



K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 4/15/05

Interviewee: Virginia Macklin

Interviewer: Jennifer Thonhoff

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[1:01:08]

Thonhoff, J.: Can you state your name and spell it for me, please?

Macklin, V.: Virginia Wohls Macklin, M-A-C-K-L-I-N.

Thonhoff, J.: And where were you born?

Macklin, V.: Nutley, New Jersey.

Thonhoff, J.: And where did you live prior to coming to K-25?

Macklin, V.: In Newark. That wasn't my residence but that's where I was at school.

Thonhoff, J.: Do you want to -- can you give me the progression from when you were born up until --

Macklin, V.: Sure. I left -- I graduated from Oak Ridge High School, went on to a school of nursing at Presbyterian Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, stayed there for three years and after that, I was employed as the assistant to the night supervisor. So I worked nights, and in the daytime I slept and took courses on Monday afternoon at Rutgers University College in Newark where they were starting a school of nursing. I did that toward my BS.

Thonhoff, J.: And did you get your BS?

Macklin, V.: No, because I got called down here.

[1:02:35]

Thonhoff, J.: How did you come to work at K-25?

Macklin, V.: Well, I think the fact that my boyfriend was down here had something to do with it.

Thonhoff, J.: Probably.

Macklin, V.: And he had some friends that were in the military, high up, and said he'd like to get me down here. I think that had something to do with it. The main thing I remember is that when they contacted my school of nursing and they said, "No way. We're not letting her go. We need her up here." And they tried about three times, and the fourth time they said, "The government wants her and

we're going to get her. No matter what, you'll just have to put up with it."

Thonhoff, J.: Deal with it.

Macklin, V.: So that's -- yeah, they said we need nurses and that's it. So that's how I came down.

Thonhoff, J.: What are your first recollections of K-25?

Macklin, V.: It's a very big place, and I remember coming in from Knoxville. That there was a pond with something sticking up, and my first thought was, oh, what the doing is they're, making submarines. [laughs] I thought it was a periscope. Of course, I didn't know that the pond was only 12 feet deep.

[1:04:04]

Thonhoff, J.: What years did you work at K-25?

Macklin, V.: I came April 5, 1945 and left in -- some time in '47 because I was going to have a child and I had gotten married and moved home.

Thonhoff, J.: And how did people communicate with their coworkers at the facility?

Macklin, V.: I think they communicated very well. The only problem that we found was in medical. You weren't ever allowed to say anything. But if somebody came in with a problem and had an accident or something, you had to write it up as it was material on the finger. That was all we could say.

Thonhoff, J.: Was that hard to be very vague?

Macklin, V.: No. You got used to it then, being in nursing. You had to have certain phrases that you could use.

Thonhoff, J.: It was kind of scripted?

Macklin, V.: Well, yeah, and people that were in the medical profession would know. But you couldn't -- some things you just couldn't put down. Other things you had to be very descriptive about.

[1:05:21]

Macklin, Virginia

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Thonhoff, J.: How did you communicate with your friends and family that were not a part of the facility?

Macklin, V.: Mostly by writing letters. There weren't any telephones in houses then. There were just telephones out on the telephone pole, maybe one for every two blocks or something like that.

Thonhoff, J.: And what if somebody asked you what you did, what would you tell them?

Macklin, V.: I said that I worked as a nurse at K-25.

Thonhoff, J.: So what you were doing wasn't so restricted? There were specific things you couldn't talk about but --

Macklin, V.: Right.

Thonhoff, J.: But you could tell them basically what you did?

Macklin, V.: I think so.

Thonhoff, J.: And what rules were important to follow?

[1:06:14]

Macklin, V.: Well, the main was you never mentioned anything except you called it material -- and you put little hyphens, things around it. And you did have to be careful about making sure you got all the little details of each person who came in, and what happened to them and why and what you did about it. If you had any problems. There was a head nurse and there was a Dr. Cameron that had come down here from Philadelphia. He had been working in a brewery company.

Thonhoff, J.: A what?

Macklin, V.: A brewery company. I think he was one of their heads of their medical department. And he turned out to be a very, very fine man down here. And I remember he asked me about my family. And I told him my dad had gone to the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, and his eyes lighted up. And he said, "Oh, that's good." [laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: What were your coworkers like?

Macklin, V.:

One of them in particular I can remember was a middle aged lady and she had never married, but she always talked about her brother that had gone to West Point, and he was a colonel something. Oh, when I get home, I'll have so many stories to tell him.

Most of us were younger.

[1:07:52]

Thonhoff, J.:

Since you worked in the medical field, what kind of facilities were there?

Macklin, V.:

I'd say the facilities were quite good. Some of the -- well, some of the machinery that we would have had in the hospital they didn't have, so they would send you to the Oak Ridge Hospital. I remember for little things like -- I guess four days after I came down, I went on a weekend trip down to Alabama. And we went on the bus. We had friends were down there. And one of the people that was with us, it was her family. And we'd been invited for the weekend. And I got sick on the bus. And so I watched what I ate and when I came back to work, after the weekend, I had the same symptoms. So they decided that I probably had appendicitis.

So they kept in over night. They had a room with four beds and another room with four more beds that was like a little hospital. And the main thing I remember is that they came in the next morning with this huge glass of orange juice. And I had never had but small glasses. And they said, "Now you're supposed to drink that all up." Well I took one taste of it, and I guess I got about that much down. And I said, "I don't think I should drink any more." And so they decided to do a blood test on me. And they said, "Oh, your white count is way up. You're going to the hospital." So I ended up having my appendix taken out.

When I came back I was supposed to have gotten moved into a dormitory in the mean time, I had been staying with a young married couple, that were friends. And the unusual thing about it was that she had a younger sister that was working and she would sleep in the bed at night and then when I came, we'd strip off the sheets, just the bottom sheet and I'd sleep in the bed at night.

[1:10:06]

Thonhoff, J.:

You guys switched off.

Macklin, V.: And I gather that was fairly typical because it was -- housing was at first was you had to be married and you had to have a certain number of children and they had to be of different sexes.

Thonhoff, J.: Can you describe that a little more for me?

Macklin, V.: Well, all the houses were cement houses. And they were -- they all had designations of A, B, C, D, E, and F. And when we first got married, we had to stay in a -- it was a dormitory that they converted into -- they called it apartments. But it wasn't an apartment at all. And I remember we came back from our honeymoon. We had a small room with a double bed, but you had to go trotting down the hall to the bathroom. [laughs] And that wasn't very much fun.

[1:11:04]

Thonhoff, J.: How much emphasis did the company and your supervisor place on safety?

Macklin, V.: I would say they were very honest about making us give reports if we saw something ourselves that we thought was not good. And we had to write the reports out and sign them, the time of day, and all the little details.

Thonhoff, J.: And was your health monitored regularly?

Macklin, V.: I think -- if you were ill, you called in and said you were sick. Then they would want to know the details and things.

Thonhoff, J.: Did you have routine physicals and things like that?

Macklin, V.: I don't recall that, not after the first one, and that was given out at what they called Wheat College.

Thonhoff, J.: Were you ever hurt besides your appendicitis?

[1:12:06]

Macklin, V.: No.

Thonhoff, J.: What type of radiological and chemical monitoring was performed? And were you informed about that?

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Macklin, V.: No. I don't think we were informed about it. But I had a good suspicion because I knew -- my boyfriend had a Ph.D. in chemistry and physics. So -- but we weren't allowed to talk about such things. But I figured there had to be something chemical going on down here.

Thonhoff, J.: And did you know what was going on with the rest of the facility?

Macklin, V.: No, not until -- let's see. I worked in the main medical department for a while and then after a couple of months, I got a raise, which was wonderful because I made more money than I had ever been making back home in my hospital. And I was put in charge of a first aid station down in the -- what they called the conditioning building.

[1:13:07]

Thonhoff, J.: What was the conditioning building?

Macklin, V.: It was a very big building. What they did there exactly I couldn't tell you, but there was a man that worked down there who was a member of our church. So I knew something important was going on because I knew he was a very bright man. And the only other thing I could remember is that there was a machine and they called it Herman, and I don't know what Herman was. But it was a very big machine. And then finally they started calling it -- oh now I can't remember the name of it. But it was like something you had in the kitchen. And that's what they called it. But men still called it Herman between themselves.

Thonhoff, J.: What was your reaction when you found out what the uranium was used for?

Macklin, V.: Well, I thought it was a great technological advance. I wasn't terribly happy with the fact that they went over and used that on Japan. But it was during the war and --

Thonhoff, J.: How do you think history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome?

[1:14:27]

Macklin, V.: I think they'll probably view it as having been a good thing and they certainly learned an awful lot between here and Los Alamos and out in California. And one of the young men that was in the

Army here was one of the soldiers that went out to the island where they first deployed the bomb to see how it would work.

Thonhoff, J.: And did he tell you about that?

Macklin, V.: He didn't speak too much about it till way long after.

Thonhoff, J.: Could you tell me a little bit about what he told you?

Macklin, V.: I don't have too much recollection. My husband would have known that better. We went home to get married. And we were riding on one of the -- well I called them carkey (phonetic sp.). They were Army buses. And we were sitting there and cute young guys and I was looking around. And that was when -- because all the ones that came were college students and there were some really cute ones. And he asked me to marry him on the bus, and I said yes, I will, but I was still looking at all the cute kids.

[1:15:51]

Thonhoff, J.: Absolutely!

Macklin, V.: And I remember one in particular came into the clinic, and he was real tall and very good looking. And he said, "I'm a student at Yale, but they sent me down here." He said, "Would you go out with me?" I said, "I'm sorry. I just got engaged to a fellow that graduated from Yale that just got his Ph.D." And he said, "Oh." [laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: I think I would have liked it there.

Macklin, V.: It was very nice.

Thonhoff, J.: And you weren't there during the cold war era, right, from '48 --

Macklin, V.: No.

Thonhoff, J.: -- on. You were there until '46, correct?

Macklin, V.: That's right.

Thonhoff, J.: You were a nurse. Can you go into a little more detail about that.

Macklin, V.: Sure. I remember one particular incident where a lady came in and said she was supposed to have a heat treatment. And I said,

“Who gave you permission.” She said, “The doctor, two days ago.” So, I looked at her and I said, “I think you need to see that doctor again.” And she said, “Why?” I said, “You’ve got a big rash that was going around her body.” And I said, “You have shingles.” And she said, “Shingles, what are they?” I said, “Well I think we better go see the doctor.” So I sent her to the doctor, and he came back the next day. And he says, “How come you were able to diagnose that?” I said, “Well, I had a good education at my hospital. All lectures were given by doctors and they were specialists.” And I said, “We learned an awful lot,” and we did. So he said, “If you ever decide you want to be a doctor, I’ll give you a good recommendation because you’re a good diagnostician.” And I remember that.

And that gentleman was really part blind and he eventually did get blind. And he was still living in Oak Ridge and that doctor went into psychiatry. He was a very, very nice man. I remember the house he moved in. And I still remember that.

[1:18:16]

But the -- after that, it wasn’t too long before they asked me if I would be the public health nurse for all of K-25. So, that’s what happened. And I had a -- an old Chevrolet, painting khaki color and it said Army on the outside. Or no, excuse me, it was hospital. And I had to drive that -- I had to go down use a walker -- down by bus and I parked the car in the medical parking lot of the hospital. And I had to get into that and I had to bring it out once a week. On the end of Friday, I had to get there between 3 and 5 to have it checked over. They checked the cars over very well and put more gasoline in it to be ready for Monday. And then I had to take it back and park it back in the hospital parking lot in either walker, catch a bus to go home. But that was very interesting.

Thonhoff, J.:

(indiscernible)

Macklin, V.:

But I had some very interesting people that I met when I was doing that sort of thing. I used to get names of people that I had to see for a day and if I heard of anything else of somebody being in the dormitories is mostly where I visited. I was supposed to see what I could do with the report at the end of the day.

And I remember one particular time they told me that somebody had tried to take their life. And they said -- they called me and they said, “Could you go there first?” And I said I will. So I got

her and got her up, got her to the hospital. And what happened after that, I can't tell you.

[1:20:18]

And other times, sometimes when people would stay out for say two or three days and they were usually good workers, they'd say check on this worker. And it didn't take me long to realize that some of these people had been bingeing over the weekend and they were sick. And so I went back and reported, and I said, "Well, when you walk in and you think that somebody's been out sick first thing, we want you to do is open the closet and see if you see piles of beer bottles." And I hated to do that but that was something I had to do. And so I didn't say anything to the person who I had to report back. And if their name -- the sad thing that hurt me was that they were at once terminated the next day. And I thought that was sad.

[1:21:18]

I thought it would have been better if they had a program to help rehabilitate them because a lot of these people came from -- they came as far up as Kentucky and down -- they'd come and leave their families at home. I can see why some of them would get, you know, desperate and turn to alcohol when they were sad and dejected and they -- on other times, when I'd see that person; they would be wonderful people. And I think that's one of the things that I felt they should have done something about. They did do things about it later. They had a good program but not in the early days.

Thonhoff, J.: Not in the early days.

Macklin, V.: No. And let's see. Those are the two that stand out in my mind were people that had been drinking and they lost their jobs and one person that I had tried to commit suicide.

Thonhoff, J.: Are there any other stories that you remember about working and your experiences?

Macklin, V.: I remember that they were very concerned if -- the cafeteria was right across the road -- and they would get concerned if you stayed too long eating. My boyfriend worked in the laboratory. He was in laboratory "B" I think. And so we would usually try to meet, and I caught on to the fact that you had to be back. It wasn't too

long after that I decided that I should become a public health nurse. And I said, "Was that anything to do with the fact that you thought we were taking too long lunches?" She said, "Oh, no, no, no. Dr. Cameron said that they'd had an older lady and he said I think she mentioned my name. And said, "I think that he thinks you're a better nurse at preparation or something."

[1:23:43]

So anyway I enjoyed the job. When I first came down, he said, "How much money were you making?" I said, after I graduated I was working at night, trying to go to college. I was making 22 dollars a week. And so when I came down here, I started at 27.50. And then within about four -- a month or six weeks, I got a raise up to 32 dollars. And boy, I thought I was in seventh heaven.

Thonhoff, J.: What do you think your most challenging assignment was?

Macklin, V.: I think probably we had some people that to me had mental problems. And they would worry about why can't we find out what we're working on. Oh, I go home at night and I worry about whether, you know, it's going to affect me and things like that.

I think the most we could do, would be to just try to calm them down and say, "Well, we're here all the time." Of course, the medical department was opened 24 hours a day.

Thonhoff, J.: And what services did you offer people that had a lot of anxiety?

Macklin, V.: I'd -- I think mostly we tried to just talk to them and if they continued, we had one head nurse. Her name is, well I shouldn't mention names, I don't think. She later on married the doctor from Philadelphia.

Thonhoff, J.: The one who went blind?

Macklin, V.: Beg your pardon?

Thonhoff, J.: The one that was blind, the doctor.

Macklin, V.: No, no, no. That was a different doctor; the one that came from the brewery. He was a very good doctor, I will say that for him, and he was a good administrator too.

Thonhoff, J.: What do you think your most significant accomplishment was?

Macklin, V.: I would say trying to keep the people healthy. We did a lot of taking blood pressures and asking questions and if they had signs of a cold and things like that, we would tell them what to take. There were some medications we could give out, some we couldn't. And then it would be referred to a doctor in town.

[1:26:29]

Thonhoff, J.: Were there any conflicts between the workers and management or nurses and doctors or anything of that nature?

Macklin, V.: I don't recall any.

Thonhoff, J.: How would you describe the management or the doctors in the facility?

Macklin, V.: I found working in the medical facility there was a very pleasant experience, and it was educational. And it was a good mix of people from north and south and west and east. And everybody that I can remember, most of them, you could tell they were well educated and they -- I think they all knew that we were all in this mix together and if people were going to be happy and want to stay, we had to all work together. And everybody was very, very friendly. And we mixed -- they had recreational things and concerts and things and dances in the town. It didn't matter where you came from, you just knew you were an Oak Ridger and that's the way it was. I think it was a very good learning experience.

Thonhoff, J.: And could you describe the community, the friendships that you had in a little more detail, like how that played out?

Macklin, V.: It was laid out. I think they did a very good job. It was Skidmore and Merrill from New York City and the houses were cemesto. But they had small houses. Two bedroom houses were the smallest. And they had apartments. There was one -- some big buildings that had two bedrooms, upstairs, and your kitchen and living quarters were downstairs. And then on each end was a smaller -- and that's what we got when we first got married. We went home to get married, came down, and my husband always called it the chicken coop.

[1:28:44]

And it was difficult for people that came with larger families. I think a lot of it depended upon what your job category was. And people that were craftsmen and things, some of them ended up living in the -- called the -- it wasn't hutments, but it was -- they were in Grove Center. And they had just the round stove to cook on.

Thonhoff, J.: Was it like the victory cottage?

Macklin, V.: Yeah. That's what it was. And we knew one family that had people come in and they gave them a pass eventually. And they came and they had three little children. And they said, "Well, where are we going to put them?" And so because there was only one bed, so, they got some blankets or quilts from somebody and put them down on the floor. And they had to go out to central places for bathrooms and showers and things, if my memory is correct. I know they did in the hutments and that was one of the places I did go and have all the Black people were all put in one end of the town, kind of away from everybody else. And they had -- I guess we called them hutments. They were not nearly as nice as a house. I think it was all one big room, and they had bunk beds. And I think they had maybe 12 women in one of these things. I could be wrong, but it was quite a large number.

[crew talk]

[End of Tape 1, Begin Tape 2]

[2:00:07]

Thonhoff, J.: Can you elaborate a little more on the conditions with the --

Macklin, V.: Well I think the thing that shocked me when I got down to the plant. I'd never seen anything like water fountains for white only, for black only, and bathrooms the same way. And I thought good grief, what have I gotten into?

Thonhoff, J.: How did you think they were treated?

Macklin, V.: I think they were treated well, but the main thing that used to bother us was that they weren't allowed to go in and -- we had a McCrory's Store and they weren't allowed to go in and sit and eat there. They could order something, but they had to take it away. And I remember distinctly that when we had the cafeteria that came up from Atlanta. It was a very nice cafeteria and a lot of

people ate there on Sundays. And some of the -- some of the black people had higher jobs than others, and they wanted to eat in there and they were turned away.

[2:01:57]

So then I don't know -- I think it was started by some women, and then they got some of their husbands and other people in with it and they decided they had to do something about that. They talked to the black people and some of them came a few weeks later and they had taken towels and wrapped around their heads. I can't remember whether there might have been one or two people from - - Asian Indians or something. So that's what they were trying to look like. And they apparently the managers came and apparently gave them permission to go ahead and serve them, this small group. I remember that.

Thonhoff, J.:

Is there any more that you remember about the way minorities were treated?

Macklin, V.:

Well, that group of men and women that was started, I think it might have been started by church women, but I'm not sure. But anyway, things got better. And I can remember when they finally let the kids go to high school in Clinton. There was a big turmoil there because the Baptist minister went up the hill to where the colored folks lived and walked them down and people were shouting at them, throwing things and he I think he got some kind of an injury. But everybody realized then that he was quite a hero because Clinton High School finally got some -- black children go there. From Oak Ridge, they had to ride a bus and go into Knoxville to a black high school in Knoxville. And that was a long trip.

[2:04:15]

Thonhoff, J.:

And being a woman there, how do you feel you were treated?

Macklin, V.:

As a what?

Thonhoff, J.:

Being a woman in the facility.

Macklin, V.:

Oh, I think women were treated very well.

Thonhoff, J.:

And as far as you're concerned, what were the female roles?

Macklin, V.: A lot of the black people were engaged in housekeeping at the plant of K-25, I can remember that. And you know, they'd be sweeping and cleaning bathrooms and things like that. The women would be. The men would be sweeping and things like that. But there were some others that had different jobs from that, probably working conditioning the building and things like that. They still mostly would be doing housekeeping jobs that I recall. But I will say one thing if there was a black patient that came in, we treated them just the same way that we treated anybody else and that was good.

[2:05:25]

Thonhoff, J.: That's different than the rest of the facility then.

Macklin, V.: I can't say too much about how they were treated other than, you know, the experiences that I had, but I know that I saw many of them working in housekeeping and things like that.

Thonhoff, J.: And what was it --

Macklin, V.: I think they must have been allowed to ride the buses, but they more or less sat way in the back.

Thonhoff, J.: So they didn't have separate buses?

Macklin, V.: Not -- I can't recall that now, but that's a long time ago.

Thonhoff, J.: And what was it like to be married and have that kind of relationship with the family?

Macklin, V.: I don't actually think that we knew any black people to have a social relationship with, not till many years later.

Thonhoff, J.: What was it like for you and your husband to be married and start a family?

Macklin, V.: Oh.

Thonhoff, J.: How was that at the facility?

Macklin, V.: That was nice. I guess we finally had two children, a boy and a girl. So we finally got out of our out of our -- that little thing we called a chicken coop and we got a house that was just across the sidewalk from where we'd been living. And we just moved across

the sidewalk to a "B" house, and it had two bedrooms and a big living room with a dinette on the end and a nice kitchen. It was very nice.

Thonhoff, J.: Upgrade.

Macklin, V.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Thonhoff, J.: And how was it dealing with the secrecy? Did that ever create any problems between yourself and your husband or your children?

[2:07:22]

Macklin, V.: No. I think we both knew that we were supposed to keep our mouths shut. And everywhere you went, there were signs that said keep quiet or don't talk about your work and things like that. So there were a lot of things that I would have liked to have asked him but I knew that he wouldn't tell me. And that's what stands out in my mind, that thing when I thought they were -- so, I told him that -- years later, and the just roared. [laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: And what do you think future generations should remember about K-25?

Macklin, V.: I think it was a marvelous, wonderful miracle that they pulled off what tried to do. And I think one of the things that was so good about it was that so many people came from -- many different cultures. By that, I mean, they came from the far west, the middle west, the south, and north. And we all kind of meshed because we had to because we didn't have a family. A lot of us were far away from our families. And so we just all made our own -- well just automatically would invite people to come and let's go on a hike or let's go down and eat the cafeteria and things like that. And you made friends from all over. They were very, very good friends. We have kept up with them all through all these years.

[2:09:13]

Thonhoff, J.: How would you describe the bond between yourself and your friends in the community?

Macklin, V.: I think they were good bonds. I remember there was one of the men that worked out in the lab and he had a large family and they were very friendly. So we went up to their house. They had a D house, which had the most bedrooms. It had three bedrooms and

they had eight children. And they were all very, very attractive, smart kids. You could tell right away. And we were busy talking to the parents, and the children would disappear. And suddenly they came out and said, "We're ready," they whispered to their mother. And they put on a play for us that they made up. And it was neat. They were very smart kids and cute and pretty. They were all girls. They finally had a boy. I remember that. And they were so tickled. I said that boy is gonna be a -- he's gonna be adored for the rest of his life.

Thonhoff, J.: Absolutely, with a family full of women and a dad.

Macklin, V.: They eventually left and went back somewhere way up in New York State. And they lived on a lake. But they would write to us at Christmastime and tell us how the kids were doing. And it was fun to have friends from all over.

Thonhoff, J.: Could you describe the great accomplishments and what you think you should be acknowledged?

Macklin, V.: Well, I think one of the accomplishments was getting the black community and the white community together. And that was started by some church people on both sides. And the way it's ended up now, we go to a big church and in the springtime, we invite the black people to come over to our church for dinner. And they -- oh, they all come all dressed up in their -- they bring their little children and they're so cute. And the women usually wear big hats and things.

And then the next year, they invite us to go over to their church. And we always have a very good time over there. And they have a program, like we have a program prepared for them. And they have a very talented musician that was their choir director. And they'd have sometimes a couple of little children, some of them probably weren't quite even in school yet, and then maybe up to age eight or something like that and they would sing and they were wonderful.

[2:12:07]

And then they'd have the whole adult choir, and those people can just sing and they'd get the place rocking. I thought that was really neat because I grew up in a town where black people were in my homeroom class in some of my classes, but we lived maybe two-and-a-half blocks away, across a broad street from where they

were. And I had some friends in that group. And one of them turned out to be a nun and I always wondered why she wasn't able to come back to our high school reunions. And somebody said, "Oh, she got to be pretty high up." And she had a lot of people her, and she was a busy lady.

And I can remember asking my mother when I was growing up, I said, "Is it all right if I have a black friend?" She said, "Of course" and I thought, "Well good."

Thonhoff, J.: That's wonderful because that was definitely not --

[2:13:11]

Macklin, V.: I know!

Thonhoff, J.: -- the way that it was in that time.

Macklin, V.: And I remember we had -- during the depression we lost our house. We moved out in the country. When we came back, they more or less said, "Well, your brother is going to be put in the last part of the junior high and you can go onto the seventh grade." And I said, "But I didn't do sixth grade yet." And they said, "Well, we got something from your principal that says they're going to put you in seventh grade. So we're going to try you there."

[2:13:54]

So I remember the first day -- this doesn't have anything to do with Oak Ridge, but there was a dramatic club and we had club periods. And so I had no idea where I was going and this little black girl that was my friend said, "Come along with me to the dramatic club." So I went there and then we were told to get by 2s and make a little play. So she and I got together and we had something. Everybody clapped so I thought that's great.

The one other thing that I remember about Oak Ridge was I knew there was a young man down here, I never saw him, he must have worked at one of the other labs or somewhere, buy I knew he was here but there wasn't any -- we didn't have a telephone directory, so I couldn't look him up. Later on, I came back home, and they said, oh, this boy had been home just raving about Oak Ridge. He thought it was wonderful. I said, "Did he tell about the sidewalks and all the mud and everything?" She said, "Well I don't know

about that, but he liked the work he was doing and thought it was a great place.” And I thought it was a great place too.

And then later on, I -- when we had the *Oak Ridger* I read in the paper one day. I said, “I know that boy. He’s from my home town.” But I never saw him. I think once -- I saw him way in the distance in the crowd at a concert or something. And my husband said, “Well you could have told me that. I know him from the other plant, and he’s a very technically and very educated, fine person.”

[2:15:37]

So later on, just a couple of years ago, I read in the paper that he had died. So I went and I said to my husband I’d like to go to Knoxville to that funeral. And we went. Turned out that that lady had come to my hometown when she was 12 years old and had a -- her parents had a bakery and that’s how she met her husband. Her husband had grown up in our home town. He came in and asked her for some cake or cookies or what do you have. And when he came in, she was busy. She had some -- a book because there was nobody else there, and she was reading it and so the next day he came back and wanted more. And she said, “Would you like to see the book I was reading?” And he said, “Yes, I would. I gathered right away that you were an intelligent person.” So that’s how I met her, by seeing it in the newspaper.

So we went, and now she’s one of our best friends. I check on her. She’s quite a bit older than I am. She’s up in her late 80s. So I check on her and we’ve taken her places. She had a son, and I didn’t know she had a son until after I read that in the paper. So I got to meet her son and he looks just like his dad did when he was young. His father had been in one of my brother’s high school classes. So we knew him, and he used to -- the parents had a shop -- a tailor shop and a dry cleaning establishment; it was on the main street in our town. And I knew that’s where John came from, but I didn’t really know until later, when I got to know his little sisters. So they all came to the funeral. It was a big reunion for us.

[2:17:41]

Thonhoff, J.:

Do you still keep in touch with any of the African Americans that you worked with?

Macklin, V.:

I -- let's see. I don't think we ever had anything to do with them outside because I think they were more or less told to stay put in the little grouping that they had. So mostly I would just see them, you know, doing housekeeping things.

A few times I had to go over to the hutments when one that was employed was sick or something. And I remember one time taking one in the car to the doctor. But I don't remember what the incident was any more than that.

Thonhoff, J.:

If you were writing a story about Oak Ridge and K-25, what key topics would you cover?

Macklin, V.:

What?

Thonhoff, J.:

What key topics?

Macklin, V.:

What key topic? I probably would say that I was very pleased to have been a part of the experience of working there because I think that it was wonderful technological feat. But I've often worried about what we did by releasing that to the world. And I think it was on a lot of people's mind. I mean, I loved working and I think we did a -- everybody working together helped make it come true, but since we didn't know exactly what we were doing, why -- and I don't know.

[2:19:46]

Maybe if I had known I might have said I don't want to be a part of this. I still remember -- I remember when I first came that first day and you had to go this Wheat -- they called it Wheat University. I think it was more of an academy for high school, maybe some college. And I remember they wanted to know your background. So I had to say what my grandparents on one side were English, which they were. And they lived -- they were United States citizens. My other grandparents were from Germany, and that's when the war was going on. So I do remember the man saying, "Would you, if there was a problem, would you take a gun and shoot your grandmother?" And I said, "No, I would not." And I said, "Oh, I don't know whether we're going to be able to let you work at this place."

[2:20:48]

And he sent me off to another man. He made me repeat what had happened. And he talked to me quite a bit, and then he said -- he asked me what my grandparents did. I said, "My grandfather is a Methodist minister in Germany, and my grandmother stays home and takes care of the house. They gave their children a very good upbringing from what I can see of my dad." So he said, well, he thought about it a little while and asked me a few more things. I can't remember exactly how the conversation went. And then he took out a big red pencil and he crossed something out and said, accepted with enthusiasm or something. Maybe that shouldn't be put in.

But anyway, he did -- he said, "Certainly we could use you." He asked me what my philosophy was about why I had gone into nursing. And I said, "To help people." And I said, "That's one of the basic things of nursing that you don't do anything to injure somebody that you can possibly -- unless you have to, I mean, sometimes you have to give them a shot that hurts or something." I said, "You want to keep life, rather than destroy it." So that's one of the main things that I remember about that.

[2:22:12]

On the day they announced in the paper and on the radio what happened, I think that was before TV, everybody went down to the Jackson Square and everybody was so excited and enthusiastic. And we all said, "Well finally we know what we were doing." [laughs] I remember that very well. And I think we all, we were pleased, but it was also kind of a solemn moment when you went home to think about -- thought about what had been released on the world.

I remember that my husband and some other scientists were in a group. I can't remember exactly what they called it. And pretty soon, the wives were starting to come out too. And it -- I think it was political but it was also philosophical. And it was good. I think it was called Oak Ridgers for World Government or something, and what they wanted to do was to get all the countries back together instead of fighting, think things out. There are better ways to do things.

Thonhoff, J.:

Absolutely. Are there any more stories or anything that you want to talk about?

Macklin, Virginia

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Macklin, V.:

Well, when we first got our A-1, it was a little -- chicken coop. And there was a little boy and his mother and father that lived in the middle part that had two bedrooms and the was three years old and he was a cute little kid. And he used to come up and say, "Here comes the noise." He says, "Where's the preacher?" And where he ever got that from and every time he'd see us from then on, he'd call us the nurse and the preacher.

[2:24:10]

[laughs] And I don't know where he got it from, I really don't. But we kept up with them. And the father worked at K-25. He was very nice. And the mother, I can't remember -- yes, I do. On the other side, there was a married couple, and they had big dogs and they kept them in a pen. I used to think, "Gee, I wish I could have brought my cocker spaniel down here," but I had to leave him at home. I used to miss him, so I was glad to see those dogs. They never let them out because there were a lot of little children around.

And on the end house, there was a lady that had just gotten married. I don't know how long she'd been married, but she got pregnant and she was going to have a baby. Soon after we moved in -- the southern people were so friendly. She came up and said, "I just made a mess of turnip greens. Would you like to have some? I'd like to have some." I said, "Turnip greens?" I said, "I know spinach and kale and things like that? Turnip greens, I never heard of." I said, "How do you cook them?" She says, "Well you just get a big mess of lard and you put it in the skillet and you cook it up and it's --" she said, "it's wonderful." It's a big thing down in the south. So I said, "Well, I'd be willing to try it for sure." [laughs]

And she brought it up and she was very friendly. And she had a -- she finally had that little boy. Oh, she used to take him everywhere and show him. She was about 40 or 41, and she was so proud of that little boy, and he was cute.

After they moved away, I don't know what happened to them. But I do keep up with the ones, the little boy, the nurse and the preacher. He ended up going to college in North Carolina somewhere and was on a football team and had his name in the paper.

Thonhoff, J.:

How were the turnip greens?

Macklin, Virginia

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Macklin, V.: The turnip greens?

Thonhoff, J.: Yeah.

Macklin, V.: They were okay, but I don't think -- I would have cooked them a different way. I -- that mess of lard, that kind of bothered me, even way back then when people didn't think too much about that. They didn't taste bad. I knew there was a mess of lard in there, and I had been brought up to stay away from lard and use Crisco, you know.

Thonhoff, J.: Are there any more stories that you remember that you'd like to go over?

Macklin, V.: Well one time, I got word from my parents -- when we had lived out in the country. We went to a Presbyterian church, and they said, "The minister's younger daughter is coming down to Oak Ridge." So I didn't know where she was, and I wasn't -- it was hard. You had to ask people in dormitories did they know anybody by such and such a name. And I finally found her. She had gotten engaged to a boy that was from the next home town to ours.

[2:27:34]

So we got tighter and the four of us -- they weren't living on the area. It was a where Cove Lakes State Park is now. They had a restaurant there and they had a few places where people could stay overnight. And so they were living in one of those places. And eventually that whole place got given over to people that were working in Oak Ridge. So they had to commute by bus and so we decided one weekend we would meet them. And we were going to climb -- it was a railroad track that went straight up to the mountain. I can't remember the name of the mountain and there was a mine up there.

So we went up on a Sunday afternoon with this minister's daughter and her boyfriend came down for a visit so there were the four of us and Dick and I, we were already married. It was very nice. And I don't remember whether we -- I guess we must have taken a picnic lunch or something. But we kept on climbing up and climbing up. It was very nice.

And one other thing I remember is I finally got my -- my brother went into the Army and said he would sell me his car. And I said, "Well, I'll just take care of it for you." "No, I'll sell it to you because I don't know how long I'll be gone." So I brought it down to Oak Ridge and parked it. And we finally ended up, instead of going on the bus, we would go in the car. I would pick him up at -- his dormitory was way further out, toward K-25. I think we took the car up and picked them -- picked them up and then we started climbing. Maybe a few other times we took friends that came from Alabama or Georgia that wanted to go home and they would invite us to go home and stay with their families. And that was really -- had quite an experience because they talk so differently, but they were so open and friendly. I really got where I just loved the southern people. It was really nice. And we still keep up with them.

Thonhoff, J.: Anything else that you want to say before we end the interview?

Macklin, V.: No, I can't think of anything except I think it was a wonderful experience for both of us to have had a chance to come to Oak Ridge. And it's been a wonderful town for bringing up children. Our schools are wonderful. I'm just so glad that I had the opportunity. When I went off, my grandmother said, "Remember, this is a great adventure." And I said, "I'll remember that, Grandma." Of course, they had come over to America and their parents told them they couldn't go together to America unless they were married. So they got married and then they came over.
[laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: That's great.

Macklin, V.: So, I'd say that it was a wonderful experience and Oak Ridge has been a wonderful place. And just a few weeks ago we got an invitation. K-25ers have a group that meets, and we meet at a local restaurant and talk about old times and some of the people that we had known --

[End of Interview]