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K-25 Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Marigrace Kirstowsky

Interviewer: Bart Callan

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Name/Org: John K. ... ENP/ Date: 4 Nov 05
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[crew talk]

Callan, B.: We're going to start out with the really hard questions first. Once again, go ahead and state your name and spell your name for us so we have that on camera.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: My name is Marigrace Kirstowsky. M-A-R-I-G-R-A-C-E K-I-R-S-T-O-W-S-K-Y.

Callan, B.: Let's talk a little bit about your background. Where were your born and you can expand on that if you'd like to.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Okay. I was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi and I went to school at Mississippi University for Women. I was recruited when I was a senior there and I was only 20 years old then. I came to Oak Ridge right after I graduated. Now, what else do you want to know about that?

Callan, B.: That's a good start. What degree did you get?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: A B.S. B.S.

Callan, B.: And how was it that you came? How did you come to work at K-25?

[1:01:40]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well -- .

Callan, B.: What attracted you to come here and how did you hear about it.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well, you have to know the background of that time. Both my brothers were in the service. Every -- almost everybody I knew was there. I knew -- I lost my father when I was 4 and Mother had gotten us through college, but I knew I had to make a living. And the recruiter down there offered me a pretty good job. So I, along with 3 of my classmates, decided to come up here until after the war, anyway.

Callan, B.: What were your first thoughts when you arrived out here at K-25 and at Oak Ridge.

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Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

I didn't arrive right at Oak Ridge. They used to process people in Knoxville, so I was interviewed over there and then put on what we call -- called then a "cattle car" and everybody came to Oak Ridge. And of course, it was mud; it was just terrible conditions every -- everything was muddy here. And I -- they assigned me to a little hole in the wall in one of the dormitories by myself. My -- my classmates had preceded me up here and they had gotten a better room. I was stuck down there for a while. Now, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to tell you what the dormitory looked like and that kind of thing, or?

[1:03:08]

Callan, B.:

No. You mentioned cattle cars. Tell me what a cattle car is.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, you know the kind of cars that carry horses around, you know? There all -- they're just wooden sides; there were seats along the sides and everybody else stood up, so you couldn't sit down in that limited space.

Callan, B.:

Okay. And so --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

They took -- .

Callan, B.:

-- they brought you up here in the cattle cars?

[1:03:34]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yeah and they dropped me at this dormitory. And I found out where my friends were, then, I decided I had to find a cafeteria and so I started out toward where I thought it was and -- through the mud -- and encountered a girl who had been here for a while. She directed me, and I had dinner with her, and then she invited me to go to her hangout. At night, she went to the -- what was it? -- the skating rink. And I said, "No, I think I'll go back to the dorm," which I did.

It was a dorm with a -- a community bath downstairs. My trunk had not arrived and I was limited to what I had in this little suitcase. There was no way to hang up anything, no hangars or anything like that, so most of the time, I put them over the back of a chair and just smoothed them until I could do something else. It was about a week. Mother had sent it, but it was a week or two

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before I got that trunk. Because, in the first place, not many people knew where lo -- where lo -- Oak Ridge was or even that it existed, so. The -- the next day, I was sent to K-25 and at that time, you two have to remember the background of women, did not qualify for any great jobs then. You know, you just took what the men gave you. And I was seated in this big room with a bunch of construction workers and this girl from New York with a loud voice came in and she said, "Marigrace!" And I said, "Yeah." And she said, "You come with me," so I did and I.

[1:05:31]

She was from New York. She had come down with her -- her boss and I stayed with them. I think they had some -- well, I know they had something to do with equipment records. That was really a big deal, keeping up with all the stuff that was coming into the plant. And in a little while, I was transferred out to a -- a better job and my -- if you want my job history, I can tell you that.

Callan, B.:

Yeah. Let's talk about your job history and what years you worked at the K-25 site.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Okay. Well, that was 1944 and I worked -- I worked for a number of bosses. In my career, I worked for 13. I s -- I spent the last 20 years in the president's office. There were 2 presidents I worked for, for the last 10 years over at Y-12.

[1:06:26]

But -- but some of the time at K-25, well, I particularly remember this one guy. He was from Houdaille-Hershey, I believe, and his name was Abdek (phonetic sp.). He an MIT engineer and had an MBA from Harvard. I learned a lot from him and he -- of course, having been sent down by his company, if -- you may remember and maybe you don't know that they canvassed the whole nation and they got some of the best people in all the corporations throughout the country. Abdek had a special ability, and he stayed here until after the bomb was dropped, and then he went back to his place.

I worked for him and he was succeeded by Bill Hume (phonetic sp.), a Harvard engineer, and I worked for him for a while, and then I got into Safety and Protection, and then I worked for the

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plant manager and -- of K-25 -- and then for the manager of Production who was over the three production plants, and then for the vice-president, and then for the president of the.

[1:07:56]

But in between -- at first, my first boss, I didn't even mention it to you. He was an architect. And his specialty was funeral homes, (laughs) but they weren't building many funeral homes during the Depression, I don't think. But he would come to work in this navy blue suit with a Hamburg hat and spats and all that mud and a cane, you know. So, I remember him because he was so different.

Do I have a favorite boss? I don't know. I liked them all. I was lucky. I had very good bosses. I learned a lot -- a little girl from Mississippi -- I learned so much from them.

[1:08:46]

Callan, B.:

Let's talk a little bit more about women at K-25. What sort of job roles did women have at K-25?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

They had to go into the administrative area. That's about all that was open to them. Of course, if they were a janitor or something like that, females could get into that.

[1:09:05]

Since I got my degree, I had planned to be a schoolteacher. I very well could've fitted into a training program, but they didn't even consider it, you see. They called me -- at the end, I was secretary to the president -- they don't use a secretary anymore; they use executive assistants. That's what they are now.

Callan, B.:

What would you say the ratio of workers was? Was there typically more women out at the site, or more men out at the site?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Oh, more men. More men. Yeah.

Callan, B.:

Did they have any special dress codes or anything for women?

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Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

No, no. I remember I had on a little blue dress and all -- all these construction workers were around me, you know. I was the only one that had a dress on. Okay.

[1:10:09]

Callan, B.:

Okay. If people inquire what kind of work was done at K-25, how would you describe the work that was done out there?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

It was a gaseous diffusion plant. They -- they built it -- unusual thing about the K-25 plant is there was never a pilot plant made of it, you know. Usually, you have a pilot plant first and -- and just like the Panama Canal, it worked. They turned it on and it worked. Divine intervention, I think.

Callan, B.:

In the interviews, I forget, I think maybe it was Wilcox, one of the interviews I did was related to the Panama Canal. You said what they achieved out here was equivalent of --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

The Panama Canal.

Callan, B.:

-- building the Panama Canal three times over for three years --

[1:11:11]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yeah. That's right.

Callan, B.:

-- and he really wanted to let folks know what a momentous achievement it was.

As far as your personal recollections of the time you spent at Oak Ridge and K-25, what are some of your favorite memories?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, I, of course, worked with people from all over the country. They -- they were -- my bosses were in states like West Virginia, New York, Ohio. It -- the thing I remember about it is we were all so young; we were all so eager to do something for our nation, and we -- we worked 6 days a week in all of that mud, we didn't mind it. We went to work the next day with enthusiasm. And I just remember the camaraderie of the whole time that we were all working toward a goal. And there were wonderful people, too. I'm just amazed at -- I mean, they're -- I made lasting friendships; I've had them all my life, you know, from that first time.

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[1:12:29]

I was impressed with -- we had so much technical ability around, you know, that my -- I met my husband when I was -- in '47, we got married.

Callan, B.: Why don't you expand a little bit about the story of how you met your husband --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well -- .

Callan, B.: -- and I guess you met while working?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: We worked in -- I worked -- that time, I was in Safety and Protection and he was an engineer. He had gone to graduate from Michigan and then he went to Chrysler Institute, and it was when Chry -- that Chrysler couldn't no longer use them; they sent them to Oak Ridge.

And I met him -- and there were about 14 of them and they were all hired into the same division that I was in and. Ed and I -- I think he was engaged to somebody when I met him, I didn't plan to (laughs) -- I hadn't planned to break that up; it just happened, you know. And I remember the night that the -- that -- that was the first date I had with him, when the Germans surrendered. Yeah.

[1:13:45]

Callan, B.: Okay, and --.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: And you want to hear about our seeking a place to live and all of that?

Callan, B.: I'd love to hear about that. Please.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Okay. We were married in the Chapel on the Hill, which was the only church on the -- on the premise, and it was utilized a lot because we were all young and at the marriageable age, you know. And they would have somebody at 9:00, somebody at 10, (laughs)

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somebody at 11, like that, you know, so everybody used the other flowers, which chipped in everybody, and the flowers were the ones the first ones had used. We gave them some money for it.

And then the -- the hard thing -- part thing happened. We couldn't find a place to live because we were just getting married and there were -- there were no houses because we didn't have children, you see. So we stayed a month in the garden -- in the guest house. You may have heard about that; the old Alexander.

[1:14:45]

Callan, B.:

I haven't. Please describe it.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Okay. We stayed there for a month and -- and then we went and stayed with someone Ed had given -- had loaned her some money or something. We went out to her place. That didn't work out, so we went back to the guest house. And finally, I -- I told my boss I just didn't think I could go on that way. I was dragging all these wedding gifts around and it was just a big mess, you know. And he got us an E-2 apartment and we, unfortunately, got the one with the coal bin on the back. So that coal dust permeated everything.

So we were there about two years and then they built the Garden Apartments and they were like a heaven on earth. We went there. It took me several years to get the coal dust out of my clothes and a lot of it, I threw away. But after that, we stayed there for a while, and my husband loved apartment living; he didn't wanna build a house. And then my mother had to come and live with us, so he was all for building a house then. And Mother helped us, too.

[1:15:57]

Callan, B.:

When was that?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

That was '50. '50. No, it was more than that. We built our house in '59. We still live in the -- live in the same house.

Callan, B.:

So you were saying it was 1950 that (indiscernible).

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yeah. 1950 is when -- well, 47', see -- and then '50 is when we went into the Garden Apartments and we stayed there 9 years --

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Callan, B.: Okay.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: -- and then we went to a -- our house. And I continued to work because there was no reason -- we did not have children. My husband was not interested in adopting, so. We -- I continued to work and they continued to let me work, you know. (laughs) When I retired, I was 60. And since then, I've been working with retirees, trying to get better pensions and all that kind of stuff. Now, I'm trying to go back to bridge and I'm so far behind everybody else (laughs); I think I'll just give it up. (laughter)

[1:17:05]

Well, first we -- when we retired, we did a lot of traveling. We went -- I'm doing this and I don't mean to be (laughs).

Callan, B.: It's okay.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Then we -- we had wonderful trips. We've had a -- a good life. I cannot wish for any better.

Callan, B.: Thinking back to what the initial working conditions are, you were there during the Manhattan Project era, what was it like communicating around classified information and communicating around the issue of secrecy. Your husband, you both worked at -- did you guys talk about work at home?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: No, you -- you didn't. My husband, of course, knew what was going on because he was an engineer; I did not. And it was just never a problem. I -- I don't know. I -- I had to protect top secret documents, secret documents, other sensitive information, all of my working life. It was never a problem. We had -- someone asked me, "Well, didn't you have a bunch of kooks around occasionally?" Well, you did. You always did, but they were always reviewed by the medical department as well as the security department. And like I said, it was just a great big bunch of people working together, trying to do the best we could.

[1:18:52]

Callan, B.: So during -- .

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Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I still am a flag waver.

Callan, B.: (laughs) It seems that everybody just worked there and everybody just went through this era, I mean, your peers, they have very positive recollections of everything that went on here --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Yeah.

Callan, B.: -- pretty much.

[1:19:08]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I didn't -- you asked me if I knew. I didn't, but this one boss of mine, I did mention him to you -- I was sitting at my desk one day and he came in and said, "I just want you to know we'll be making the papers in about 3 days." And I didn't ask him any more about it, but that's when the news came out that we had dropped the bomb.

Callan, B.: What was that day like? Do you remember that day well?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Just a day like any day, no -- no excitement or anything. I -- I knew that after that happened, that he would be leaving, of course. And it wasn't -- it was a day like all days. Nobody got terribly excited about it, you know. We were just thankful.

Callan, B.: How do you think that history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome? How do you think history will look upon it, or what should be noted for history?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I think that those men did a fantastic job! I don't know how the nation could ever thank them enough. And yet, I know they won't. I know they won't because you have too many people around condemning atomic energy, you know. We tried after the war, you know, to move it into the workplace, other places, and so forth, but you -- like you say, there are a lot of kooks everywhere. And they just don't know what they've done by resisting it. I -- I don't know.

[1:21:02]

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We were never afraid of it like a lot of people were. Ed and I have lived all our lives here, just about, you know. We were never afraid we were going to be subjected to some sort of nuclear reaction or nuclear bomb or anything. You know, we just -- we just didn't. We knew that they were the most cautious, safety-minded people in the world. I mean, they -- they just bent overboard to keep it safe for us, even, for the country.

Callan, B.:

Tell me a little bit about the health and safety at the workplace. Were there health facilities available? Did you get regular checkups?

[1:21:48]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yes. We did. We had -- we called it a dispensary and they -- of course, Ed got checked more than I did because he went into areas that were more sensitive. I was in an office most of the time. Although I did -- my bosses always arranged tours for me so I would know what they were talking about and, in fact, that's one thing about those men of that time. They stretched you in every way. They stretched, they challenged. That was just the way they were. And they made us rise above ourselves, you know.

[1:22:35]

You don't want all this. (laughs)

Callan, B.:

No, I do! It's exactly what I want. I'm just looking at my questions. I mean, you're giving me so much information. I just want to make sure I'm not asking a redundant question, but this is exactly the type of stuff I want to get.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, if you read that, you'll get some of my other stuff.

[1:22:50]

Callan, B.:

What did you like most and what did you like least about working at K-25?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, I was out at K-25 a long time. I enjoyed the relationships. I was very happy of the progression I made up the ladder. I -- I -- Mother kept calling me all the time, "They want you to come back, teach school in your hometown," you know. I couldn't because I

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could see that I had already established a ladder of what I wanted to do. And my hometown was not particularly spectacular. I wasn't eager to get back there. The thing I liked about K-25? There was a challenge almost every day. I liked it.

[1:23:45]

Callan, B.:

Any dislikes?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Oh, I can't really say (laughs) I disliked anything about it. It was - I don't -- I don't know that I did. I'm just not hard to please, I guess.

Callan, B.:

If you could relive anything about the years of your career, is there anything you would change or live differently?

[1:24:16]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, I think -- of course, I did progress up. I think I could've gone faster (laughs) and -- had to wait till somebody else left, you know, so you could get a job. But I wish that later on -- well, it's later, you don't want that. I was always happy there. I don't -- I don't know what to tell you in that I would've changed anything. I wouldn't. I was happy and my husband was, too, and we had a happy life.

Callan, B.:

Well, then, that's the answer I was looking for. You don't have to change anything. (laughs)

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Now, if -- if -- if you -- I thought first you were going to ask about associations with Knoxville and other places like that, but you aren't interested in that, are you? They didn't really come -- they didn't really accept us too much.

[1:25:19]

Callan, B.:

Let's talk about that because I do want to talk about that. Tell me a little bit about what life was like when you were behind a fence. Were you able to come and go freely? And what were the perceptions of the people who didn't work there?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yes. And we were so eager to build our town -- we built our own golf course. Ed and I moved out there because it was close to the

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golf course and we love golf. And we had bridge clubs; we had dances; we had bowling; we had -- everything was offered to -- to us here, so we had a playhouse and we had a -- you know, all of the -- Oak Ridge is a town that's very -- it's a little town, but it has all of the qualities of a larger town, and we all built it ourselves. We got little help from the surrounding areas.

Knoxville, well, they told us, you know, because Knoxville doesn't accept you. They didn't accept TVA for years and years and years, you know. They were insulated people. I -- I don't know. We bought some things over there; some of the stores. I love clothes; I'd go over there and buy 'em. And we'd go there to eat a lot, and to the Tennessee Theater. We'd go to UT to the Clarence Brown Theater and other places.

[1:26:59]

And I was involved in an organization called Secretaries Association, and their primary aim was to improve the quality of secretaries. And I did that and we had -- we had an exam and I was trying to lift all of the secretaries. We all took this exam, and we had, at one time, had more CPSs than any other place in the country. CPS, so we had a wonderful staff. I used to tell my boss, you know, "I think I could run this plant with these secretaries." (laughs) And he laughed at me, of course. (laughs) They were so talented in everything.

Callan, B.:

When you've traveled outside of Oak Ridge, what were the perceptions of Knoxville residents? Did they treat you the same?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Oh, they endured us. Yeah. They endured us. And -- of course, they were not -- they were very happy when the government did not sell the houses out here as soon as we thought they should. And they did not mind at all having some of our employees going over there and build big houses, you know, (indiscernible) in some of their areas. And they were happy to have -- come out here and make their livelihood and bring the money back to Knoxville.

[1:28:40]

We lost a lot of good people that way because they -- they wanted better houses and -- and they just decided to go ahead. They had

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children and they -- they wanted to go over there and get established.

What did you ask me? I -- I -- I'm inclined to wander, so.

Callan, B.:

Oh, that's okay. Just the perceptions of people that -- .

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

You know, they were not -- they were not unkind. They just thought we were kind of -- a little bit lower class than they were. I don't -- (laughs) so. Little did they know! (laughs)

[1:29:26]

Callan, B.:

Were they -- did you ever -- ?

[crew talk]

[End tape 1, begin tape 2]

[2:00:05]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

-- anniversary of the United Nations, I think. And he could take -- he could take us everywhere for that. We enjoyed it very much.

[crew talk]

Callan, B.:

No, actually, everything you've talked about so far is related to a topic I wanted to cover with you.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yeah? Just kinda letting me talk? (laughs)

Callan, B.:

Right. Kind of checking up as we go through.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, I sound like I thought I was so great. I didn't. I worked hard. I worked so hard that sometimes I would come home from work and have to rest before I could start dinner, you know? It was hard work.

Callan, B.:

Let's talk --.

[2:01:07]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, if you remember, that was before copy made -- copiers, before computers and everything. Of course, I remember when the

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first computers we bought and we set up a building at K-25 to house them. And we were constantly having to create systems to handle a certain thing, too, you know. That was interesting. I don't know. For the first few years of my tenure, I guess I did an awful lot of typing. By the time I started working for the president, I was doing very little of it, but I had a word processing graph -- group -- that would do most of the stuff. I just gave it to them, and after he told me what to write, I would write it and give it to them.

Callan, B.:

Did you have to work long hours?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Yeah, yeah! Of course, we worked 6 days a week during this early time, and sometimes a lot of overtime. And we were constantly trying to fix our home, you know, and I had a lot of duties in that respect. I was trying to go to this organization I started, you know, I would have to be involved in that.

[2:02:43]

I liked to go and have my hair fixed and so (laughs) one day, I -- one time, I -- one afternoon, I would have to go to that and that irritated my husband, you know, 'cause he had to wait for his dinner that long time. I'm just a hard worker; I've always been a hard worker, and if something needed to be done, I wanted to do it. I -- I probably didn't do it as well as a lot of other people could have, but I gave it my best.

Callan, B.:

After the Manhattan Project, how did things over at K-25 change? What was K-25's role after the Manhattan Project?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Well, they still tried to implu -- improve the gaseous diffusion plant, you know, they wanted to enrich it to 99.9% or something like that, you know. And we -- of course, in the jobs I was in -- the first president I worked for, he wanted to integrate all four plants: Paducah, K-25, Y-12, and X-10 into a cohesive group. And, you know, like put all the engineering together from these various groups and have a super-duper engineering division and that kind of thing.

[2:04:15]

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We had to cha -- I was constantly writing manuals on how to do something. That was a part of my job all the way through my -- my work history, you know. I had an office guide and I had a classified information book, and we tried to establish procedures that made it easier for the people. And my bosses let me do it, let me do stuff like that. Like I said, they stretched you.

Callan, B.:

It sounds like an interesting job, writing manuals, because a lot of the stuff you were writing manuals for were for devices that never existed before.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

They hadn't. They hadn't. And it was so much more efficient to -- to teach them how you wanted it rather than -- my bosses had to assign certain things and it was so much better to teach them to do it rather than their having to send it on up there and we'd have to redo it, see, in acceptable form.

[2:05:34]

How -- how did it change? It got more -- it got easier to -- to improve. I don't know. I don't know what to tell you what else.

Callan, B.:

I guess the facility wasn't shut down, but it was put on standby status in 1964. What did you do when the facility was put on standby? Did your work change at all then?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

I moved to K -- Y-12 in '62, I believe it was. And I don't know what year they put it on standby. Do you?

Callan, B.:

'64 is what I have.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

'64? Okay. So I was already over there. And my boss had moved over there because he wanted to be closer to the town. I tell you one change, we had so much media attention, you know, and they -- they wanted to know a lot more about the place, of course. Before that, we had pretty much done our own public relations, you know. But we had to, at that time, interact more with the media and DOE and first, DOE pretty much approved everything Carbide wanted to do, you know, but then they -- because of influence of Washington, I suppose, and well, it just got to be not quite as comfortable a place as it was there at the last.

[2:07:38]

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Callan, B.: Okay.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Although we hired a public relations director and we hired a new legal man, staff, and I think we did our (laughs) public relations about as well as they -- we did after we had that staff. I don't know. I don't know what to tell ya.

Callan, B.: (laughs)

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I -- I'm.

Callan, B.: Let's get back to your career and your work history. What was your most challenging assignment and what were your most significant accomplishments in your career at K-25?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well, I suppose, like I said, trying to set up systems and -- and procedures and so forth like that and trying to teach people to do things. And my -- in my -- you want to know about K-25 and I keep going to Y-12 -- I keep going up to the ladder part.

[2:08:42]

Callan, B.: That's fine.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Okay, well then, when -- when we moved to Y-12, Dr. Larsen (phonetic sp.) came in and threw a book on my desk and he says, "We're moving to Y-12. I want you to take this book along and come back Monday morning and tell me what furniture we need to furnish a whole suite of offices." So I -- I worked all weekend on it trying to do something and I got back and I thought, "Well, now he's kind of a staid individual. He probably wants the really, you know, the furniture -- old-type furniture, you know." I showed it to him. He says, "No." Says, "I think we 'oughta get this." New desk and so I had to go back home and try to work again on that. But he let an architect work with me and we had, I guess, about 6 or 7 offices in his bailiwick.

[2:09:58]

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But more than that, we had a cafeteria, but my boss would frequently want to have visitors in and he would want to -- me to find out where I could get food and get it in there for them to eat. Many times, I took it in from my home and I took my dishes in there so I would have something to feed them in. He let me have a refrigerator, and he sent somebody to the store with me occasionally to purchase things. And I had to have a place for -- we had a big vault where we kept all the classified stuff.

[2:10:48]

That was in the back of the suite, of course, and -- and then I had -- we had to serve coffee to everybody. I remember when we integrated the plant. And this was a hard time for -- for us in the administrative area because Washington would send down these black people. And they loved to put you down, you know. I would offer them a cup of coffee and ask 'em. "I like my coffee hot and black," you know. They -- they -- they were really -- it -- you had to keep your temper on this. [11:28]

And when they started to be integrated into the plants, they were put in high-level places so you -- so people could see that we were integrating, you know, and so -- so they were put into services. And what happened is they would do something and then we would do it over. It just went on like that until we got 'em trained.

I'm off the subject. What did you wanna know?

Callan, B.:

You're not. You're actually not off the subject.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

(laughs)

Callan, B.:

It was a subject I was going to go into and I was going to talk about minorities at K-25. And what --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

Really?

Callan, B.:

-- and what sort of role they played.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace:

At K-25, they were mostly in the janitorial staff. I don't remember any of 'em ever succeeding much further than that at K-25. I said in my notes over there and you'll see, that the first time I came up against this resistance of the races, we hired a girl that had -- she

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came from Hawaii. And you remember that Hawaii integrated a lot faster than this country did. And she came into our work force, and she started making waves about why this black girl had to clean the restrooms, you know, why -- why didn't we give her a better job than that, you know. She was just -- we didn't know what to do, what to say.

[2:13:28]

We did. We promoted them. They did okay. And I had some wonderful friends in the black race. I had one woman who lost her husband, work for me in my house because I had to have help, and we helped her. She had five children; her husband was a janitor -- not a janitor, plumber. And she have five children and she worked for me all this time, and she sent them all to college. She had one that was a Olympic medal winner; one that was a football hero at UT; one that was a teacher; they all just did so well. I felt so happy that I was able to help her.

Callan, B.: Back at K-25. You were kind of an administrative area and working with management. Were there any unions?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Oh, yes!

Callan, B.: Any tensions that ever occurred?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Oh, yeah, we had an awful lot of negotiating to do with the unions, and they had -- we put in our best team always because they were pretty rough. They're, you know, wanted to get what they wanted. Although we never had any strikes and stuff like that, you know, that I remember. There might've been. No, I just don't remember. There was no problem working with the unions like you had in the automobile industry and places like that.

Callan, B.: So people just seemed to cooperate better.

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: They did. Yeah, and -- and when they weren't doing negotiations, you know, they got -- our people seemed to get along with them and, you know, they were always meeting in some room and they would pitch pennies at the wall and -- and I thought, "Gee whiz, is that negotiating?" They would -- I think they went out to eat together. I -- I think that -- as I remember it. That's not telling you anything. You have to get these men to tell you about that.

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[2:15:57]

Callan, B.: Well, that depends --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: 'Cause they were -- they were pitching pennies against the wall, you know. When you'd reach a stalemate, they still would get -- they would eventually get back together, and, I don't know. I was just a very small peg in the whole thing, very small. They could've done without me, but they didn't.

Callan, B.: Do you want to talk a little bit more about living in Oak Ridge and what was the social environment like? I mean some of the different things you got to do for fun?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well, I told you, we played golf. We belong to the oldest dance club here in town. I've worked with the "Y" and I've worked with -- oh, and when I was working at K- -- Y-12, we have a -- a community arts center here which is outstanding. And I used to rent pictures of the some of the local artists for our suite of offices out there. That was one thing we thought we could do to help 'em. And Ed and I have been members of the playhouse forever, and I think they're about the oldest playhouse in this area -- this part of the country or something. We played bridge a lot then, you know, we did an awful lot in each other's homes; didn't have to go anywhere else to do it. We -- we had dinner clubs and stuff like that. I don't know. We felt we were very lucky to have had the opportunity to socialize with 'em.

[2:18:05]

I was -- I used to do the social activities of the country club. And that was fun. I'm really a social animal, but I -- I like to work hard, too. I'll play as hard as I work.

Callan, B.: There you go! You gotta be balanced, you know?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Yeah. (laughs)

[2:18:32]

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Callan, B.: Better to sharpen your sword sometimes; then to work hard again.

I'm going to get into the grand finale questions, sort of like the broad picture type questions and you can answer however you wish. Describe what future generations remember about K-25. What should be preserved? What were the great accomplishments (indiscernible) here? What should be acknowledged in history?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Well, I think Harry Truman said it right, "We won the war." We were gonna lose at least a million people if we had to invade Japan. And that was -- nobody will admit to that now, but they should be forever thankful that they aren't speaking Japanese, and also German or something, you know. I think that they should [be] very proud of what their government did in setting up that and be very proud that it worked. And we tried very hard to make it -- in peacetime, we wanted to help that along, too. I hope they will remember that (laughs), you know, Brokaw called them, "The Greatest Generation." Well, that was the generation that built that plant too, and they deserve a lot of credit.

[2:20:19]

Callan, B.: That was beautiful. Thank you! Is there anything else you'd like to discuss, say, or expand upon before we wrap up this interview?

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Just forgive me for running on with, you know -- just yelling.

Callan, B.: (indiscernible)

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: 'Cause like I said, I was such a small cog in the wheel, just small. I don't really have anything of lasting value for you.

Callan, B.: No, you actually do because your observations are very significant --

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Uh-huh.

Callan, B.: -- and you've been able to give -- when you do a task like oral history, there are so many different perspectives that you have to look at. And it's not just the technical documents, blueprints, or procedures that are important. And actually, that stuff is already preserved.

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[2:21:03]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Yeah, that's right.
Callan, B.: What we're trying to capture here --
Kirstowsky, Marigrace: The flavor.
Callan, B.: -- the flavor, the human aspect, and so.

[2:21:08]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I hope you'll read my write-up over there --
Callan, B.: I did.
Kirstowsky, Marigrace: -- because I did a summary on it in the very back.
Callan, B.: Okay.
Kirstowsky, Marigrace: I gave 'em everything I could think of that they might want, you know.
Callan, B.: No, I definitely will and I want to thank you for coming out --

[2:21:22]

Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Oh, you're welcome!
CALLAN, BART: -- really, your contribution has been significant and I've really enjoyed interviewing you.
Kirstowsky, Marigrace: Oh, thank you. (laughs)
Callan, B.: The pleasure's been all mine.
Kirstowsky, Marigrace: And if you got -- if you got pictures of me with my hair up like this, give them to me and let me destroy them. (laughter)

[End of Interview]