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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 4/12/05

Interviewee: Emily Clouse

Interviewer: Bart Callan

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[0:01:47]

Callan, B.: Okay, we're going to start out with a hard question and that is go ahead and state your name for me and spell your name out as you like to have it preserved on the interview.

Clouse, E.: My name is Emily Deitrich Clouse. C-L-O-U-S-E is my last name.

Callan, B.: Okay. Why don't you tell me where you were born and expand upon it if you want to.

Clouse, E.: I was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, and I lived there for ten years. And then we moved to Nutley, New Jersey. And that's where I graduated high school and then went to college at West Hampton College, University of Richmond, Virginia. I was married in 1948 and my husband came to Tennessee Tech to go to college. And when he finished there, we came to Oak Ridge, Tennessee where he worked as a mechanical engineer.

Callan, B.: Did you do any work prior to coming out to K-25?

Clouse, E.: Did he do any work, no. When he graduated from Tennessee Tech, that was his first job, was at the -- was at Y-12 first.

[0:03:09]

Callan, B.: Why did you two decide to come out to K-25 or to come out to Oak Ridge?

Clouse, E.: He was at Cookville, Tennessee, and he just happened to need a job and, therefore, came the -- there was openings here, and he came and applied and they hired him.

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

Clouse, E.: My first thoughts of this town was very small. I missed sidewalks. I missed being able to walk to the store, but you soon get used to it. It became a very enjoyable town to live in.

Callan, B.: How did you get around, because you didn't have cars or anything? What was that like?

Clouse, E.: At the time we had one car. He carpooled at times so that I would have the car in order to transport children and go to the store.

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Callan, B.: Did you husband ever able to talk about the work he did out here?

Clouse, E.: My husband didn't talk about the work that he did. He was very. He was told it was secret, that he wasn't supposed to talk about it, and he never did.

[0:04:42]

Callan, B.: What was that like for you? Were there any tensions that existed? Was it difficult to not know what it was that your husband did?

Clouse, E.: I didn't feel like it wasn't hard to know. I knew he was an engineer, and more than likely I wouldn't understand what he was doing anyway.

Callan, B.: What are some of your most vivid recollections of the time that you spent out here? You still live out in Oak Ridge, right?

Clouse, E.: We still live in Oak Ridge. I have lived here for 53 years, I guess.

Callan, B.: What are some of your fond memories of the time that you were out here?

Clouse, E.: Going to softball games. They always had a lot of interplay games in softball and basketball. I guess that was a lot of fun that we had back then.

Callan, B.: Everybody that was out here, everybody that you socialized with were also either workers of the K-25 facility or spouses. What did all the wives do when their husbands went to work all day?

Clouse, E.: We took care of children [laughs] was about the extent of it.

[0:06:08]

Callan, B.: Did you guys have other activities together?

Clouse, E.: Not too much, no. Engineers are a rather close group, is what I found out. There wasn't much socializing with us.

Callan, B.: Have you stayed in touch with the people that were former workers?

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Clouse, E.:

No, I haven't.

Callan, B.:

Okay. What kind of health facilities were available?

Clouse, E.:

The health facilities were the hospital and very good doctors, very good hospital.

Callan, B.:

Was the home that you guys have, was it provided to you by K-25 or did you purchase a home out here?

Clouse, E.:

We first lived in an E-1 apartment, which was provided by the company. It was assigned to us. Then we were able to, when we started having a second child, we were able to get into an A house. And that house then was sold to us. We purchased it and eventually -- and within a year sold it and moved to a Title 9 home that was out in the west end -- western end of town. And then eventually we moved out to New Haven Road, where we now -- where I now live.

[0:07:56]

Callan, B.:

How old were you two when you had your first child?

Clouse, E.:

When my first son was born, I was 25. My husband was 26.

Callan, B.:

Were a lot of people having kids? Was it kind of like encouraged to do so because you get a bigger house, or anything like that going on?

Clouse, E.:

I didn't feel like it was; however, we -- needing the larger house, my husband threatened to quit, to leave, because of the housing, because we needed larger housing. Obviously, a one-bedroom apartment wasn't going to be enough for a few children. And by his more or less telling them he needed to leave if he didn't get a larger house, they provided the larger home for him.

Callan, B.:

I'm sorry. What year did you come out here?

Clouse, E.:

1952.

Callan, B.:

1952?

[0:09:15]

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Clouse, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative)

Callan, B.:

Did you know what kind of work was being conducted out there at the facility in 1952 or not really?

Clouse, E.:

As far as work that was being conducted, maybe I had an inkling of it. I wasn't real sure. I had a friend that -- a college friend's husband was working down here when I was in my senior year of college. Not that she really knew what they were doing as far as the bomb, but we all knew it was kind of secretive.

Callan, B.:

What were your thoughts, feelings, or perceptions that you had overall about K-25, being that you weren't really directly working there, but you probably, you know, would hear, like you said, from friends or other people through the grapevine what might be going on? What were your thoughts about what was going on out there at K-25?

Clouse, E.:

I really don't remember what I thought about the work that was being done at K-25 or Y-12.

Callan, B.:

Did you know other women that worked out at K-25?

Clouse, E.:

No, I did not know any other women.

Callan, B.:

What about minorities? Did you know any minorities that worked at K-25 or where there minorities in the community? Were they treated differently?

[0:10:51]

Clouse, E.:

There weren't any minorities in my immediate community. And if there were any that worked at the plant, I didn't know them.

Callan, B.:

What was life like for your spouse and your children during the time you were out here?

Clouse, E.:

They -- it's hard to say. We got very active in our church. My husband was the Deacon. I did the secretarial work, as far as finances, for them. I coached the basketball and softball teams. And that was pretty much our life. The children seemed to really enjoy high school and the grammar schools. They participated in a lot of things and gained a lot of knowledge from the schools.

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Callan, B.: I guess a lot of people are active in the church out here?

Clouse, E.: I think, yeah. A lot of people were active in their church. It seemed to be the way to -- to me, it was the way to raise children, the best way to keep them active and happy.

[0:12:41]

Callan, B.: What was it like having your spouse work out at K-25?

Clouse, E.: He just got up and went to work every day. It wasn't any [laughs] -

Callan, B.: Was he ever dissatisfied with the living conditions or the inconveniences?

Clouse, E.: In his last few years, he became dissatisfied and was glad to be able to retire when he reached 65.

Callan, B.: How did you support his work? What did you do to support his work during the time that he was working at K-25?

Clouse, E.: Well, mainly I worked for the City of Oak Ridge for 22 years. I guess that was supporting his endeavors.

Callan, B.: I already asked you, but let me ask you again, what was it like dealing with the issue of secrecy?

Clouse, E.: No big problem as far as dealing with the secrecy of the work that was being done at the plants. I didn't feel left out or not, you know, not being able to know exactly what he was doing.

Of course, by the time we came, the bomb had already been dropped.

[0:14:15]

Callan, B.: In living in Oak Ridge, you talked a little bit about your living conditions, but tell me a little bit more what the living conditions were like? What was an apartment like and what were the houses like?

Clouse, E.: Well the A house, by the time we had it, we had three children in two bedrooms, and that was very crowded. There was -- for some

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of those years -- well all those years, we just had coal, which is not a very clean way to heat a home. But we were happy. And it felt like that was just a stepping stone to something a little bit better. As the time progressed, we went along.

Callan, B.: When you were here, was the town still fenced and secure?

Clouse, E.: When we came, I had to have a pass to come from -- we were staying in Kingston with some friends until we got housing, and I had to have a pass to come through the K-25 area to get into Oak Ridge. And when we first arrived, we had to come all the way around Oliver Springs. The town was not secured. The gates had already been opened, but the plant area was still secure. You had to have a pass to go into the plant, which you still do, I guess.

[0:15:50]

Callan, B.: When you went into nearby towns, such as Knoxville, were you treated differently when they knew you worked up here?

Clouse, E.: No, I don't recall. Uh-uhn (negative).

Callan, B.: What did you do out here for recreation and entertainment and with whom?

Clouse, E.: We played a lot of softball, basketball, and went to the softball games.

Callan, B.: Is there anything special or unusual that you want to discuss about moving to Oak Ridge?

Clouse, E.: I don't believe there's anything special, just learned to like the town. I like the smallness of it. I sometimes wish we had more entertainment than we have. Particularly as you get older, you like some more -- not movies but plays and things of that nature.

Callan, B.: What do you think that future generations should remember about K-25 or the work that was done out here?

Clouse, E.: Oh gosh!

Callan, B.: It's like an essay question, right. [laughter]

[0:17:27]

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Clouse, E.: I guess the future generations should know about what did take place and how unique it was and how people from all over the country came together and worked to produce what they have produced to better the country and to help our country.

Callan, B.: These are kind of wrap-up questions, so they're kind of like essay questions. Describe what the great accomplishments were here and what should be acknowledged.

Clouse, E.: The great accomplishment was that we ended World War II with fewer loss of life. It also gave us power throughout the world in that, "Leave us alone. We can take care of ourselves."

Callan, B.: That sort of makes me bring up an interesting point because there are a lot of questions that we go down with people that were here during the Manhattan Project. Of course, you were out here at Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project, but you were around. What were your thoughts initially when the bomb was dropped on that day?

Clouse, E.: I was at the shoreline in New Jersey with a friend. And we heard about -- we heard that the war had ended because of the bomb. And, of course, we raced home and ended up in Newark, New Jersey, cheering with the mobs of people. That was my reaction to it.

[0:19:55]

Callan, B.: At that point, did you know how K-25 was involved with that?

Clouse, E.: I didn't even know -- at that time, I didn't know about K-25 or Y-12 or X-10 or any of them. I didn't even know about Oak Ridge.

Callan, B.: So what were you thoughts when you arrived out here? How long was it before you learned that that's what basically is produced out here, is the uranium that made the bomb?

Clouse, E.: I don't remember just when I learned that, that the uranium was produced out here.

Callan, B.: If you were writing a story about Oak Ridge and K-25, what topics would you cover?

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Clouse, E.:

What topics would I cover about Oak Ridge and the atomic bomb?  
That's a tough little question. I'm not much at writing. [laughter]

[0:21:03]

Callan, B.:

Are there any other things that you want to discuss or say or  
anything you think we should talk about for historic preservation  
before we wrap up the interview?

Clouse, E.:

I don't believe I have anything else to say. No.

Callan, B.:

Well, I really appreciate you interviewing with us.

[End of Interview]