

Harris, Kattie

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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 9/20/05

Interviewee: Kattie Harris

Interviewer: Valerie Smith

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[crew talk]

Smith, V.: Okay. So would you please state your name and spell your name, please?

Harris, K.: My name is Katie B. Harris. K-A-T-T-I-E, Kattie Bill Harris, and B. H-A-R-R-I-S.

[crew talk]

Smith, V.: Okay. Where were you born?

Harris, K.: I was born in Lawrence County.

Smith, V.: In what city and state?

Harris, K.: In (indiscernible), Montgomery, Alabama.

Smith, V.: Okay. And where were you living before you came to Oak Ridge?

Harris, K.: I was living in Montgomery.

Smith, V.: Montgomery, Alabama?

Harris, K.: That's right.

Smith, V.: And what kind of work did you do there?

Harris, K.: I was working at the Jefferson Davis Hotel and Coffee Shop.

[2:57]

Smith, V.: So how did you get recruited to --

Harris, K.: I guess it was a lady there by the name of Ms. Adeline Bivens (phonetic sp.) and she -- some of her friends told her about the jobs here. So she asked me and Lillian, another girl, would we go with her. And we said, "Let us think about it." (indiscernible) but they sent us here from the employment office there in Montgomery. We were sent here.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And we rode the train in Knoxville. Then we rode to the gate and we had to have a pass to get in. And

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they'd have somebody there to pick you up and bring you inside. And I hired in as Wheat School. That's right behind there in K-25. And that's -- and J.A. Jones was working at it then, was running it then. J.A.. Jones going out and Carbide was coming in.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: So, and I worked there until Martin May River (phonetic sp.) got here.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: I retired the same month Martin May River took over. I done stayed there about 39 years and I thought that was long enough.

Smith, V.: What type of job did you start out doing?

Harris, K.: We done sweep the floor, dust, mop, clean bathrooms or the furnitures.

Smith, V.: And what year did you start working here?

Harris, K.: In 1945.

Smith, V.: 1945?

Harris, K.: Retired in '84.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: So what's your educational background? How far in school did you get?

Harris, K.: I went to tenth grade. Uh-huh (affirmative).

[5:09]

Smith, V.: Okay. And what were the living conditions like when you first got to Oak Ridge?

Harris, K.: We lived in the huts. We lived in the huts. And I, for safety, I don't, it wasn't as -- I wouldn't call it exactly -- the screen was inside, and we opened up the shutters outside. Nothing between you and that shutter but that screen. So, that was what it was like.

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The women stayed in pens. We had to stay in one place. That's what it was like.

Smith, V.: And what was the community called where the Blacks stayed?

Harris, K.: Addison County (phonetic sp.).

Smith, V.: Okay you said it used to be called Gambel (phonetic sp.) --

Harris, K.: Gambel Valley, over -- since when we moved over here and watchin' them built the houses. (indiscernible) been building houses back in the 50s, I believe. And we stayed on Houston in flat tops before we built them houses where we live now.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: And so that's where we lived until we moved there and where we are at now.

Smith, V.: Okay. And where are you now?

Harris, K.: I'm over there in Scarborough Village, that's what they call the Gambel Valley. Why they call it that, I don't know.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: But people used to live over in there. They say, you know, years ago.

[6:49]

Smith, V.: So where did you get your hair done, or how did you get your laundry done? What did you have to do to get that done?

Harris, K.: They had a place where you'd wash. And finally, it was -- I don't know where this lady live, she had finally -- she had a beauty shop when we -- you could over there and get your hair done -- or you just do it yourself.

Smith, V.: What about shopping and food?

Harris, K.: Well, you had to go to a -- they had stores. They had -- when I worked at K25, they had a post office that sat right over one side of the highway. (indiscernible) store on store, sat another one. And on the left hand side going there, you could, you know, buy stuff if

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you wanted to. We didn't have too much problem about getting food. And then they had a big cafeteria, you'd go over there and eat. So that was good.

Smith, V.:

Now was the cafeteria -- were there separate -- was there a separate cafeteria for Blacks and a separate one for whites or how did that work?

Harris, K.:

Well you -- nothing went there but Blacks. No.

[8:19]

Smith, V.:

And how was the food? Was the food good?

Harris, K.:

The food, it was okay. Uh-huh (affirmative). They cooked well, like -- I wouldn't say it was exactly the way it was cooked down where I came from. I wouldn't say that, but it was pretty good.

Smith, V.:

What made you decide to come to Oak Ridge?

Harris, K.:

I had three kids to raise, and I saw where I could -- I'm knowing the older they got, the more it was going to take to take care of them. I took care of them. And that's what -- that was my reason for coming here.

Smith, V.:

So that you can have a better life for your kids?

Harris, K.:

For my kids. Yeah.

Smith, V.:

Now what was it like working out at K-25 at first? What all -- what kind of -- what was it like to work out there in the job?

Harris, K.:

To me, it was alright. It was fine. Well, we did what we knowed and that was what? Cleaning up.

Smith, V.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Harris, K.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

Now what about your supervisor? Did you get along well with your supervisor or --

Harris, K.:

Yeah, I got along with all of them, but about two.

Smith, V.:

About two of them? [laughing] What was the problem there?

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Harris, K.:

Well, one was a secretary and the other one, me and her used to work together and so it looked like they did (indiscernible). And so one night finally both of them named Brenda. Brenda, she lived in Kingston. Now when the lights would go out in the building where we worked, we would go over and help somebody else and then help them get their work done and then when the lights come back on, they'd come back and help us.

[10:28]

Smith, V.:

Okay.

Harris, K.:

So the burden we had was to clean up the restrooms and we brought the flashlight, and everything I didn't like that too -- part. So, you had the other Brenda, me and her, as much as we used to help her out when they put on all that double work. And she got all -- we saw some people here. Get a little sass and do that. And she crossed me one time too many, and I -- she come down there and I was in the conference room. And then she opened the door. And I don't know what she want to say because I just told her, "I ain't in the mood for none of your misty (indiscernible)." She just run along and ran back. I didn't have no more -- I had no trouble out of none of them. I guess I cleaned behind every big shot come in there and go look like they stick them all (indiscernible). That Clark (indiscernible), (indiscernible), Summersfield, most of them. I just -- (indiscernible).

Smith, V.:

So what was the interaction like between Blacks and whites when you worked there?

Harris, K.:

I used to -- When I went there?

Smith, V.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Harris, K.:

The colored line was up.

Smith, V.:

The colored line was what? Was up?

Harris, K.:

We had a water fountain for the Black and you had a water fountain for the white, and they had a restroom for the Black and a restroom for the white. Where no people come out of the washroom, they did cut all that stuff out. How come I know, cuz' I was the one workin' around in em'.

Smith, V.:

So who came out of washrooms?

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Harris, K.:

I don't know. It was some government folks. I don't know who they was, but they -- when they cut that out, things got better.

[12:33]

Smith, V.:

Well, Ma'am, what year was that? Do you remember?

Harris, K.:

I don't remember what year it was. And then I knew when there was a boy come there with a full year of college degree got give him a job cleaning machines. That was nobody's business. And a Black secretary come there, they sent her somewhere else. So, it finally got better. I guess it had to. So we got what we had, Black bosses and everything then -- were hiring that.

Smith, V.:

So originally did you have a white boss?

Harris, K.:

Huh?

Smith, V.:

Originally did you have a white boss?

Harris, K.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). That's all we had till later. So finally -- most of them was all right though. I had old ladies older than me. She was a nice old woman though. She was real nice.

Smith, V.:

Now what about the pay? Did you get paid the same as -- did everybody get paid the same whether they were white or Black or -

Harris, K.:

When we went there, we would make but 58 cent a hour till the union got in there. Then we got, you know, you'd get a little raise, a raise until it got it up. You know? That's how it went.

Smith, V.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Harris, K.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

So what was the thing that you liked the most about working out at the plant?

Harris, K.:

I guess when the -- the money because I had my kids to raise and take care of. My oldest son, he's a welder and a first -- he's a first class welder and a concrete finisher. Of course, he do most everything. My daughter, she was a boss over -- she lived in Ohio, some plant or another where they make wheel shells, till she got sick. And so my youngest son, he worked at over there at the hospital till the doctor put him on disability because he had -- had hurt one of his leg when he small going to school, and it kept on

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flaring up till they finally put him on disability. He live in Birmingham; he used to live in Las Vegas, but he moved back to Birmingham now. Uh-huh (affirmative). My daughter lives in Ohio. My oldest son, he live here with me.

[15:26]

Smith, V.:

Okay. Now did you work the whole time at the K-25 site?

Harris, K.:

Yeah, I ain't worked at none of the other plants.

Smith, V.:

Okay. What about the secrecy about -- I mean were there certain things you couldn't talk about or that they told you not to look at or anything?

Harris, K.:

No, because I didn't even never seen it. So, when we were hired, they told us, "What you see here, what you hear, when you leave, leave it here." So I --

Smith, V.:

I see. So you were told that if you saw anything or anything --

Harris, K.:

Yeah, we weren't supposed to go out and tell it, you know, stuff like that.

Smith, V.:

So what did you do for a social life or for entertainment? What kinds of things did you do?

Harris, K.:

Go to church when Sunday come. They had a little church and so finally they opened up a club over there where we lived. We go there every now and then, but to church mostly.

Smith, V.:

What was the name of the club?

Harris, K.:

I don't know now, it's been so long. They done tore it down. And there's a center built there now for the it's for the day care. Children go there. Grown folk go over there. They still have stuff there for senior citizens. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

What role did the church play in the Black community here in Oak Ridge? Is that like the place where you guys met and socialized?

Harris, K.:

Well, we got -- how many churches you got (indiscernible) chapel. There was Mind's Eye and Old Raleigh. They build us -- we had the church made of (indiscernible) old house down on the road. We started there, and they finally built a church where there -- Old Valley, where is it now. So it's grown from that. Uh-huh

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(affirmative). Then the Church of Christ sit right there. Had two (indiscernible). So (indiscernible) Chapel and just sits right down where the old Mind's Eye. Uh-huh (affirmative).

[18:09]

Smith, V.: Now tell me about, I know the Black women were separated from the Black men.

Harris, K.: Yeah, was -- I'm telling you now. We stayed in a pen in the huts. And the shelter for the women, the shelter was outside, and the screen was inside. And so that's where we'd be, but sometimes we'd be like three or four of us in one. That one got a bed over there and this one had one over there, one over there. (Indiscernible) for heat. Sure did.

Smith, V.: What was it like to live in the hut and then to see the trailers that they set up for the whites? How did you feel about that?

Harris, K.: I didn't feel bad. I guess I really can't do no better. You just can't do no better. And it ain't -- they really didn't start building no houses and fixing up no houses till they went to raising hands. So they decided to build houses back in there.

Smith, V.: Now who was raising hands about that?

Harris, K.: Just like the folk who were these council meetings, I guess that's what it was. And was talking about them houses, building houses. A lot of them houses over here white people live in. They were all houses. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: Now with your kids, what kind of -- where did they go to school?

Harris, K.: My kids -- I let my kids stay at home with my parents.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: And I took care of them, and you know, when I get paid, I'd send my mom the money to buy their food stuff, but I'd buy their clothes myself.

Smith, V.: I see. I see.

Harris, K.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I didn't put that off on them until they grew up, you know. And now I go visit them and then after she got sick and I'd go often and visit. So, yeah. It worked out pretty

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good. Uh-huh (affirmative).

[20:31]

Smith, V.: Now were there any kids -- would you have been allowed to bring your kids to Oak Ridge?

Harris, K.: For the first -- at first, there wasn't no kids around. There wasn't no kids. Uh-uhn (negative). My mother come in one time, drove my baby, and he was a little ole' boy about, something like that 3 or 4 years old. I'd say about 3 years old. We were living in the huts then, living in the family huts. See, when you're single, you didn't live in a family hut. But see, I was married. I lived in this family hut. So she come one time to visit me and brought that -- brought my little smallest kid. And we had to get a pass to come in here. You couldn't just find it and they'd open up the gates. So, it was all right, I reckon.

Smith, V.: So when your mom visited you with your son, did she have to get a pass?

Harris, K.: Yeah, had to get a pass for her to come in. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: Now you say there were family huts?

Harris, K.: Family huts, yeah.

Smith, V.: Those were for the married people?

Harris, K.: That's what they were for, the married people.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: I had a friend. I had a friend. She passed. She had gotten older. She didn't have but two kids, a girl and a boy. They lived direct down from me. And my mom brought that little boy of mine here, he'd go to her house every body. He'd go run around to her hut every day. Uh-huh (affirmative)

Smith, V.: Now you said you were married, right?

Harris, K.: My husband has been dead for quite some time.

Smith, V.: Okay. Did you meet him here?

Harris, K.: Meet and married him here.

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Smith, V.: How --

Harris, K.: We met here. We were working on the same -- in the same job. We went over to (indiscernible), Alabama, and that's where we got married at. Uh-huh (affirmative).

[22:42]

Smith, V.: What attracted you to him?

Harris, K.: I don't know.

Smith, V.: [laughs]

Harris, K.: Some time I wondered if it was worth it. [laughter] I don't think it did. I don't wish (indiscernible).

Smith, V.: Now did he do the same type of work?

Harris, K.: Oh yeah.

Smith, V.: Okay.

Harris, K.: But I stayed longer than he did though.

Smith, V.: So he retired. Did he work at the K-25 plant?

Harris, K.: Yeah, he worked at K-- he worked at K-25. But he was working over here to somewhere else when (indiscernible). And then he got sick. He got sick (indiscernible) he had six brothers, he didn't have no sisters. One of his brothers died last year. All of them dead.

Smith, V.: What did you dislike or what was the thing that you did not like about working at K-25?

Harris, K.: I don't -- I really don't know. I just -- I didn't mind working, but I just -- it just -- don't pester me. We had pretty good bosses. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: Now tell me, I want to go back to something. You were talking about the union. Once the union --

Harris, K.: Well, after the union got in there. Now they didn't have no union. When I joined the union for a dollar before it was even set up.

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[24:30]

Smith, V.:

Okay.

Harris, K.:

And -- but now I bet you couldn't get on it for that. Uh-uhn (negative). See, I figure the union got in there and then they, you know, they paid more. They got to where they had to pay more. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

So you got higher pay once the union --

Harris, K.:

And we --

Smith, V.:

Okay.

Harris, K.:

When we worked there, we made one fifty-eight cent an hour. Fifty-eight cent an hour. Uh-huh (affirmative)

Smith, V.:

Man, that's interesting. How did -- were there any rules that you had to follow when you were at the K-25 site? I know you said you had to have a pass to get in and things of that nature.

Harris, K.:

You had to have a badge. If you had a badge, you could go in and out. We rode the bus, and you had to have a badge -- checked your badge every day. You had to have that badge to get in them gates, and outta' there go out the gate.

Smith, V.:

Now how did you get to and from work?

Harris, K.:

On the bus.

Smith, V.:

On the bus?

Harris, K.:

They had busses.

Smith, V.:

Okay.

Harris, K.:

They had good transportation. Boy, I leave now. I used to run out the door and get on the bus. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

Now did Blacks and whites ride the bus together?

Harris, K.:

Yeah. For a -- yeah. Yeah.

Smith, V.:

And did you have to sit in the back of the bus?

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[25:58]

Harris, K.: No, I ain't sit in -- No. Uh-uhn (negative). It wasn't like that. You could sit anywhere you wanted. And they line them busses up when the shift was over. Everybody would get on their bus, where they was going.

Smith, V.: Okay.

[crew talk]

[End of Side A]

Smith, V.: So what made you stay?

Harris, K.: Where did I live?

Smith, V.: No, what made you stay in the area?

Harris, K.: I just -- the work, the money, the work. Just like I said, I had three kids to take of. And that's what made me stay, but as far as me loving it, like I did a home, no. Uh-uhn (negative). But I had -- this is what I had in mind, when I retired, I was going back home. I didn't want to live here.

Smith, V.: But that didn't happen?

Harris, K.: (indiscernible) after my kids grow up and come in, it look like I got stuck then. And I just stay here, yeah. [laughter]

[1:23]

Crew: Ladies, when you're ready.

Smith, V.: I want to talk about your kids a little bit more. What age were they when they came here to live with you?

Harris, K.: They was really -- they like did come to visit, but they'd go back with their father. They were like 17, 18 or 14 years old, or 12 or something, but I don't (indiscernible). I don't know what year they started to come in to see me like they did.

Smith, V.: Now the --

Harris, K.: But they'd come and visit, but they wouldn't, you know -- shoot

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I'll go and visit them. I'd visit more than they did me. But my mother, they had they live on the (indiscernible). I was their mother, and that was their grandma. So, they stayed there, stayed there with my parents for a while, a for a long time till they were almost grown.

Smith, V.: When they did come and visit, where did they stay?

Harris, K.: They were with me, after I done got the house. I done got a house then. Well, at first started out renting them. Then the government started to sell them.

Smith, V.: So you were able to buy the house you were renting?

Harris, K.: Carbide bought it, and I paid them. That money, I didn't see. The company bought it.

[3:14]

Smith, V.: Union Carbide?

Harris, K.: Union Carbide bought the house I live in right today. And I didn't -- that money I didn't see because they'd take out the check. I'd never see it.

Smith, V.: That's interesting. So Union Carbide bought the house, and they took --

Harris, K.: Well, where I live now. But I don't know whether any other companies wound up buying any because I knew (indiscernible) the old man used to work across -- at all the way up in Henderson. I wasn't going to buy it now when it was -- when they was selling the house and started (indiscernible) we moved over there to rent about 39 dollars a month and that was going to be your house.

Know a lot of people sold their property. Just like if you had a chance and was living in one, you had a chance to buy, you'd sell your property to someone. Some of them did. I'd say and that wouldn't make sense. And so the credit union was upstairs in the same building I went up in with two people there, a man and a woman. A man and a women, and I talked to the woman, and they paid it off, even including the back taxes that was owed on it. And that's how I got the house. Uh-huh (affirmative)

Smith, V.: So when you first came here, when you got your check, where did you put your money? Did you go to the bank?

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Harris, K.: Well they finally -- they had banks. They had a bank -- put one of them banks up at Jackson Square there. Uh-huh (affirmative)

Smith, V.: And what was the name of that bank, do you remember?

[5:07]

Harris, K.: Hamilton National Bank, I believe. Then after a while, they're building (indiscernible) and then they put in -- yeah, it was Hamilton National Bank.

Smith, V.: Now were you ever hurt on the job or anything?

Harris, K.: No I wasn't -- no, I wasn't ever hurt on the job.

Smith, V.: Do you know of anybody who was hurt on the job?

Harris, K.: No. Uh-uhn (negative).

Smith, V.: What kind of health care or benefits did you have working out there?

Harris, K.: Same thing we got now.

Smith, V.: So, did you have life insurance?

Harris, K.: Oh, you carried -- yeah, you carried your own life insurance. You carried -- carried insurance yourself and the company paid it all. You had insurance on you. They had kid insurance.

Smith, V.: Now were you given a physical or anything before you started?

Harris, K.: Yeah, you had to go through -- yeah.

Smith, V.: What was that about? What did they you check for?

Harris, K.: I don't know what they checked -- for a little everything. And just like you go to the personnel when you hire in, you have to go through there when you get ready to turn -- when you retire. You have to go through it again. Uh-huh (affirmative). Take pictures and everything of you.

Smith, V.: Now what kind of jobs besides janitors and laborers did the Blacks have when they first came here? Were there any that were in management or anything like that?

[7:00]

- Harris, K.: No. No, not that I know of.
- Smith, V.: Did you have any opportunities to advance or to go --
- Harris, K.: Yeah, later. Well, later, just like I said, later. Yeah. Some, you know, there were a few of them would, like I said. But first off, no.
- Smith, V.: Yeah. Did you have any idea what the buildings were for out there or what they were doing in those buildings?
- Harris, K.: I had no idea whatsoever. Uh-uhn (negative). I was a -- the only time I'd work in any of them other buildings, they had two other buildings right at the highway. I worked there for three or four hours and then they (indiscernible) when I retired, I'd work in that building. But on the weekend -- just like on the weekend when you work over, that's the only time you worked back down in them other buildings. Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Smith, V.: So sometimes you would work weekends?
- Harris, K.: Oh yeah. We worked weekends. Sure did. Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Smith, V.: Did you get overtime pay or anything for that?
- Harris, K.: Oh yeah. They'd pay you time-and-a-half or whatever you call it. Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Smith, V.: What made you decide to make Oak Ridge your home? What kept you here?
- Harris, K.: I don't know. I can't -- I could leave and then I'd come back. But after things turned out like it did, just like I said, after my kids got grown, some come in and stayed and then I reckon, just stayed on. But it turned out all right. Got nice churches, got good pastors, and friends, and things, good neighbors. Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Smith, V.: What are some of the -- what's the most interesting story you could tell or something that happened out there?
- Harris, K.: I don't know if there's any -- really have them, that's good or bad. I don't know. In a way it was fun, in a way.

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[9:42]

Smith, V.: Really?

Harris, K.: Yeah --

Smith, V.: How so?

Harris, K.: Well, they send you somewhere, just like they want somebody to clean up some thing. They send two of us. And two of us would go. And, you know, it's all right. Uh-huh (affirmative). Met people from all over. There were a lot of people. I just seen all kind of people.

Smith, V.: What different types of people worked out there?

Harris, K.: All types, I would say. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: So you had Blacks, Whites, and --

Harris, K.: White -- or any other kind. Yeah.

Smith, V.: And how did -- in general, how did the whites treat people?

Harris, K.: Well, all right. Anyway, all right. They treated me all right. Yeah.

Smith, V.: Are you remembering an incident or something?

Harris, K.: No. (indiscernible) They called it the (indiscernible) Bank.

Smith, V.: They what now?

Harris, K.: They had a bank down on the post office, and all that stuff was down in K-25 for a while. So, I (indiscernible) help old Fred. So -- it was all right. There was nobody else special that was -- before you go if you was sick or something and they would have -- (indiscernible) laundry. Where you'd wash your -- first we were wearing a uniform, and all of us were wearing the same thing and that was coveralls, which I guess was better. Uh-huh (affirmative) I met a lot of people.

Smith, V.: You did?

Harris, K.: Oh yeah, all kinds. Nice folks. Some of them called right now where I done retired like I did. Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Smith, V.: Who were some of the people you met?

[12:28]

Harris, K.: Like Ms. Morney (phonetic sp.), Ms. Boulders (phonetic sp.), and Ms. Boris (phonetic sp.). We're supposed to go out for dinner, but don't look like it was going. So Frances -- Frances (indiscernible), and she was one of the nicest persons you ever met.

Smith, V.: Now what kind of jobs did the women have at K-25?

Harris, K.: A mop and a broom till later. Clean up. Clean the office up, that's all they had. So, (indiscernible). I don't remember now -- the first secretary they sat there, they sent off somewhere. I don't remember nobody being no secretary. Of course, it could have been.

Smith, V.: Yeah. What was it like for both you and your husband to work out at K-25?

Harris, K.: He worked at one place. I worked at another. We didn't work in the same building. Uh-uhn (negative).

Smith, V.: Now did he ever come back and have any interesting stories to tell?

Harris, K.: Nah.

Smith, V.: No?

Harris, K.: He got -- he got terminated reduction in forty hours. I'd be working there before he was, I think I was. I'm sure I was. Then finally he worked there. He had two brothers who worked at Y-12 and X-10 somewhere over there. They lived in camp, but they finally moved to Knoxville. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.: Now what -- let me go back to your husband again. Tell me exactly how you guys met.

Harris, K.: Met on the job, just like -- just met up on the job, talking. Used to ride the bus together going to work. And I guess that's how it got started, me and him. We used to go down home to visit, and we got married in (indiscernible). That was his home. We had been down there to see my folks and then went on his way back, come back through there to see his daddy. And that's where we got

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married. So that's how it went.

[15:13]

Smith, V.:

What made you want to marry him?

Harris, K.:

I don't know. I really thought I was in love. I don't guess I was.

Smith, V.:

If there is any advice you can give to future generations about the opportunities that --

Harris, K.:

Opportunities of the job?

Smith, V.:

Yeah, or opportunities that Blacks have now that they didn't in the past, what would you say?

Harris, K.:

Well, I tell you what I think. Things have changed. But it ain't changed like a lot like some folks think it have. If you get the job, for God's sake work. But some people just ain't gonna work. Don't care what happened. I ain't working for no child. I ain't gonna do that. So, back where you go. But I said if you can get a good job, well go for it. Yeah. I worked like I did because it was more than I was making at home. But like I said, I had three kids to take care of. I wanted to give them the things that I didn't get.

Smith, V.:

So you came here because it was paying a lot more?

Harris, K.:

Got (indiscernible) a job, that's why I come here, for the job. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Smith, V.:

Because the pay was better than working --

Harris, K.:

It was more than I was making at home.

Smith, V.:

What were you making at home?

Harris, K.:

I wasn't making too much of nothing. I worked (indiscernible) hotel, but now you're working in the field. What you say, 50 cents a day. I didn't say a day, did I?

Smith, V.:

No, I thought you said an hour.

Harris, K.:

Not no 50 cents no hour in no field.

Smith, V.:

I see.

Harris, Kattie

Harris, K.:

But I made just a little bit more working at the hotels and after Ms. Adeline and (indiscernible) kept on talking about coming here, at first I thought, "Oh yeah, I'll go. I don't care." But then she didn't get the call because she had one kid. She didn't go. Her child got sick. She never did come.

Smith, V.:

Now you said that the county or city of Montgomery actually was helping to recruit people to come.

Harris, K.:

You go to the -- yeah, they were sending them from the -- from the sent us from the employment office. We went to the employment office, and they sent us from the employment office.

[18:11]

Smith, V.:

Interesting. If you were going to write a story about Oak Ridge, what kind of subjects would you talk about?

Harris, K.:

I don't know. I just -- I would want to know if I need to write a story, but it's all right. It's over.

Smith, V.:

We're about to bring it to a close. Is there anything that you want to talk about, your experience out here that I may not have asked a question about?

Harris, K.:

I know one thing, it used to snow a lot here. But it -- I stayed on the job all night one night on the count of the weather. One night out of them 39 years. Got home about 11:00 the next day. And at that time, they (indiscernible) we changed clothes. (indiscernible) go home and told her the only (indiscernible) if you're at home, don't come. So, we -- I stayed out one night and went to work that morning about 4:00. Throwing ice -- throwing salt for people to come in the next day. And on the way, me and Bessie got back to that change house to put them coveralls back on. We got us a bucket of ice. She got on one side and I was on the other. Throw the ice. That's the only we could stand up. It was rough.

Smith, V.:

So where did you sleep that night?

Harris, K.:

We didn't sleep. We just sat up in the restroom. We didn't sleep. And some of them didn't go back to work the next night. We had done got slush and you know. (indiscernible) on the sidewalk looked just like it wasn't nothin' there -- wasn't nothin' but a sheet of ice. So that was about the worst ice storm we had. Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Harris, Kattie

Smith, V.:

If you had to do it all over again, would you?

[21:01]

Harris, K.:

Would I do it?

Smith, V.:

Yeah.

Harris, K.:

I think I would.

Smith, V.:

You would.

Harris, K.:

I think I would. Now I look back over here, now that I don't have to work. Uh-huh (affirmative). I can't go to work. I appreciate -- I think the Lord blessed me. I got all my kids up. I got kids, grandkids, great grandkids, great-great grandkids. So I appreciate all that.

Smith, V.:

Good.

Harris, K.:

Yeah. Yeah.

Smith, V.:

Okay. Well I think we can bring it to an end. We appreciate your time.

[End of Interview]

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