in a while -- I know this. When I worked at ORNL, my badge showed some radiation many years later and that was caught because they did monitor badges and mine had radiation. The reason the radiation was in my badge was I had received an X-ray from my family doctor who lived in Knoxville and my badge was in my purse on the other side of the room, but it showed I had -- the radiation -- I had been close to radiation, so that must've been an awful lot of -- I don't know the correct term -- whether radiation scattering or what, but the badge in my purse on the other side of the room showed too much (laughing) of an exposure. That's the only time I was ever aware of anything to do with radiation.

**[2:02:48]**

Callan, B.: That's why those X-ray techs stand behind that concrete wall --

Gailar, J.: (laughing) Yeah. Lead!

Callan, B.: -- (indiscernible) safe and then they get behind this wall. (laughing)

Gailar, J.: Right!

Callan, B.: Were you ever hurt or injured while working at K-25?

Gailar, J.: No. No.

Callan, B.: Let's talk about the Manhattan Project a little bit. Let me just restate this question although you've kind of answered it before. What was your understanding of the function of the K-25 facility during World War II or while you were there?

**[2:03:17]**

Gailar, J.: All I knew was I really didn't understand what was going on. I didn't really -- I didn't know it all. I just knew that overall object of trying to make an atom bomb. And that's all I knew. I knew nothing at all about the process, nothing that was going on. My husband never discussed classified information with me, never. I didn't even know -- had no idea what he did.

Callan, B.: So really, you didn't even know at that point that they were enriching Uranium 235 --

Gailar, J.: No.

Callan, B.: -- anything like that?

Gailar, J.: No. I didn't know that. He didn't tell me that. I did not know they were enriching. No, I didn't know about the separation of isotopes, anything like that until much later when it wasn't a secret anymore. (laughing)

Callan, B.: You kind of answered this before, but let me restate the question again, and that's how did you link what you were doing with what was going on with the war effort, with the current events and the dropping of the atomic bomb on August 6th.

**[2:04:12]**

Gailar, J.: How did I link -- when I was working there?

Callan, B.: Yeah.

Gailar, J.: I didn't. I knew other people were working at other plants because at Cove Lake where I lived with these other G.I. couples, one couple named Lesh (phonetic sp.), they drove their car. They had a car. They were one of the only couples that had a car. They rode their car to X-10. So they worked at X-10. I didn't know about -- really -- if anybody worked at Y-12 or anything about Y-12. Maybe I knew it existed, but I did know there was an X-10 and K-25, and I don't remember having heard about Y-12 back then. I might've, but I don't remember.

Callan, B.: You mentioned that one time when your husband pointed at the newspaper --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

**[2:04:49]**

Callan, B.: -- and it was talking about atomic bombs, did you see other current events going on in the newspaper and did you link them to the work that you were doing?

Gailar, J.: No, nothing. That was the only inkling. No. Nothing. Nothing at all.

Callan, B.: What was your reaction to the August 6, 1945 news and the role of the K-25 facility in the Manhattan Project?

Gailar, J.: Oh, well, as I said, I -- the reaction in the office was one of exhilaration and euphoria, celebration, and all that kind of thing. And my family knew what I was doing. That was something else, too. We got letters from the family all about that. They were really excited to know what Joanne was doing in Oak Ridge. 'Course all I did was clerical work, but they knew why Oak Ridge existed then.

Callan, B.: And so that was kind of cathartic to you in a way that your family --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

**[2:05:35]**

Callan, B.: -- that people actually knew kind of what was going on?

Gailar, J.: Yeah. It made me feel important in my home -- in my hometown (laughing) that I was working, even though my job couldn't have been any more lowly than it was, to know that I was connected in any way at all with this development.

Callan, B.: If you could relive those years in Oak Ridge during the war, would you change anything?

Gailar, J.: I don't know how I could. I wasn't really happy about living in Oak Ridge, well, of course I didn't live in Oak Ridge, but shortly after we came to actually live in Oak Ridge, when my husband was still working at K-25 and then the army -- he worked 10 years at K-25 as I think I said -- he was still in uniform when we moved into Oak Ridge into a victory cottage; still in the army, still working on the project. In fact, he continued to work at the K-25 plant for the next 10 years. And I was very pleased about living in Oak Ridge then. Then, I got a feel for the town itself. And that's when I gradually fell in love with Oak Ridge.

**[2:06:39]**

Callan, B.: How do you think that history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome?

Gailar, J.: It's hard to say. I know that the words haunt me of Richard Revere [Rhodes] who wrote, "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" that "humankind has devised the means of its own destruction."

So that would be one way to view it, but other -- more positive ways to view it, the people -- our country -- there were many lives saved. I know my husband, my present husband -- my first husband died -- my present husband had a first cousin who was in the infantry and he was getting ready to go invade Japan. He was very happy about the lives saved, as many people were. People didn't have to go invade Japan, and some people feel that it even saved lives of the Japanese because so many more people would've been killed -- their lives and our lives -- had we not had an atom bomb. So that's another view.

**[2:07:33]**

Callan, B.: You weren't here for the expansion program period. You'd left the K-25 facility then you'd come back at some point later. Let me just cue you for that now and let's talk about -- you worked out here at Oak Ridge, at

K-25, and you left for a while, and then you came back. Do you want to talk a little bit about different perspectives that you have? Let's talk a little bit about that this time.

Gailar, J.: Yes. I would like to do that. After I worked at K-25 and after I came back and we lived in a victory cottage, which is a story in itself, I can tell you about that, which I will in a little bit, but you wanted to ask about the -- working at Oak Ridge and other perspectives. I didn't go back to -- I had three children and I decided I wanted to go back to school and get my degree when my children were all in school, when my youngest was in the 6th, 7th grade. I wanted to go back to school and get my Bachelor's degree, so I did and that was a good thing I did 'cause I couldn't have gotten another job.

**[2:08:32]**

When my husband died, my first husband, I was only 40 years old and I had to make a living. So I was able to get a job at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and I found it very ironic what I was doing at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. I was a member of the Civil Defense Research Project that had been established by Eugene Wigner, who was a Nobel Prize Winner, and he had started the project and he came still -- Jim Burzee still ran it, but Eugene Wigner came back one week a month to work with us and see how things were going. But the purpose of that project was to devise means of defending our country against the very bomb that I had -- in a very lowly way -- worked on at K-25; how to protect our country against nuclear warfare. And also chemical warfare, biological warfare, and it amazes me to this day that the variety of things that we were working on. In fact, I just wonder if there's a group somewhere working secretly on those same things, today. I don't know, of course, but one of the men in our group then -- and none of this that I'm telling you was classified, what he was working on, I mean, now it isn't -- was working on biological warfare agents. What to do to protect us against poisonous gases and biological warfare agents such as anthrax, smallpox, (sound familiar?) botulism (which didn't), Equine encephalitis, which I don't even hear about today. But these were some of the things -- how will we protect ourselves against it?

**[2:10:06]**

And we had a physicist working on bla -- underground blast shelters with something called baffles that were structures from the ceiling of the underground shelters that would attenuate -- lessen -- the shockwaves

from a blast. We had someone working on that; how to attenuate shockwaves from a blast.

We had a doctor of veterinary medicine who was studying the effects of radiation on farm animals and also how to decontaminate the meat if the animals should be irradiated. And I guess one of our most -- one specialist who was probably the most specialized of specialists was, I think, an apeist? Apiology? Whatever. It was bees. He studied bees. And whether they were -- how subject they were to radiation. They were very resistant to radiation, but he was doing this because bees were important to pollenate the fruit trees on the West Coast. That's why he was looking at bees.

**[2:11:04]**

We had a do-it-yourself kind of guy, Cresent Carney (phonetic sp.), who was a brilliant man, and he studied how to quickly erect fallout shelters. And -- things that anybody could do, case of we needed to do something like that; and how to make homemade dosimeters so we could measure radiation. Those are just some of the things that -- some of the different things that people did.

Callan, B.: Just restate exactly what you just said as far as your job. What kind of job did you do at K-25?

Gailar, J.: Well, my job title was just clerical worker -- low-level. I think it was Third-Class Clerk; I don't think there was anything lower than that in the clerical area. (laughing)

**[2:11:51]**

Callan, B.: What do you feel was your most challenging assignment that you had to do while working there?

Gailar, J.: K-25?

Callan, B.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Gailar, J.: Survive. (laughing)

Callan, B.: That's it, huh?

Gailar, J.: Yeah.

Callan, B.: Okay. Is there a significant accomplishment, or what was your most significant accomplishment while you were there?

Gailar, J.: At K-25?

Callan, B.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Gailar, J.: Well, I held a job; I stuck to it; I did it. Even though I had a cough all summer, I came to work every day. I don't think I took any vacation. I guess survival would be it. (laughing)

**[2:12:30]**

Callan, B.: Here. This is one I wanted to ask you. Was there any conflicts that occurred between management, co-workers, and the unions?

Gailar, J.: At K-25?

Callan, B.: Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Gailar, J.: Not that I was aware of at K-25.

Callan, B.: But would that be like the whole K-25 site?

Gailar, J.: I probably would not have been aware of conflicts if they did happen, but I was not aware of any conflicts. As far as I can say, people got along harmoniously.

Callan, B.: Let's talk about women a little bit. Being a woman yourself, you probably have some pretty good perspectives on that. What sorts of roles did women have working at K-25 and how were they treated?

Gailar, J.: Women -- well, the ones that were in most abundance, of course, that I saw, most visible, were the clerical workers in the offices -- all offices seemed to have clerical workers like me and like my -- the secretary of our group, and then the women who were operators, the ones who were around the panels operating the dials and whatnot along the panels.

Now, there was some nurses there. One of the women at Cove Lake -- whose G.I. husband came with her and my husband and me to work -- was in the -- the laboratory. She analyzed samples. So that was more of a technician's job, and the laboratory where she worked was air

conditioned. So she had a more posh, pleasant job than those of us who had to work in that hot U-building.

**[2:13:58]**

Callan, B.: What was it like for you to be a woman working in K-25?

Gailar, J.: It wasn't -- I guess it would be almost like a woman in a clerical job anywhere else in a man's world, you know?

Callan, B.: And you mentioned a little bit about dress code. Did everybody have a dress code to adhere to?

**[2:14:13]**

Gailar, J.: Well, Miss Ransom said not to wear -- that was the only dress code that I knew of. The men did not dress -- they were not very well dressed, as I say; they just wore anything they wanted to. Now, my husband was a G.I. and they had something they wore called "fatigues" when they were at work. They didn't have their uniforms.

But that's another story. There were a lot of G.I.'s out there, people who were in the Special Engineering Detachment as was my husband. Now, since they lived off base, you know, we didn't live -- he didn't live in the barracks -- every third day, he would have to check in, so the bus that we rode, which had a number of G.I.'s on it who worked at Cove Lake and some of the outlying areas like LaFollette, 'sides Caryville, Jacksborough, Clinton, the bus would have to stop by the barracks so all the G.I.'s could go check in and register.

**[2:15:07]**

Now, they were not supposed to wear their fatigues off the area. The fatigues, they could wear at work, but when they left the plant, they were supposed to wear their uniforms. Well, one time my husband didn't have time to put his uniform on and he left with his fatigues on and he was stopped at the gate and taken off by the guards. And I was really worried about him. He didn't get home until the last bus at 9:30 that night. Because I had heard that the punishment for doing things like that was to dig a 6 x 6 hole -- senseless punishment. And it didn't happen. He didn't have to do that, but I was mighty worried and never again did he wear his fatigues off; they were very strict with the G.I.'s, but that wasn't K-25. That was the army. (laughing)

Callan, B.: Was it ever established that people had to dig a 6 x 6 hole, or was that just kind of?

Gailar, J.: It might've been a rumor. (laughing) Well, the guys said that they were occupying Oak Ridge. That's what the Special Engineering Detachment said. The guys at K-25 would say, "Well, we're occupying Oak Ridge and it's a lot nicer to occupy Oak Ridge than it is to be sent overseas." But that was always a threat. If G.I.'s should fight and do anything like that, there was always a threat, well, you might be sent overseas if you do things like that. So they stayed pretty much in line; very few altercations. (laughing)

**[2:16:20]**

Callan, B.: As a woman at K-25, were you treated respectfully by your male co-workers?

Gailar, J.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they (indiscernible). Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Callan, B.: Were you treated any differently?

Gailar, J.: They were very nice. Our whole office had a congenial, friendly -- everybody was first name, you know, first name basis, informal.

Callan, B.: And your social life at work? What was that like?

Gailar, J.: There wasn't really much social life at work. The social -- we were working too hard to have a social life, but they did have things we could do at Oak Ridge. We worked, as I said, 6 days a week, but occasionally, we'd stay in and see a movie, take the last bus to Cove Lake.

And then there were dances at the Recreation Hall, so my husband and I and some other Oak Ridgers would go to these dances. The G.I.'s got in free. But the civilians, the men who were civilians and the women, they had to pay. And when you paid, they would have a rubber stamp that they would put on your wrist: "Paid" for the women and the ones who were not in the service and you'd remain "Paid" for about a week. You couldn't get that stuff of no matter (laughter) how much you washed, so that's what you had to do to have a little recreation at the dances.

Callan, B.: Let's talk a little bit about minorities.

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: We talked a little bit about them out in the living room. Did you have any contact with African-Americans and other minorities?

**[2:17:44]**

Gailar, J.: The only minorities that worked at the plants -- that I was aware of -- were the maids and the -- sometimes -- the janitors. Minorities were not well-treated at Oak Ridge. There were separate facilities; minorities lived in something called "hutments"; they separated the men from the women; and if a woman got pregnant, she was sent off the area in a bus. The treatment was very, very bad. This was the South and the treatment was -- I'd use the word "abominable". Very, very bad. 'Course, that changed.

Callan, B.: Did you see that change evolve during the whole period of time that you lived and worked here?

Gailar, J.: Oh, indeed! Indeed. It was a segregated community for a long time, with Jim Crow laws, but the Oak Ridge schools were one of the first to become integrated. When the Clinton High School had this incident when the bomb was set in the high school because of integration, the Oak Ridge people let one of the schools that wasn't being used -- be used for the people in Clinton, from that high school. And of course, later on, when I became involved in affirmative action, I became first of all the Affirmative Action Coordinator of Oak Ridge National Laboratory and things had changed. There were executive orders that had teeth in them. We were a government installation, as was K-25.

**[2:19:07]**

All four of the installations were called "go-cos", government-owned, company operated. And Union Carbide ran, I guess, all of them when I was connected with the nuclear division. And we had to have an affirmative action plan written every year, with goals and timetables to hire and promote qualified minorities and women into the job openings that were available. And these laws had teeth in them. We had compliance reviews that were conducted at our installations, all of them, K-25, ORNL, every one of them, to make sure that we were complying with these laws, that we were indeed recruiting and hiring and promoting minorities and women. Not that it happened very fast. But yes, it did happen and things changed a great deal.

**[2:19:58]**

Callan, B.: Let's talk a little bit about married life in Oak Ridge and being at K-25 and what was life like for your spouses? Did you have children? I forgot to ask.

Gailar, J.: Not -- not when I worked -- yes, I had three children at Oak Ridge when I lived in Oak Ridge. Life in Oak Ridge was very, very pleasant. There were all kinds of clubs for people; there was women's clubs. You could go to various sections of it, the history section, the book section, the bridge section, the garden session -- section. And I joined the women's club early on when I lived in the victory cottage so there was -- and my husband and I went horseback riding and we hiked, and we made a lot of friends at Oak Ridge.

When we first lived in a victory cottage -- in fact, wherever we lived, our neighbors became our friends. People who came to Oak Ridge, few of us had any relatives here. We depended on one another. And as I mentioned earlier, things were in short supply, you know, things were rationed. And when we lived in the victory cottage, we were always borrowing from one another. And we got to be, as I say, dependent on one another, somebody was sick, somebody else would take care of them and very -- very friendly community. It was also a community at work -- you could make friends easily because we were all new here. It was easy to make friends, good social life, we were friendly with our neighbors, we met people in various clubs and groups, and it was easy to have a lot of friends in Oak Ridge.

**[2:21:25]**

And people helped one another out a great deal. Later on when we went to a cemesto a more permanent type house -- one we could rent -- we were not sure when we moved on, we lived -- and then in the cemesto, our neighborhood had a nursery group. Five mothers right in the neighborhood, had children the same age, pre-school children, would take turns. One each day would have all five children at her house all morning and have supervised play for the children. People banded together. Babysitting clubs and nursery groups and we were friendly with our neighbors. We played bridge with them; we got to know them. Our neighbors became our family in a way.

**[2:22:04]**

Callan, B.: You must've dreaded those days when it was your turn to do the nanny group and have all five kids.

Gailar, J.: (laughing) Well, our mother dreaded where she'd came one day to take care of the kids (laughing) when she -- when I was about to have my third child. She found it very tiring. (laughter)

Callan, B.: A lot of these questions, you already answered, but you showed me some pictures and stuff of the victory houses, but for those that haven't seen your picture, why don't you describe (indiscernible).

Gailar, J.: A victory cottage. Well, that was the first place my husband, Ralph, and I lived in on the area. It was very flimsy; it was a two-family unit and the floor was -- the walls were so thin we could hear the neighbors -- our neighbors were from Virginia, the couple who lived in the other one -- and they were oot and aboot the hoose all day long with their (laughing) Virginian accent.

**[2:22:50]**

And the floors were flimsy. One day when I had on high heels, my heel ran through the floor, so I called the Rowan Anderson people. They were the fix-it people. Anything went wrong in Oak Ridge, no matter what kind of house you lived in, Rowan Anderson guys would come fix it early on. So they came and they put a little tin plate on the floor where my heel had gone through.

Well, in the victory cottage, it was heated by an oil stove, and the oil stove heated the house, heated the water, and you cooked on it. And when you cooked, it didn't cook very well. When you baked, you just put something in and prayed; you couldn't regulate the oven at all. And it was fine in the winter. We moved into our victory cottage in February 1946; was cold, so the victory cottage was nice and warm. Then summer came. And it was hot. So we had to turn off the oil stove so we wouldn't burn up, cook on a hot plate. We couldn't even get a hot plate. We had to get just the unit that fits into a hot plate to boil things in, and we had to take cold showers. Then the windows wouldn't open. So what do you do? You walk several blocks to the -- half a mile to Grove Center 'cause you don't have a telephone -- and you call Rowan Anderson. Then you wait for them to come. Two men came and they opened the windows for me. They were under the wooden pegs; hard to open. They had a hard time, but they opened them.

**[2:24:07]**

Okay. Fine. It was cooler. Week later, it starts to rain. So what do you do? You go back to Grove Center, you call Rowan Anderson, they come back -- I happened to get the same two men. They said -- this is the truth --, "Lady, make up your mind. You want these windows open or closed?" Fine choice. (laughing)

So it was primitive. The icebox, too. I didn't know about iceboxes. When I was 5 years old, we got a refrigerator. A Frigidaire, we called it when I was a child. So, iceboxes, I didn't know about iceboxes. Well, they don't keep food cold very long. One day, they had a bargain, they had lamb chops, actually, at the grocery store and I bought enough for three nights and they spoiled. You were also dependent on the ice man to come. You had to put a sign out whether you wanted 20 pounds or 40 pounds and you put that in front of your house with the -- whichever you wanted, sign up so they could see and the ice man would come and put the ice in the icebox. But you had to be home.

**[2:24:59]**

And then the oil man would come fill the oil stove several times a week and you needed to be -- I don't remember whether you needed to be home for that, but you did need to be home for the ice man unless a neighbor would take care of it for you, but they often did.

So those were very primitive dwellings.

Callan, B.: So were you lacking electricity altogether?

**[2:25:15]**

Gailar, J.: Oh, no. We had lights. We had lights.

Callan, B.: I guess it had to do with trying to conserve electricity in the area 'cause you're 5 years old and you had a refrigerator --

Gailar, J.: Well, that's when I was a child. Yeah.

Callan, B.: -- then you get to be 20 years old and you have to go back to an icebox.

Gailar, J.: I don't really know why it was so primitive. Telephones -- only the people who were the big shots had telephones. We had no telephones. And when we got to live in a flat top, we had a poly line. You couldn't get a private line very easily, either. That was another thing.

Callan, B.: What else do we have here? Let's talk a little bit about living at Oak Ridge. You really wanted to get to living at Oak Ridge and you talked a little bit about that. (indiscernible) you wanna talk about and this is like where did you live? What were your living conditions, right? And you talked about the secret city and your experience there. Do you want to talk about how it was fenced and secured, or could you leave Oak Ridge --

**[1:26:17]**

Gailar, J.: Oh, yeah.

Callan, B.: -- and come back? That kind of stuff? (indiscernible)

Gailar, J.: You could leave and return freely. That was no problem. Yeah.

Callan, B.: Okay, let's talk a little bit about that. So, we had this secret city which you were able to leave and come back?

Gailar, J.: Yeah. And we were able to have guests. Before -- well, we were able to have guests before people knew what Oak Ridge -- well, before it was an open city -- before it was an open city, you know. When they still had gates, you could get people to -- could have your family come see you.

**[2:26:40]**

Callan, B.: Were there positive aspects of living in Oak Ridge --

Gailar, J.: Oh, yeah!

Callan, B.: -- (indiscernible) bad conditions?

Gailar, J.: It was a wonderful place to live! I don't know if I told you this an hour earlier, but it was a place where you could -- people in their 20s and 30s could be on the boards of organizations. It was really great! I was on the Board of the -- I was on a Girl Scout council, the board of the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters. All of us! Not just me. I'm not just talking

about myself; we were all being able to be involved in community activities and be heading these things that our parents did when they were in their 50s, 40s, you know, nowhere near their 20s and 30s did things like that. So it was a really wonderful community.

We could make it the kind of town we wanted it to be. We had a symphony orchestra. Our symphony orchestra in Oak Ridge is the longest continuous symphony orchestra in the state of Tennessee and it started out with Oak Ridgers who wanted to get together to play music. Volun -- on a voluntary basis. We had -- early on -- as early as 1946, let's see, '47 when I wrote Oak Ridge and Me, my book, as early as that, we had a playhouse gave wonderful plays all put on by the people who lived here. The same with, I said, the symphony orchestra, all volunteers and a club for any interest you could think of. Hiking clubs, tennis clubs, bridge clubs, book clubs. You name it, they had one.

**[2:28:00]**

It was a cultural community; it was quite cosmopolitan. People came from all over. And I think it was -- I don't think it was -- could've found a better place to live. It was -- it wasn't a snobbish community. The one thing that was hard to do was keep up with the Joneses, not from the standpoint of wealth, but from -- were you doing enough volunteer work? (laughing) People were supposed to be doing good and I think that still is true. People in Oak Ridge are -- spend a lot of time helping other people. The neighborliness prevailed -- that started because we were a town of strangers.

**[1:28:32]**

That whole way of life continued on. I know my husband and I, when our -- my present husband and I lived off the area for a while and our house burned down, we came back to live in Oak Ridge -- we came to a neighborhood where I didn't know anybody. A subdivision; I didn't know anybody, a part of town that didn't even exist when I had lived in Oak Ridge earlier. The neighbors came around; they brought cupcakes; they brought tomatoes.

Callan, B.: Oh. We have one minute left, so.

Gailar, J.: Oh.

Callan, B.: How're you doing? Do you want to take a break real quick 'cause I got a few more questions we need to go cover.

Gailar, J.: Well, if they're just a few, you know, we can finish.

Callan, B.: Yeah, well, okay.

**[End of Tape 2, Begin Tape 3]**
**[3:00:13]**

Callan, B.: [crew talk]

As far as living at Oak Ridge goes, is there anything else special you'd like to discuss regarding life in the secret city, or any other recollections you'd like to share with us?

Gailar, J.: Well, just that I had a complete turnaround in my feeling about Oak Ridge. When I came here, I didn't want to stay here. I wanted to go home with all my heart. No way that I wanted to live in this community. And it wasn't very long before I fell in love with Oak Ridge. And my first husband would say that I'm a one-person Chamber of Commerce for Oak Ridge. It's been a great place to put a life, and I've really enjoyed being here very much.

Now, I never did get to tell you about K-25 when I went back, when I was the Affirmative Action Coordinator. I don't know if you wanted to go into that at all because when I became the Af -- the Affirmative Action Coordinator of all four installations, I did go back regularly to K-25 for meetings. So it became a part of my life again. I don't know if you wanted to....

Callan, B.: Yeah, I was going do to that right now because I got some final --

Gailar, J.: Oh, okay.

Callan, B.: -- perspective wrap-up questions. We need to get to those. So then I have a list of things you wanted me to prompt you about --

Gailar, J.: Okay.

Callan, B.: -- so let's talk about coming back as an Affirmative Action Coordinator and what you would like to share there.

Gailar, J.: Well, I never thought when I left K-25 that I would be going back for any reason, just had no idea that I would go back, certainly not in any kind of professional area. And then, I was the Affirmative Action Coordinator of Oak Ridge National Laboratory in 19 -- February '74, and in December 1976, I became the Affirmative Action Coordinator of all four instillations of the Nuclear Division: Y-12, X-10, K-25, and Pad -- Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. And then when I was a coordinator of all four installations, I went regularly to each of the installations, Paducah, too, and the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant, to hold meetings -- to hold every month, the Affirmative Action Coordinator -- each plant, as I said, each instillation had a coordinator, and that coordinator had an affirmative action organization with an affirmative action representative from each division of that organization, and I as the Affirmative Action Coordinator of all four, would go back to each of these instillations and be there when they had their meetings. And I was also involved in problems that the affirmative action coordinator might not resolve.

**[3:02:32]**

In fact, we had something interesting happen that may or may not be of interest, when there was affirmative action, there was -- a woman came to see me, a black woman. And I mention she was black because she said she was discriminated against and I was Head of Affirmative Action. And she said that K-25 had laid people off -- were laying off operators. And she wasn't complaining about that 'cause she was laid off appropriately because of her seniority and -- but she was not being interviewed at the Y-12 plant, and people with less seniority than she had were getting hired at Y-12, and she didn't think that was at all fair. Well, since I had investigated discrimination cases, the first thing I did was call the affirmative action coordinator at K-25 and asked her -- asked him -- "Is this woman being discriminated against? In any way?" Because she wasn't interviewed at these other plants.

**[2:03:26]**

And he had investigated already. She had already been to see him. I didn't go over anybody's head. In other words, I always asked someone, "Have you talked to your plant coordinator first?" before they came to see me. And he said the reason she wasn't interviewed wasn't that. She didn't go to work. Her attendance was terrible. She had bad attendance. Nobody wanted to work for him; she didn't come to work. So I -- I told her -- I confronted her with that. I said I discovered what the problem is. Is not that you're black that they don't want you. It's 'cause you don't

work. And -- so that's what happened in that case. Was not discrimination at all. (laughing) Sometimes people will discriminate against, but that was not a particular time when it was -- when it happened.

**[3:04:04]**

Callan, B.: Does that cover what you wanted to talk about as far as Affirmative Action Coordinator related stuff? And you wanted me to prompt you -- I wanted to ask you a few questions about your book. You wrote a book, Oak Ridge and Me.

Gailar, J.: Yeah. Okay.

Callan, B.: Tell me a little bit about your book.

Gailar, J.: Well, I wrote the book at three different points in my life. As I mentioned, when I was expecting my first child, I wrote the first part, "A Boy, A Girl, A Bomb" about my early impressions of Oak Ridge, working at the K-25 plant, living at Cove Lake where we shared a refrigerator with 16 other people -- 16 other couples, and life -- the bus ride -- things about living there and working at K-25 plant, the indoc -- the orientation process, and so forth.

**[3:04:52]**

Then, in 1965 when I lost my first husband, I wrote another part of the book. I didn't know I was writing a book, but I wrote something else called "The Solitary and the Ark", what it was like to become a widow in Oak Ridge, how the time -- how the town I had helped to settle 20 years earlier turned around when I was a widow and helped to settle me, how wonderful the neighbors were; how they helped me stay in Oak Ridge; how they did everything they could to make it possible for my -- my family and me to stay here; and how I got a job; what a wonderful community it was then.

And the last part of the book, I wrote in 19 -- I guess, when was it? -- was it? No, it was, I guess 20 years later. It was published in '91, so it was written shortly before that. The last part was called "The View From the Hill", comparing the Oak Ridge that I had come to -- had come to in 1945 with the Oak Ridge that it had become in 1990. The differences between the town.

**[3:05:55]**

And at that time, I described Oak Ridge in the book as mother, sister, and child. My child, from the standpoint that I had helped establish some of the clubs and institutions. My mother, from the standpoint that it's mothering me and taking care of me when my husband died, becoming a very caring, warm community. Let's see, and sister because Oak Ridge and I matured together. We were both young and there were many changes and we -- we came of age sort of at the same time, so. That was one of my comparisons.

Callan, B.: We're now going to go ahead and get to some of my broader perspective questions --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: -- got you warmed up, actually, you've been warmed up for the job. It's been a wonderful interview and I thank you. But these are some of the key questions we like to get from people, you know, sort of get a broader picture, a broader perspective of things. Describe what you think future generations should remember about K-25.

**[3:06:59]**

Gailar, J.: Well, certainly they should remember its part in contributing to the atom bomb because it played a very important part with the separation of isotopes, the gaseous diffusion process. I think that should certainly be something they would remember about K-25. And I guess that's most likely the most important thing -- I'm sure there's other kind of work that was important afterwards. I don't really know all what they did afterwards. (laughing)

Callan, B.: Describe some of the great accomplishments here and what should be acknowledged as far as what was done here.

Gailar, J.: Helping end -- I think probably the greatest was helping to end World War II. They accomplished what they set out to accomplish, and as I'm sure you know, they had duplicate -- well, they had various, not duplicate -- they had different processes going on at the same time. They couldn't wait to see if one worked or the other worked. They were trying different things at different installations. Cyclotron at Y-12 and gaseous diffusion

at different -- at -- at K-25, and all of these were very important toward a final result. So that was certainly one thing to remember. I don't know how else Oak Ridge will be remembered. It's certainly a vibrant community today.

**[3:08:15]**

Callan, B.: Actually, you had written a book (laughing), but if you were writing a story about Oak Ridge and K-25, what topics would you cover in it?

Gailar, J.: Probably (laughing) the ones that I did. What it was like to work there (laughter), what it was like to hire in. What it was like to be there when the first atom bomb was exploded, the feeling of exhilaration, the excitement of being part of the birth of the Atomic Age, although I certainly -- my contribution was -- it would've been going on without me at all (laughing), believe me, but it was being part of something, being there when it happened. And that, to me, was exciting.

**[3:08:49]**

Callan, B.: Okay.

Gailar, J.: Just being present. Being there, you know. (laughing)

Callan, B.: Is there anything else you want to discuss, say, your experience with the bomb, before we end this interview?

Gailar, J.: I don't know. I mentioned -- I think I did, didn't I? -- the speaker -- I sometimes -- some of the things I talked to about you earlier, but I think I did mention Richard Revere [Rhodes] and The Making of the Atomic Bomb. I think I said that in this interview -- did I not? -- about?

Callan, B.: I don't know if it was in here or out -- let's just talk about that one more time, just to make sure you got it on camera 'cause we might've been talking about it out there.

**[3:09:16]**

Gailar, J.: I think -- I know -- I think we talked about it in here, too, but that. Well, something that impressed me was when they made the History Channel and it's Modern Marvels series on the Manhattan Project, that particular

episode. It started out with Richard Revere [Rhodes] who wrote The Making of the Atomic Bomb. And he started out by saying, "Humankind has devised the means of its own destruction." And this was something that I had thought about and I had thought about earlier because after our work at K-25, before my first husband died, I went to UT to get my degree, as I mentioned, to get my degree in English, and we studied Hawthorne. And Hawthorne had stories about his men of science, and he worried very much about some of the things that these men of science were doing. And in one of his stories, Ethan Brown, he mentioned this concern that men's moral sense had not kept up -- was not keeping pace with man's intellectual capabilities. Intellectual capabilities was exceeding its moral sense. And that was something that disturbed me, and then I studied that under Hawthorne and then when Richard Revere [Rhodes] spoke about The Making of the Atomic Bomb and how "humankind has devised the means of its own destruction", I thought of Hawthorne's prescience, his understanding, that just such a -- such a thing might happen. As one of the critics said of Hawthorne, his men of science, "they can feel the adumbration of Los Alamos." Well, I didn't know what "adumbrations" meant. I didn't know what he had meant. I looked it up; it meant foreshadowing. (laughing) You might know, but I didn't. So I think that that's very interesting that -- in American literature, Hawthorne had some of these fears before some of these things happened.

**[3:11:14]**

Callan, B.: It kind of prompts me to ask you another question.

Gailar, J.: Sure!

Callan, B.: I know you're probably anxious to get out of this room (laughing) --

**[3:11:19]**

Gailar, J.: No, I'm glad to answer anything you want me to.

Callan, B.: I was just thinking about the stuff we were talking about --

Gailar, J.: Yeah.

Callan, B.: -- before the interview, and you had talked about how you were familiar with Los Alamos and how, when you see a lot of these documentaries or programs being made, that they seem to really focus on Los Alamos --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: -- and not on Oak Ridge. Well, there was stuff done here that was just as significant. Did you want to talk a little bit about that?

Gailar, J.: Well, I -- I think one reason -- that the focus of Los Alamos has to do with Oppenheimer. He was such a colorful figure and became controversial in some ways, and I think that's one reason that Los Alamos was focused on, and -- I'm not sure of all the other reasons, but certainly in that documentary about the Manhattan Project, much more attention was devoted to Los Alamos than -- than it was to Oak Ridge. I have some friends -- I have a friend in Los Alamos and women there wrote a book, too. They -- 49 women wrote a book, Standing By and Making Do, about what it was like living in Los Alamos, and it was kind of similar to the life that we had in Oak Ridge, lots of children being born, the secrecy, you know. A lot of the same things went on in both places, although Los Alamos was much more secret than Oak Ridge.

**[3:12:36]**

Callan, B.: Who was the famous guy that you met on your bicycle that tipped his hat up?

Gailar, J.: Oh, he wasn't famous. His name was Sam Barnett. My husband said he was a wheel. He wasn't famous. The most famous people -- person that I worked with was Eugene Wigner and he was the Nobel Prize winner who headed our Civil Defense Research Project and Edwin Teller would come down for our information meetings -- Edward Teller, Father of the Hydrogen Bomb; and I knew him. He asked me if I would write for his friend, Louis Strauss. He wanted me to write something for Reader's Digest about the Soviet Civil Defense Program, a level for the Reader's Digest. And Teller asked me to do that. It was never published, but I did write it.

**[3:13:17]**

I didn't mention this, but one of the things I got into when I worked at the Civil Defense Research Project, I became -- much to my amusement -- a Soviet Civil Defense analyst. I watchdog the Soviet Civil Defense

Program and wrote 20 articles on Russian -- Russian Soviet Civil Defense. I got into that really by luck. I don't know if I told you that story or if you even want to hear it.

Callan, B.: No, I think I do and I kind of skipped over some questions --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: -- because I was just looking at the narration, that you worked over at K-25.

Gailar, J.: Yes.

**[3:13:45]**

Callan, B.: It was on my questionnaire. And so I kind of skipped over Cold War-specific recollections, and it sounds like you have some Cold War-specific recollections that you could share with us.

Gailar, J.: Well, I tell you, my life has had a lot of coincidences happen too -- I mean, luck. I started to work at OR -- I didn't mention what I did in that Civil Defense Research Project; I told you what everybody else did -- well, what I did was this: the documents were coming in a mile a minute. We had social scientists. I forgot to mention that. Besides the hard scientists, well, the ones who worked in agriculture, we had some social scientists. In fact, we had Claire Nader, who was Ralph Nader's older sister. And she was working on Civil Defense and cities and she -- the concern that mayors were not interested enough in Civil Defense. And it had very low priority in cities. I mean, mayors had other problems. They had poverty; they had crime; they had sickness. They didn't really make Civil Defense their main objective by any means. So she was in the group.

**[3:14:38]**

Well, the point I was going to make: we were getting documents on all of these subjects, on decontamination of meat, on protecting animals. One of the women we had -- one of the people in our group was a woman who was studying about petroleum. If we had nuclear warfare, how would you get petroleum from one place to another? What would the bottlenecks be? And I mentioned the biological warfare and so forth. Well, this group was getting documents a mile a minute and there was no

way to have a subject index for them, so my job was to devise a subject index to these documents.

And one reason I can tell you all I can now, which I did not write about in my book, is that I had to read -- I had to find keywords to have this keyword index, which I fastened on. At that time, computers were at a primitive state. They had card files, card -- all-look systems, they called them -- so I had to get keywords from either the title, the abstract if they had one, or the introduction.

**[3:15:32]**

And -- and I did this. And some of them did not have abstracts or titles that meant anything. So as a consequence, the Soviet Civil Defense literature -- there were military translations of what the Russians were up to, Soviet Civil Defense military translations -- but since there was nothing that gave me a clue what they were about, I had to read the whole article. Well, I must've read 30, 40 of these articles. They were short, but they said what the Russians were doing. One day, our Nobel Prize winner, Eugene Wigner, was visiting and he held a meeting of the whole staff and he wanted us to be able to say the next day what we would do in case of nuclear attack; on a personal level. Well, I didn't -- the only clue I got from the stuff I was reading was what the Russians were doing. They were educating their teach -- their schoolchildren, learning how to use gas masks. They had hasty shelters the people were building. That's how we happened, eventually, to do that. They had spoke railroads -- Moscow alone had 11 spoke railways leading out of town. People were told to evacuate on those routes, what to store, what to take. Well, that's what I shared with the group. Because I knew that from what the Russians were doing.

**[3:16:36]**

And Eugene Wigner was very impressed with what the Russians were doing. He said, "I want you to write something about that." So I wrote an article on Soviet Civil Defense using the -- all the sources I had, 30, 40 little papers. It was published in the ORNL Lab Review; it was picked up by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists; it was picked up and translated into French and published in Switzerland; and it became something that people were interested in. So as a consequence, Wigner said to me, "I don't -- don't bother anymore with the subject index. We'll find someone else for that. I want you to watchdog the Soviet Civil Defense Program." So that's how I got a new career and even

found myself giving talks at the Institute for Defense Analysis -- a talk (laughing) -- in the Washington area, and to the Civil Defense Regional Meeting that they had in Biloxi, Mississippi, of 7 states, so I found a career for myself just by luck. (laughing) One thing lead to another.

**[3:17:33]**

Callan, B.: Just saying the right thing at the right place --

Gailar, J.: Yes.

Callan, B.: -- at the right time got you.... Fantastic!

Gailar, J.: I was lucky. (laughter)

Callan, B.: Anything else? I mean, Cold War-specific recollections that you remember going on around this area? Some people have other amusing Cold War stories. Is there anything you want to share with us?

Gailar, J.: Can't think of anything off hand.

Callan, B.: Anything else on (indiscernible)? Okay, that's really all the questions that I have.

Gailar, J.: Yeah. I can't think of anything else. I think we covered most of them.

**[3:18:00]**

Callan, B.: Okay.

Gailar, J.: You probably get some of the same things from other people. (laughing)

Callan, B.: No. This interview has really been a pleasure, really enjoyed it. I really thank you for --.

**[End of interview]**