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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 5/18/05

Interviewee: Helen Lowery

Interviewer: Jennifer Thonhoff

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[1:00:07]

**Lowery, H.:** -- really looking forward to meeting you.

**Thonhoff, J.:** I'm really glad you're here. I was looking forward to hearing about your life.

**Lowery, H.:** Wow! Well, you see I spent a couple of -- other jobs before I went out to the area where you're doing the documentary.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Ah. I'm going to have you start with saying your name and spelling it for me, please.

**Lowery, H.:** My name is Helen S. Lowery, that's H-E-L-E-N S. L-O-W-E-R-Y. And that S. stands for Schultz, S-C-H-U-L-T-Z.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Where were you born?

**Lowery, H.:** I was born here in east Tennessee, in Hamblen County.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Where did you live prior to K-25?

**Lowery, H.:** Where did I live prior to K-25? I lived in Talbott and moved here to Oak Ridge and have been here ever since.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What brought you here?

**Lowery, H.:** The Manhattan Project.

**Thonhoff, J.:** How did that come about?

[1:02:16]

**Lowery, H.:** In -- I was in school and I was recruited. There was a recruiter came and talked to those who might want to come to Oak Ridge. Well, we didn't know it was Oak Ridge. Come to Clinton Engineer Works for a job. And the interviewer impressed on us that if we were chosen; we would be helping the war effort that it would eventually lead to hopefully a successful end to the war. That's World War II.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And this was in school?

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**Lowery, H.:**

Yes, uh-huh (affirmative). And so I was one -- I think I was the only one that was chosen from the group that interviewed that day to come. And I came into Knoxville and had further interviews. And then they extended over a two-day period. And I spent the night in Knoxville and finished the interview the next day. I was brought by bus by way of a road I never traveled to Oak Ridge.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

What was your first recollection of K-25 when you got here?

**Lowery, H.:**

Well, K-25 was just a plant. There was a -- see, there were three: Y-12, X-10, K-25 and K-25 was operated by Union Carbide. And I went to work in Y-12 first for Tennessee Eastman and then went to -- when they left, I went to work for Monsanto, which was the operator of X-10. And at the time, I was taking some classes, studying because I figured since the war, by this time, had ended. It was a successful conclusion. I had studied some in engineering and office management. And because I figured there was going to be life after.

[1:04:37]

So I went to work for the City of Oak Ridge. It was Ron Anderson at that time and the electrical engineering department. They started the construction work in the K-25 job site area, I decided it was time for me to move on. So that's how I became involved. I went to work for the electrical subcontractor, Edenfield Electric.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

And what did you do with them?

**Lowery, H.:**

First, we moved into -- we just had a section of the Carbide administration building, while our field offices were being constructed. And when they finished the field office, we moved out and my job was to do interviews of the journeyman and linemen who were coming to do some work. We had to keep record of that. So I worked -- it was more or less office management. I worked closely there, and then by fate, there was an opening in engineering. The project manager said, 'What are we going to do? We need to get the layouts and designs.' And I said, 'I can do that.' And he said, 'What do you mean you can do that?' I said, 'Want to give me a try.' So I went in and that's where I stayed for the remainder of my job.

[1:06:15]

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**Thonhoff, J.:**

What did you do while you were there?

**Lowery, H.:**

Helped with the design of the electrical for K-29, K-33, which was a pilot plant, and then K-33, 31, 33. And yeah, it was interesting. I was one of, I guess, few women who could don a hard hat and climb around over the scaffolding to see how the electrical work was doing.

Prior to that venture -- I'll regress and go back to the office management. It was all aspects of office work for the electrical contractor. And I developed a plan, which would keep a current daily inventory because so frequent on subcontracting work or on construction work, if you run out of the project, it delays the date of completion.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

Right.

**Lowery, H.:**

And I developed a plan that they could stay current and keep supplies. And stay on time with their contract. And I was awarded -- well, it was a dot -- my plan as adopted by all the subcontracting work and I think including DOE. And I was awarded one dollar. You know, if you do something, it belongs here. You can't get a patent on it or take it with -- or you couldn't at that time. So I was very proud of my brave dollar.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

What an accomplishment.

**Lowery, H.:**

Uh-huh (affirmative) because they had adopted my plan and it provided successful for all. I know Kay and Hughes, who were the plumbing contractors; they called me up and invited me to a special dinner because I had saved them. That plan they had adopted, they wanted to recognize me.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

Can you tell me a little about the plan?

**Lowery, H.:**

It was -- no, it was just a system whereby if something goes out, like in electrical, if there were so many feet of wire, say 100 or 150 feet of wire, that was a record kept of that, and you always needed to keep your supplies back ordered. And this would help with the stock room supply.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

So everything that went out got ordered to come back in.

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**Lowery, H.:**

You got a replacement -- you worked with the estimator on how much wiring was going to be needed. And this way you kept -- and the same way for any type of -- if it was plumbing, piping, the same system would apply. You'd work with the estimator of the jobs. And so that was that. But it was quite fascinating to be classified junior engineer.

[1:09:36]

One woman working with men was quite a bit different.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

How was that?

**Lowery, H.:**

I enjoyed it very much. You didn't encounter cattiness but there's another thing about construction work. It's like one big happy family because you know that the contract is going to end. So you don't have a lot of the -- what you call cutting throat.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

Yeah.

**Lowery, H.:**

Yeah. So it's --

**Thonhoff, J.:**

How did the men treat you?

**Lowery, H.:**

They treated me as one of the fellas. They didn't -- of course, construction work is a different culture of people.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

Sure.

**Lowery, H.:**

And if someone came in and told a joke and looked around, oh, you know, if it was a little off color. I said, 'It's okay. No sweat.'  
[laughs]

**Thonhoff, J.:**

I can relate.

**Lowery, H.:**

Yeah. But I enjoyed it very much. In fact, I much prefer to work with men than women to get the job done.

[1:10:41]

**Thonhoff, J.:**

Yeah, it gives a really good dynamic, I think.

**Lowery, H.:**

But it's fascinating to think that from a drafting board and a design, you can take that from a piece of paper and see the reality

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of what you have to do. And I think it's -- one thing that fascinates me more, after the war, about Oak Ridge, is their attempt to alleviate suffering. By that, I mean, in X-10 the first isotopes to fight cancer came into being and shipped all around. And it's truly a town of research, scientific discoveries. And now we're about to enter a super highway. I'll tell you here when they get it done, the --

**Thonhoff, J.:** I didn't know that.

**Lowery, H.:** Yeah, and I'd love to be young again and go through. I enjoyed working.

[1:11:51]

**Thonhoff, J.:** Could you describe for me when you came into Oak Ridge the first time?

**Lowery, H.:** My feeling?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Yeah.

**Lowery, H.:** I thought, gee what kind of place is this? All the houses and everything seemed to look very much alike. And there was military everywhere you would look. And housing, we were housed in dormitories, much like school dorms. And we would eat in a designated cafeteria, near our residential place.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Did they have more than one cafeteria?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative). They had West Village -- there was a cafeteria in West Village, which eventually turned into house the American Museum of Atomic Energy. And then there was the Central Cafeteria, which was located in Jackson Square or as we referred to it town site. And I lived in Town Site. The first dormitory was in the west end, Ridgewood. It's now been demolished, and there's a school building, Willow Brook, on the grounds where Ridgewood Hall was. And then I moved into Chester Hall, which was originally for men's dorm, but there were so many ladies that needed housing, that I moved into that dormitory in the Jackson Square area.

[1:13:22]

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**Thonhoff, J.:**

What were the dormitories like? I've heard about hutmans and flat houses -- or flat roofs.

**Lowery, H.:**

The dormitories were H fashion, style. In other words, there was four wings with a central hall. And you had single rooms, and I think a single room's rent for the month was like 12.50 or 15 dollars. I got a double room, and that's a larger one, and it was 20 dollars a month. Now there was -- you had to have all your meals out. Of course, you could carry some snacks in from the grocery store, and there were A and P store in Jackson Store. And in Groves Center was Tulip Town Supermarket. And that was Grove Center was named for Leslie R. Groves. And I don't know what Jackson Square -- if it was named for Jackson, down in New Orleans. There's a street down there called Jack -- I think it's Jackson Square in New Orleans.

But everything -- and the streets is quite different from any other town. You come down -- in on the turnpike and all streets leading off to the right at that time, that was a residential area. They started with an "A" and "B" and "C," and all the way down. Your last one -- they're in alphabetical order and then every street -- would say if it was Tennessee Avenue, every street off of Tennessee would begin with a "T," or if it was Alabama, every street would begin with an "A." It was easy to get around in Oak Ridge.

**Thonhoff, J.:**

You would know kind of where you needed to be.

[1:15:25]

**Lowery, H.:**

Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative). And we had three theaters. And there were four different tennis court sites. And there was three bowling alleys. There was dancing on the tennis courts at night. This was in those early days. This was a town that never even dozed. There was three shifts working. And depending on what shift you were on, they would have the band or records set up dancing on the tennis court at night. It was a good place to be. And you felt safe because you were locked in. No one could come in. And of course, when the gates were open in '49, that was a trying time follow for the people who resided in Oak Ridge because we were not accustomed to people knocking on the doors wanting to sell you something. And we were overrun with door-to-door salesmen following until I think they decided they were going to have to get a permit in order to knock on doors to pass through. Some

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security was rendered to the residents by the move of the powers that be that was in charge at that time.

[1:16:52]

Any questions you want to ask now?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Absolutely. When people would ask you what you did at K-25, what would you tell them?

**Lowery, H.:** Oh, I just work on construction. And if they asked me, 'What are you building?' I don't know. [laughs]

**Thonhoff, J.:** What was -- what did you like most about working at K-25?

**Lowery, H.:** At K-25? I liked the people with whom I worked and I felt that I was doing something worthwhile that would be beneficial to the cold war effort.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And what did you like the least?

**Lowery, H.:** What I liked the least was the heat that we had to endure in upper floor field office building. It was engineering. It was just a tarpaper roof with no air conditioning and only one exhaust fan, and it just seemed to pull in all the hot air. It would get up to 115 degrees in the summer, July and August. You feel as though you were in a sauna.

**Thonhoff, J.:** How did you do it?

[1:18:15]

**Lowery, H.:** Well you didn't gain a lot of weight. [laughter]

**Thonhoff, J.:** And you said the people communicated well?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes. Yes. And we seemed to be, you know, everyone was singing from the same page. And some of the most enjoyable times, of course, was lunch break. We could leave the area, go through the gate and there was a little homey-type restaurant out on -- in Ron County. And we would just load up a car and go to lunch there. It was different from the cafeteria meals on site. The cafeteria, we could go to Carbide Cafeteria to eat, but we chose to go outside. It was a little different.

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**Thonhoff, J.:** How many people would you hop into a car?

**Lowery, H.:** Oh six. Yeah.

**Thonhoff, J.:** (indiscernible)

**Lowery, H.:** And I really enjoyed the construction -- the electricians I got to know and have conversations, got to hear them. They came from all parts of the country.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What did you like the most about them?

**Lowery, H.:** Their openness, sincerity, and honesty.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And did you form life-long friendships and bonds there?

[1:19:50]

**Lowery, H.:** Somewhat, yeah. A number of those bonds are no longer -- they're broken by death because a lot of the people were older than I at the time. But I relish the 60 years that I've spent here. That's better than a half a century, you know.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What were the physical working conditions like? You said they were very, very hot. Besides that, was there an emphasis on safety?

**Lowery, H.:** Oh yes. Yes. There was an emphasis on safety. In fact, you most all -- including the plants would have awards -- what they call safety awards -- if they had so many months or so many days without lost time, accidents, they would issue awards for the workers.

[1:20:50]

**Thonhoff, J.:** We were talking out there, and there were little things you had to wear on your wrist.

**Lowery, H.:** Oh, if you had a visitor come to see you, you had to get them what you call a visitor's pass. And those were available at the gate, Elza gate or -- which is usually the one main gate going toward Clinton or coming into Oak Ridge from Clinton. And you would go and you would have to tell the name of your guess and how

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long they were going to be staying on the area. And their signature and your name and your signature appeared on their pass. So then you would know that there was some person -- resident of the city, of the Oak Ridge area, that would be the one held responsible if that visitor should do anything that was prohibited.

Another thing, when you were working in the plant site, there was prohibited items you could not carry -- a firearm in, you could not carry a camera in, and you had to be careful of your conversations, both inside the plant area and outside. You just -- you talked about things, weather, or whatever. You just didn't dwell on what was going on because this was, after all, the secret city.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And were any particular rules that were important to follow?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes. Yes -- all the rules that applied to security. It was very important that you kept those in mind in any of your transactions or communications.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Did they have safety precautions, like badges or --

**Lowery, H.:** We wore badges. Yes, with a picture.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What other information was on there?

**Lowery, H.:** The -- your badge number, your name, and your clearance, and then on the back, there was -- if you were on the inside of the plant, there was a little film to -- that they would remove every so often to check to see if there was radiation.

[1:23:32]

**Thonhoff, J.:** And you said you had a clearance on there. How did you classify clearances?

**Lowery, H.:** P clearance was just personnel. You know, you couldn't go behind the vent where a Q clearance was required. I had a Q clearance in all the jobs that I worked in.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And what does a Q clearance allow you?

**Lowery, H.:** A Q clearance allows you to go in restricted areas where a P clearance would not permit you be there.

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**Thonhoff, J.:** Is there anything above Q?

**Lowery, H.:** No.

**Thonhoff, J.:** It's just P and Q?

**Lowery, H.:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you know what the Q stands for?

**Lowery, H.:** I have no idea. It's just a letter that was assigned. Just like X-10, Y-12, K-25.

**Thonhoff, J.:** I was just going to ask you do you know how the plants got their names.

[1:24:24]

**Lowery, H.:** That was just one of the things. Instead of saying worked at K-25. We worked at the gaseous effusion plant, now we work at K-25. That was a security precaution. And X-10, even though it was a laboratory, where the (indiscernible) level and a lot of things were going on at that time. You didn't say, I work at the lab. You'd say, 'I'm at X-10.' And Y-12 of course, that's where the calutrons, the electromagnetic plant was located.

**Thonhoff, J.:** There was a lot of stuff going on.

**Lowery, H.:** Yes. That was one of my first jobs, was in Y-12. Yeah.

**Thonhoff, J.:** As far as health conditions, was it a safe place physically? How did they take care of your health issues?

**Lowery, H.:** You had bad -- the -- everything was operated by the Army in the early days. And they had the hospital with the Army doctors. And if you needed to be hospitalized, they took a small amount out of your paycheck and this took care of your hospitalization, medical expense. And then each of the three plants had their own medical facility, where they could treat you know, the minor things. If you had a headache, you'd go there, or if you got a nose bleed or whatever, you check in with the plant medical and they would either refer you to the hospital if necessary, or they would treat you on site.

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[1:26:24]

But in those earlier days, there was not as much known about the safety steps that were necessary as there is today. So we've come a long way.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Right. Do you feel like everything was taken care of appropriately, given the information?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes, because as I said, things were not known in those early days that are now known. So --

**Thonhoff, J.:** Were you ever hurt while you were working at K-25?

**Lowery, H.:** No. No. We did have one fatality that happened on the job with the electrical substation.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Can you talk about that?

**Lowery, H.:** There was two fellas, and they got into a hot line. And one was electrocuted and the other almost. So, yeah, there was fatalities here, but in the early days of Oak Ridge and this was prior to my going to the K-25 area, we had no funeral homes.

**Thonhoff, J.:** So what did they do?

**Lowery, H.:** It was always kept very quiet. So there were things that happened, and I guess when I say there were no funeral homes, this meant that any deaths or things that occurred, they were taken care of outside of Oak Ridge.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And during the war, did you have any idea what they were going to use the uranium for?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes.

**Thonhoff, J.:** You had a Q clearance?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes.

[1:28:22]

**Thonhoff, J.:** What was your reaction when we dropped the bomb?

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**Lowery, H.:** It was mixed really. I knew it was a hell of a thing to happen to people, innocent lives. But at the same time, I felt it was necessary and I would do it all over again because I think in the long run we saved lives because had there been an invasion of mainland Japan, there would have been more fatalities that occurred from the dropping of the bomb.

[crew talk]

[End of Tape 1, Begin Tape 2]

[2:00:03]

[crew talk]

**Thonhoff, J.:** What we're doing now is most of the tapes are going to go the Department of Energy and they determine what's going to happen with them. I don't believe there is going to be tapes available, but that's something that you can discuss with Gary. Okay.

So, how do you think that history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome?

**Lowery, H.:** I'm sure it will probably be mixed views.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Right.

**Lowery, H.:** Because you always have those who are anti nuclear bomb, anti nuclear period. And yet if they would just broaden their vision and see not only was it a destructive thing, but it was been a good thing because many good things have come from the use of nuclear power.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What are some of the things that you have seen grown out of these nuclear powers?

**Lowery, H.:** The health in the realm of health for individuals. There's the cancer treatment from the isotope. There's also an isotope you use for persons who cannot take the physical stress test in cardiology. They have now -- they can give you the chemical one, which basically was developed over at X-10.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Wow.

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**Lowery, H.:** A number of things are happening, even probably as we speak.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Absolutely.

**Lowery, H.:** Because that's one of the meeting research things that we have in Oak Ridge, is the laboratory. And we have robotics that's come into being. A number of things have happened in the space program, that were developed here. The developments around Oak Ridge are far reaching.

[2:02:54]

**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you feel like that's that --

**Lowery, H.:** I think that that is one of the things that should lay to rest the issue of just it being a destructive thing.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Absolutely. It's all encompassing. And what kind of work was being done at the facility during the cold war and after the bomb was dropped?

**Lowery, H.:** Well, we seemed to be a race with Russia at the time that I was in the construction part. The big talk was Russia is going to do this and Russia is going to do that. And how could we contain them. And I think that as the years passed, Russia was not the big threat that we thought it was. After all, it has crumbled. Communism was a way of life that should not have been for the Russian people, the many states in Russia.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you feel like as much progress would have happened had Russia not been a threat?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes, because I think that in the United States we've always had the idea of finding out things, discovery, research and development. I think that has been a big thing, not only here in Oak Ridge, but across our nation as a whole. We've been known as pioneers from way back. We continue to be so.

[2:04:48]

**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you think Oak Ridge is a base from which these things began?

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**Lowery, H.:** Not necessarily. I think it began before Oak Ridge, and for that reason is why Oak Ridge came into being. We needed a place that was secluded with ridges and mountains -- with plenty of water supply -- and a source of read power. And that was why this area was chosen back in the early 40s.

**Thonhoff, J.:** That was beautiful. Are there any particular stories that you remember about your work and about the city?

**Lowery, H.:** Nothing except it was filled with excitement those first few years. And then we were overcome with joy when we realized the role we had placed in the bomb. Many of the people who were not aware of what was going on and there were many people who left Oak Ridge immediately when they heard the news because they were -- had attack of fear and left, moved away, went back home.

[2:06:21]

**Thonhoff, J.:** Did you have a husband and a family?

**Lowery, H.:** Not at that time, no. I didn't get married until 1950.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What was it like to have a family in Oak Ridge?

**Lowery, H.:** It was -- I'm sure for the mother and the children most unusually, particularly if the father was the one who was the employee because he could go home and could not talk about what he was doing at work or he wouldn't. And the children, they'd only say, 'Dad works at Y-12, X-10, or K-25.' 'What does he do?' 'I don't know. He never tells us. He just gets up and goes to work and comes home.' So it would be unusual.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you think that --

**Lowery, H.:** There was a development of Carbide wives. After I got married, of course, I was a Carbide wife.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And what did that -- what was that group>?

**Lowery, H.:** It was a group of ladies who got together to have -- play bridge and Canasta in the evening, once a month. We organized and had officers. And Mrs. Clarkson was the first president of Carbide Wives, and I think I was the last when it was ready to fold up. Rather, I was president three terms of Carbide Wives. We had --

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we met at the central recreation hall, Town Site Recreation Hall.  
I'm --

**Thonhoff, J.:** Ho often did you meet?

**Lowery, H.:** Once a month and then we had our -- the officers had their business and planning meeting once a month. And we brought into being the Christmas parties for the children of the employees at K-25, big Christmas parties. And then Carbide came along and decided it was such a good thing that they would sponsor. And of course, the Carbide Wives helped pass out the Christmas stockings and get everything going.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What would you do to get that together?

**Lowery, H.:** What did we do?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Lowery, H.:** I don't know because it was already an organization when I became a Carbide Wife and that's --

[2:08:47]

**Thonhoff, J.:** And what would you do to -- what was your involvement in putting it together? What would you do?

**Lowery, H.:** You mean for the children's Christmas --

**Thonhoff, J.:** Yeah.

**Lowery, H.:** We would make contacts for a program, usually a magical program, one of magic Christmas, and we'd always have Santa visit and he would, of course, come in and the Carbide Wives would have all these Christmas stockings that was packed with the gifts and we would pass those out to the children in attendance and we usually had -- this was held in the auditorium of a local high school. And we usually had two or three shows, depending on the number of children that would be in attendance. And each one was treated to a stocking, stuffed with toys and things for children.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Great.

**Lowery, H.:** Yeah.

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**Thonhoff, J.:** Do you have any particular memories of interactions or stories of co-workers or --

**Lowery, H.:** None except a bowling team. I was on a bowling team and also I played softball and basketball.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Wow you were very active.

[2:10:17]

**Lowery, H.:** We stayed busy.

**Thonhoff, J.:** How often did you bowl?

**Lowery, H.:** How often did I bowl?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Lowery, H.:** When I first came to Oak Ridge, I started bowling. I would have - - I worked shifts, of course, but I would figure in at least once a day to go bowl two to three games just by myself for the practice. And then I was on the Y-12 bowling team.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And you said you played softball.

**Lowery, H.:** Softball for the lab. And basketball. Yeah.

**Thonhoff, J.:** You kept yourself incredibly busy.

**Lowery, H.:** Oh yeah. You just -- I didn't date all that much because everyone you come in contact with was strangers -- you just didn't know. So I didn't want to take chances and the safest thing to do is what? Sports.

**Thonhoff, J.:** That's right.

[2:11:27]

As a woman, do you feel -- you said you felt like you were part of the guys in your construction area, but do you feel like women had different roles or were treated differently?

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**Lowery, H.:** Well in some cases, women were treated differently. They never really were paid. They could be doing the same thing probably as a man but would not earn the same salary. And I think that hopefully is a thing of the past.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Totally diminished now.

**Lowery, H.:** Because things get better with time, given time. I think women had to really prove themselves because it was a man's world up until really I guess the onset of World War II, when so many women had to go into the defense plants to work. Yeah, Rosie the Riveter and who knows, Navy shipyard work. I think women proved their medal.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And how about minorities?

**Lowery, H.:** Minorities?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Lowery, H.:** They were treated different and much different today. I think basically it was a cultural thing for many people, particularly in the south, although I don't think they fared as well in the north as they did in the south in certain cases. But there was a separation.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What was separate?

**Lowery, H.:** The housing and the eating-places, some of the things were off limits. You just didn't mix and now you have a mix.

**Thonhoff, J.:** How did you feel about the separation factor?

**Lowery, H.:** I've always viewed, regardless of the color of a person's skin, as they are human. They are a member of the human race, and we all should get together, work. We'll have problems and we'll still have problems, but everyone should be treated equally.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Absolutely. Amen. And you said the family life was a little different then just because of, you know, you couldn't really speak much. What was it like being a wife and a mom?

**Lowery, H.:** That, of course, there was quite a bit more freedom that came about by the time I became a mother. But I'm sure that mothers and wives felt put upon. They had the care of the children, to see

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they got to school and take care of all those things, more so than having a father to rely on, especially a father who couldn't talk about what he was doing. And this would put a strain on any wife, I think, not knowing exactly what their husband was up to.

[2:14:57]

**Thonhoff, J.:** Was that the case in your family, with you?

**Lowery, H.:** No, because I was aware of what my husband was doing, having worked in the area and --

**Thonhoff, J.:** And having (indiscernible)

**Lowery, H.:** I had an inside line to it, so I knew when he got up and went to work, he was doing what he was supposed to be doing. Of course, he worked as a -- in the laboratory. So this was quite a bit different.

**Thonhoff, J.:** So you had a different scenario as far as your family?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes, uh-huh (affirmative).

**Thonhoff, J.:** And your children?

**Lowery, H.:** I have two daughters, one is an RN, the oldest one, and the other lives in Mexico City, Mexico. She is married to a physics professor. Each of my daughters have one daughter, so I have two granddaughters, one just turned 21, my youngest daughter's child turned 21. And the oldest daughter, she has a 12-year-old.

[2:16:10]

**Thonhoff, J.:** That's wonderful.

**Lowery, H.:** Small family, but a small world, and with computers and instant messaging, I can stay in touch with my daughter in Mexico daily.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Exactly.

**Lowery, H.:** You see her, you know. I've got a web cam. So --

**Thonhoff, J.:** (indiscernible)

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**Lowery, H.:** Yeah, so we can chat and reach out and touch.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Absolutely. Speaking of your daughters and your granddaughters, what do you think is important for the future generations to remember about K-25 and Oak Ridge?

**Lowery, H.:** That the generation that brought things into being in Oak Ridge has been referred to as the greatest generation. And I think they should look back and say, 'Hey, they carved a pathway,' one that we should continue to carve and to follow in the footsteps that we have set a pattern for the route that they are to go, and I hope that they will continue in it.

[2:17:30]

**Thonhoff, J.:** As far as the accomplishments at Oak Ridge, what do you think is -- first of all, your biggest accomplishment and then the biggest accomplishment of the plant city and --

**Lowery, H.:** My biggest accomplishment is being able to say here I've been here for 60 years and been involved in working at the plants and in the community and the county. And also the biggest accomplishment for the city of Oak Ridge has been the scientific knowledge they've been able to pass on to other -- not only other states but other countries and the capitulation with other nations that have come here to do research and sharing. I think that this Oak Ridge has shared more with the world than any other city the size of Oak Ridge.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And what did you like the very most?

**Lowery, H.:** The very most? I liked the freedom and the fact that Oak Ridge was a new town. It had not developed any cliques. Everyone was seemingly on equal footing. And you didn't look at someone and say, 'They come from the wrong side of the tracks or the wrong side of the tracks.' We were just a melting pot of people who were interested in doing what was done here.

[2:19:24]

**Thonhoff, J.:** What did you like the least?

**Lowery, H.:** What did I like the least? I'll have to think a while because most everything was kind of enriching to me. See, I was a country girl,

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although I had been to New York, solo, by myself, by the age of 16.

**Thonhoff, J.:** You were a pioneer.

**Lowery, H.:** And then have been in Washington and worked some for a congressman. I've enjoyed politics. I've been an election commissioner for Anderson County. And just been involved in everything, and I still like to stay involved and on top of things.

**Thonhoff, J.:** Wonderful. Are there any other stories or recollections that you have that you might want to add?

**Lowery, H.:** Nothing except it's been a great time to live here in Oak Ridge, a great time to be. And friends and my church family, they've all been added -- it's an added enrichment to my life. And if I had to do it again, yes, I would in a heartbeat.

**Thonhoff, J.:** I think we're done.

**Lowery, H.:** That does it?

[2:21:08]

[Off the Record]

[On the Record]

**Lowery, H.:** I would do it all over again. And also I would like to mention that I received the Army/Navy E award.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What is that?

**Lowery, H.:** That was for part working on the bomb. Also I earned the bronze A bomb pin.

**Thonhoff, J.:** What is that?

**Lowery, H.:** That's a pin that was awarded by the Manhattan Engineering or the Army, who was the Army/Navy E Award, with a letter and also the A bomb pin. If you worked for -- there was two. There was a silver and the bronze. And if you worked for so many months, you got the silver one or if it was a lesser time, you got a bronze one. And so I have those, plus that's something I'll pass on

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to my children. Yeah, with the letter and all my other employment records from different ones, letters of commendation for things that I've done, and my framed one dollar award.

**Thonhoff, J.:** You got that for the program you created for organizational --

**Lowery, H.:** Yes.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And tell me a little bit more about the pins.

[2:22:37]

**Lowery, H.:** The pins?

**Thonhoff, J.:** Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Lowery, H.:** Those were, as I say they were given to those who were employed on the atomic bomb project, the Manhattan Project. They each earned them -- all three plants were involved and so those were passed out in mass. We had a meeting of the shift, each shift, and they were presented on site. That was a long time ago -- we were addressed by an Army Colonel representing the Manhattan Engineer, Detachment of Engineers -- yeah, and he read his -- a message from General Leslie R. Groves. It was a good feeling. You knew that you had been involved in something that was truly worthwhile.

**Thonhoff, J.:** And you got acknowledged.

**Lowery, H.:** Uh-huh (affirmative). And so that's it?

**Crew:** Can you say the thing about you'd do again in a heartbeat one more time?

**Lowery, H.:** Yes. Looking back over the years that I've spent here in Oak Ridge, if asked, 'Would you do it again?' I'd say, 'Yes, in a heartbeat.'

[End of Interview]