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**K-25 Oral History Interview**

**Date: 5/18/05**

**Interviewee: Ruby Shanks**

**Interviewer: Bart Callan**

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[1:00:09]

**Callan, B.:** Let me start out with the hard hitting questions first and that's go ahead and state your name for me and spell your name out so that we have it down because we like to have it saved on the tape.

**Shanks, R.:** Okay. My name is Ruby, R-U-B-Y, M. Shanks, S-H-A-N-K-S.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. And where were you born?

**Shanks, R.:** I was born here in Tennessee, Morgan County.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. Do you want to expand a little bit on your childhood life, I guess?

**Shanks, R.:** Well, up until the time I came to Oak Ridge I don't remember a lot of stuff.

**Callan, B.:** Okay.

**Shanks, R.:** But we lived on a little small farm. We raised what we ate and that's hay and corn for the stock and that's about it.

[1:02:17]

**Callan, B.:** Okay. And so basically it was just farming work that you did before coming out here to --

**Shanks, R.:** Uh-huh. My daddy worked in the coal mines and he farmed.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. And did you attend high school and did you graduate?

**Shanks, R.:** Well, I did here in Oak Ridge. I didn't graduate with my class, but I graduated later.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. Did you go to college or university?

**Shanks, R.:** No, I didn't.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. So what prompted you and your family to come out to Oak Ridge and work for K-25?

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**Shanks, R.:** Well, when my daddy heard about Oak Ridge, he was really excited about it, you know. So he came and put in his application and he got hired so we came straight to Oak Ridge.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. How old were you then?

**Shanks, R.:** I was 13.

**Callan, B.:** And what was your dad doing down at Oak Ridge?

[1:03:09]

**Shanks, R.:** Well, he was a farmer. They put him in charge of -- the first place we lived was the old Hackworth House. It was up next to the new golf course and they had -- The government had built a chicken farm there so we took care of the chickens. We raised chickens for the government.

**Callan, B.:** What -- you told me how old you were, but what year was it that you came out?

**Shanks, R.:** October, 1943.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. What did you first think about this place when you first arrived out here?

**Shanks, R.:** Oh, I thought it was wonderful. I loved it.

**Callan, B.:** What did it look like?

**Shanks, R.:** It's just -- of course, we were on the farm and we didn't do much running around because we were busy all the time. My daddy worked long hours. But when we got out, it was nothing but a mud hole. The streets -- we had boardwalk sidewalks, the streets. I remember Tennessee when I went to high school. It was still just not paved -- just mud -- so.

[1:04:19]

**Callan, B.:** So, most of the time -- tell me about the chicken farm.

**Shanks, R.:** Okay. Like I said, we raised chickens and we fed the soldiers. I was here during the whole time that the soldiers were here and so we -- my dad took care of the chickens and we killed chickens and dressed them for the soldiers. And I remember one time that my

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daddy got an order for -- seems to me it was like a thousand chickens by Sunday afternoon and my brother was eight years old, of course, I was thirteen. The other two kids were too small to help. But anyway, they paid us fifty cents an hour to pluck chickens and they had a conveyor like they installed and my daddy would cut their heads off and he'd dip them in the hot water and then they'd come on down to us and we'd pluck them and my mom was on the other and she did the dressing. She cut them up. So when dad would get caught up he would come down and help her. So -- and at that time my dad only made 75 cents an hour. So we thought we were rich. We had all that money in our pocket and they paid us -- I don't remember if they paid us a check or if they paid us cash. I just don't remember.

[1:05:41]

**Callan, B.:**

Did your fingers hurt after plucking a thousand chickens?

**Shanks, R.:**

Nah, we was used to it. We raised chickens on our little farm and we killed them and put them, you know, chickens. Of course, we didn't have a freezer back then, but I can remember mom even canning chickens, you know, cooking them and putting them in jars and canning them. We canned about everything we ate at that time.

**Callan, B.:**

And what kind of work was your father doing out at -- oh, he was running the farm as well, correct?

**Shanks, R.:**

Yeah. Um-hmm.

**Callan, B.:**

And then you said that your husband also worked at K-25 in the boiler room?

**Shanks, R.:**

Yeah. My husband I'm married to now. The father of my children died in '69.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. So tell me about how you met your husband.

[1:06:25]

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, he was -- he lived around here. He lived out next to Clinton, you know, he'd lived there all his life. So he came to Oak Ridge and went to room for Ron Anderson. And in the farm houses where we lived, the cisterns and the water supply was done away with. They filled up the cisterns because, you know, we just

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couldn't drink it. And they hold our water and after we got through with the chicken farm, they moved dad around quite a bit. They moved us to the Frills Cabin down on the Clinch River. And so, well it's a lake, but it was a river back then. And we took care of cattle for the government and the cattle were also slaughtered for the soldiers and they had a slaughtering pen up from the chicken farm back in those woods where that subdivision is now overlooking the lake?

**Callan, B.:**

Okay.

**Shanks, R.:**

And that's where they had the slaughtering house. And so we lived there and we were really busy. We didn't get out and do anything because we were taught this on a farm, I mean a ranch. We had horses and cattle and we'd help herd the cattle and bring them in, you know, so it was -- really is fun time. We really enjoyed it. We loved every minute of it.

[1:07:52]

So my daddy took care of that for a long, long time and I guess until -- we probably lived there until the -- I don't know if we lived there until the city was open or not. But anyway, we attended school and we had to walk. We attended school. The first school we started at was the little Scarborough School. And it was there on Bethel Valley Road, you know, where you go down into K-25 park and down toward Frills Cabin. We went to school there and I started in the seventh grade there and so we had to walk from the Frills Cabin to Scarborough. We didn't have any buses. But then when we -- when I graduated the eighth grade there, they sent me to Robertsville Middle School and then we had a bus then, but we had to walk all the way to the Y-12 red light, where you go up to Y-12? We had to walk there to get a bus. So -- and I can remember my girlfriend and I, we -- when we'd get off the bus, the soldier would remember, you know, and they'd pick us up and take us home. And so we'd wait around every evening for someone to come along and we'd crawl in the car with three or four of them. They'd take us home. But the little kids, we'd walk them to Scarborough and they went there until they closed that school down. And then they were moved to Gamble Valley. It was Gamble Valley back then.

[1:09:48]

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And after I went to Robertsville, of course, when I finished middle school there, I went to high school. And at that point, the roads were still -- that Tennessee Avenue, we'd walk down there and they had the Center Theater, you know, and after the movie we were all just mud, you know, so it was quite a while before they got it all paved. They had the main streets paved like Bethel Valley and, you know, the streets, roads going down to the plants.

[crew talk]

**Callan, B.:**

Here in this area it was early. It was in 1943 -- it was before K-25 was built. I mean, did you see any of the construction of K-25 occurring?

[1:10:39]

**Shanks, R.:**

We saw some of it when we would -- there was places where we couldn't go. They wouldn't let us, you know. But there was a road that went up to the Frills Cabin and round the hill and we can get down there and we could see things, but then they blocked us off and wouldn't let us go. So we didn't get -- you know, really you couldn't get out and run around too much round the town. They were pretty strict about that. So that's why we just -- and we were kids too, you know, and when it got where my daddy could drive and take us places we seen a little bit more. Now, I can remember seeing Y-12 and the construction there, but, you know, I didn't have any idea what they were doing or anything.

**Callan, B.:**

From the point of view of a kid at that time, what did you think about all of the -- I guess all of this instant activity and just all these people and all that's going on?

[1:11:37]

**Shanks, R.:**

I was just fascinated by it. You know, there were so many people. There was just so many people and the house that we live in now was occupied by a colonel and he -- he was the first one that lived in it when it was set up and then one more family bought it when the city became open. And I've got a fallout shelter underneath my house. He built a fall out shelter. When we moved there he had, oh, they were little lights with candles in them and little lights with flashlights and all kinds of water and he'd left a lot of stuff because he was serious about building and it's just a little hole back under

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there, but still, it would protect you. Of course, that was later years, but we moved -- when they finally moved us out of the -- we moved to another house after they left Frills Cabin we moved to a house up in -- it was right there next to the cemetery where the Oak Ridge Memorial Garden is. And it was -- I forgot what it was called, but then there were quite a few families lived around there then. I can remember Carters and Whaleys and Greenes live right down in that section. And I think they worked in Oak Ridge, maybe grocery stores or construction. I don't know.

[1:13:24]

But going back, we got off the subject of my first husband. When they filled up the wells where we couldn't get water, the way I met him is we had a big old maple tree out in the yard. This was down at the Frills Cabin. And they built a bench and they had us two barrels. They had a water barrel, they brought us fresh water every day and they had brought us ice every day and that's where we got our water. And see, we didn't have inside plumbing neither. We had to use that water, we had to use it for bathing, washing, and everything. So they filled it up every day. We had plenty of water and they wouldn't let us get water nowhere. I mean, we weren't to go down in the river and get water or anything. That's all the water we had.

**Callan, B.:**

Did they tell you why?

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, they just said, you know, that it could be contaminated. And that's all they ever said. And the river, we had -- back then it's not like it is now. We fished that river. Us kids would go down there and, oh man, we caught fish in that river and it's just right down below the house, you know, we could just walk down there. Me and my brother, he was eight when we moved there. And so my older brother was in the navy. He was 19. Then I had a 15 year old sister and myself and then an eight-year-old brother and a five-year-old sister and a two-year-old. So they was six of us. So, we were just really happy down at Frills Cabin. It was really nice. And then after that they moved us up to the other one by the cemetery and then after that we moved into town.

[1:15:13]

By that time, I was married because I got married in '47. So my husband and I, the father of the children, we moved full five Robertsville Road and he worked for, you know, they called it Oak

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Ridge Housing back then too and he worked for them. So, you couldn't get a house. I mean, if you didn't have a good sized family you couldn't get a big house like our house now. A "D" house. They had -- you had to have -- and the D houses, too, were more for the higher paid people like, you know, -- foremen and everything, scientists and doctors and then the other houses. So, it was like the B house and the C house and everything, it was based on your income and how many was in the family.

[1:16:10]

So, my husband, after we first got married, they gave us a two-bedroom house down on Robertsville, which was unthinkable. People just didn't get a two-bedroom house. But it's because he worked for Oak Ridge Housing. They worked out something. And then I lived in Oak Ridge until, let's see, I had my first child in '48 and I remember the day that they made the city open, opened the city. It -- my son was born in '48 and the city was opened in '49. And I remember that so well because it was his birthday -- nineteenth day of March, 1949. And they had a big parade and it was this real exciting time for all of us. And then we lived in Oak Ridge, I continued living in Oak Ridge right up until -- well, I moved out a couple of times but came right back so. We've been in Oak Ridge all my life really.

[1:17:20]

**Callan, B.:**

Being from Tennessee and from this area, I mean, was there, I guess, sort of differences between the people that were from here and the people that came here from up north and different areas?

**Shanks, R.:**

Oh yeah. Yeah. We had lot of our teachers were -- wasn't Tennesseans. Yeah, very much, you know. The northern people are really different from us. I mean, not in the way that -- well, they just different. I don't know, you know.

**Callan, B.:**

Different in a good way? Different in a bad way?

**Shanks, R.:**

Yeah, different in a good way. I mean, you know, you could tell a Tennessean when you met him, usually, because we talk country and, you know, we had people from everywhere here at that point. I mean there were people from, oh, just all over the country.

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**Callan, B.:**

Was the atmosphere around Oak Ridge and K-25, the people that were doing up there, I mean, was there closeness among people? Was it --

[1:18:22]

**Shanks, R.:**

I feel like it was. And I feel like that, you know we were all here and we really didn't know what was going on. I mean, like my husband, my husband now. When he came to K-25, of course, he was in the boiler room and what he did was not anything that you can talk about or anything like that, but the people didn't know. My first husband, he went to work in Oak Ridge plant later and he worked in, I forget the name of it, 137 I believe is what he called it. I believe that's the building. But he never did tell us what he was doing. He never, you know, of course I didn't ask him, but it was just real hush up. You just didn't talk about your work.

**Callan, B.:**

While you were out here, did you ever meet any famous people or notable --

**Shanks, R.:**

No.

**Callan, B.:**

Scientists, generals?

**Shanks, R.:**

No, not really.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. If someone were just to walk up and ask you what was the work that was done here, how would you describe it? Say someone has no background about K-25 or Oak Ridge?

[1:19:41]

**Shanks, R.:**

Well the only thing I could -- to say is what I learned later that I knew that they were making the atomic bomb, but that I learned later in life. Then I knew nothing about what was going on.

**Callan, B.:**

Was there any talk or speculation or anything going on? Let's say if someone were to ask somebody that was more involved in working at K-25, did they give you weird things like oh, we're putting the fire in, you know lightening bugs or did they kind of tell you silly stories about what they were doing?

**Shanks, R.:**

Not a lot. And like I say, I was -- the early days of Oak Ridge I was just young. But I can remember when my kids collected lightening bugs and brought them in to Oak Ridge and they paid

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them for them and they really enjoyed doing that. And then I can remember one time, too, that -- this is when we moved out of Oak Ridge for a little while -- one of my sons, he always has loved terrapins. And they would collect these terrapins and they had, oh, they had gobs of them and they'd build them a little pen back in the woods. And one time we read in the paper where that they wanted some terrapins so these kids, they collected all these terrapins up and we carried them over there to next to the hospital and -- it was cancer research, I think -- but like I say, I've learned that since. But they took those terrapins in there and dumped them out in a bathtub and my little boy, he looked up there and he said, "When you get through with them, what are you going to do?" And, of course, they knew they probably do anything with them and he said, well, sir, we might just turn them back out. And so they started looking for some of those terrapins later because they'd marked them and they knew, they named them and everything. So things like that is about the only thing that -- they would know -- well back then I knew that it was for research, but I didn't know the details or anything.

[1:22:05]

**Callan, B.:**

Tell me more about the cattle that you were talking about.

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, when we lived down in the Frills Cabin and took care of the cattle, I remember they -- we got a load of cattle in -- big old thing, big old truck load, and the men that came down with the truck, he made us -- we were watching, you know, we wanted to see what's going on and he made us stand back. And they put them in the -- they made this big fence, big pasture up there for them. And they had been -- we found out later, we didn't know right then, but they had been in where they had experimented with atomic bombs.

**Callan, B.:**

Los Alamos.

**Shanks, R.:**

Yeah. Yeah. And some of them didn't have any hair on them at all. They were just no hair. And, oh, we love animals so it just broke our heart. And some of them didn't have any ears. Their ears were just burned off and they really looked pitiful. And they were there for quite a while and I know that daddy -- they had a pen down there where they dipped them. I think they dipped them maybe twice a week and I don't know if that was medicine we was putting on them or whether it was to get rid of flies or what. We would help daddy run them up the little elevator there and put them

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in that dip. But we rode the horses and we helped herd them in and bring them in, you know, and helped feed them and everything.

[1:23:50]

But I can remember daddy's foreman, his name was John Coward. I just thought about that last night. He told daddy, he said, don't let those kids inside that pasture. These are not normal cattle. They don't act like normal cattle. And they were kind of wild, you know, and so -- and then later they moved them out and I don't know where they took them. Maybe they ended up killing them. I don't know what they did with them.

**Callan, B.:**

So how long were they out here?

**Shanks, R.:**

Oh, I'd say several months, you know, because like I say, we moved around. We moved from Frills Cabin and at that time they had moved them out of there. And they took them up to the slaughtering pen. I think that was where they loaded and unloaded because they had better facilities, you know, than we had down there.

[1:24:47]

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. What are some of your other most vivid recollections of the time that you spent at Oak Ridge?

**Shanks, R.:**

Just seeing it grow and seeing it change. When we came here, like I say, it was just starting and seeing a city just build up over night, seemed like, and that was just so fascinating to a bunch of little country kids. It just happened so -- and like I say. People didn't talk about it. They just went on and did their job and nobody was saying anything about what was expected or what was going to happen next or anything. They just -- I just didn't hear people talk about it.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. What would you say that you liked the most and what did you like the least about being out here?

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, I really don't know. I'd -- I don't really have any complaints because I liked everything. I guess the worst thing was having to walk so far to school and then when we first came here we didn't know nobody, you know, didn't have any friends. We had to leave all of our friends. But other than that, I didn't have any complaints.

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It just -- I just loved it here. It was fascinating to us. It just -- exciting seeing it grow, you know.

[1:26:13]

**Callan, B.:**

Tell me a little bit more about living life, I guess, behind a fence when Oak Ridge was all gated up, I mean, describe to me what that was like.

**Shanks, R.:**

You know, you had to have a pass to go in and out. And so there's been many a time that us kids when we started getting out and running around, you know, some of the guys would have callers, you know, just like young people do today. Many times we'd go through the gate and go to the gate to go out and we left our badges at home. So they were really strict about that and usually they'd make us -- well I think always they'd make us park our car and they'd take us home. We'd tell them that we had a badge at home, but, you know, they didn't take our word for it. So they went to see and take us home and everything. So they were real strict. And we didn't go out very much. We didn't go out. We went out the Solway entrance quite a bit because it's a grocery store right across Solway Bridge there. And we went out there quite a bit and to that store. But, and that was the gate, you know, you had to show your pass. And you know, back then you had to get a pass for your relatives to come visit and if anybody came to see you, you had to get a pass for them. Back then we had our ration cards. We had to get shoes and buy gas and everything. I still got my ration book where I didn't use all my tickets for shoes. So, you know, it was just, it was just a fun time.

[1:28:05]

**Callan, B.:**

Hold your thoughts. We're gonna switch out tapes real quick. Am I asking you good questions?

[End of Tape 1, Begin Tape 2]

[2:00:09]

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. I want to ask you a little more about badges. Did everybody that lived inside Oak Ridge, they had badges? Even the kids?

**Shanks, R.:**

Oh yeah, we all had badges. Um-hmm. Everybody did.

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[2:00:45]

**Callan, B.:** At what age did they start issuing badges out, I mean?

**Shanks, R.:** You know, I'm not sure, but seems to me like the two little ones in our family had a badge.

**Callan, B.:** Okay.

**Shanks, R.:** But they might not had. I'm just not sure. But I know we did and from the time that I came here I had a badge. So I don't know exactly what year they started in. I mean, how old a child had to be.

**Callan, B.:** Were there other rules about living behind a fence and in Oak Ridge that were real important to follow that, you know, say you could do or couldn't do?

**Shanks, R.:** No. Just the things that I told you about. The only thing that we were in contact with where I could say, you know, that we couldn't do. There's places we couldn't go and we knew that. I mean, they were fences up and you weren't allowed to go even near it and, like, down where we lived down at Frills Cabin, you know, K-25 plant wasn't too far from that. And ORNL, you know, like when you went down through the woods you could come around closer to K-25. But we just didn't get out all that much.

[2:02:04]

**Callan, B.:** What were your first thoughts when you actually saw K-25 itself? That building? I mean, was it impressive?

**Shanks, R.:** Oh, it's amazing to me. I couldn't believe it. And it just breaks my husband's heart to see them tear that building down, you know. He just said just so much money went into building it and he just, you know, he can't stand -- of course, in his head he's seven years old. He's living back in the twenties in a lot of respects. So, like I say, he was confined to the boiler room there and they didn't get out. They weren't even allowed to go to the cafeteria. They had to stay -- well, in fact, it was around the clock. They had shifts. And they couldn't leave on their shifts so they cooked and that was Mr. Shanks. So they cooked their meals, they cooked their breakfast on midnights and they cooked all their meals.

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[2:03:13]

**Callan, B.:** For someone who has never seen K-25 before, I mean, describe what this building looks like. Describe it to me.

**Shanks, R.:** Well, it's one of the biggest buildings we ever saw in our life, you know. And we never -- I don't remember every going inside the gate in my life. I never did. Well I did too. But we just went right inside the very maybe it's the cafeteria when my husband retired. That's the only time I was ever in there, inside that gate. And then when I went to work later in life, I worked for ORNL, I'd go down there and pick up their blood samples. We did all their blood work at K-25 and Y-12 too. And I'd go down there, but I'd just go beside the gate to the medical department, which was just right there. So I never did, I just never did go inside there. And I was never in Y-12 as I remember.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. What kind of health facilities were available to you and other people out at Oak Ridge and K-25?

[2:04:28]

**Shanks, R.:** Health facilities?

**Callan, B.:** Yes.

**Shanks, R.:** You know, us kids were never sick. We're just never sick and I don't remember seeing a doctor in Oak Ridge until I was married. Now, I'm sure mamma took the smaller kids, but I don't remember. I just don't -- I can remember a lot of the doctor's names and all. The first doctor I ever went to was Dr. Cruz (phonetic sp.) and he died here a few years ago. And I think I went to him -- yeah I went to him for everything. I mean, I didn't go to another doctor.

[crew talk]

**Callan, B.:** So, was healthcare provided for you, for you and your family when you worked out here?

**Shanks, R.:** Yeah. When daddy worked for Ron Anderson we had insurance just like you do now. They had some kind, and I don't remember

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exactly how it was, but we were covered to go to doctor and best I remember, we didn't have to pay anything.

[2:05:42]

**Callan, B.:** Okay. Was -- were you given or were people given like regular, I guess, health checkups and physicals and whatnot that --

**Shanks, R.:** Not until we were in school, but when we were in school we had, you know, they had a health department and they come in and check us. Just about like they do now, but back then it was a little different. They checked us more closely, I think.

**Callan, B.:** Okay. Let's talk about -- let's back up a little bit and reel back and let's talk about the Manhattan Project and I know you were pretty young back then, but you said that you really didn't have any understanding of the function of the facility during that time?

**Shanks, R.:** No. No.

**Callan, B.:** I mean, was there speculation as far as what they were doing there? Did --

**Shanks, R.:** Excuse me. We were told that it was secret. And that's what my daddy when we'd ask questions. Daddy was -- it was just secret work. And when he'd try to explain it to us, of course, we knew we were in the war cause, you know, my brother had gone to the navy and we knew that and he'd just tell us. He said, well it has something to do with the war. And that's all we ever know, you know.

[2:07:14]

**Callan, B.:** Do you need a drink of water? It sounds like you're getting a little --

**Shanks, R.:** No. I don't know what's making me do that.

**Callan, B.:** Do you remember that the day that the bomb was dropped? And that was August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Do you remember that particular day out here at Oak Ridge?

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**Shanks, R.:**

I just remember it, but as far as the details -- I know there's a lot of celebration. And a lot of -- I know my daddy kept the radio on all day long and, like I say, we were still all of us still at home in '45 and so that's about all I remember.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay.

[2:08:01]

**Shanks, R.:**

And you know, back then, we lived out there in those houses. We didn't get a daily paper. We didn't get -- all we had was a radio. And to get any news or know anything, it'd just have to be somebody that come by and tell us or either hear on the radio. And you didn't hear too much on the radio about it. You know, it was, you know, you just didn't hear too much about Oak Ridge.

**Callan, B.:**

What was, like I don't know if you remember because you were really young, I mean, what was your reaction to August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945? What were your thoughts about it? When it happened and what are your thoughts about it now?

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, I'm just glad that we won the war and all that, but that's about all. I felt real excited and glad cause I kept thinking, you know, all the soldiers would get to come home and all this stuff, but that's about all that I can --

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. How do you think history is going to view the Manhattan Project and its outcome and the work that was done here?

[2:09:23]

**Shanks, R.:**

I think it was a great work and I think we had some of the smartest people in the world here. I mean, to do what they did and do it under so much secret -- the men and the women really didn't know what they were doing and it was just fascinating to me that they could have done what they did and under those circumstances.

**Callan, B.:**

So many people working on something in such a short period of time.

**Shanks, R.:**

Yeah. And it just -- is just really -- you imagine, see, in '43, that was only two years. They did a lot, oh man, they did a lot of stuff

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and so they had to have some of the smartest people in the world here. I still think we got some of the smartest people over here.

**Callan, B.:**

I would agree. I think so. Did you see a lot of the construction occurring?

**Shanks, R.:**

No, not a lot of it. Mostly them putting the houses up and that sort of thing, but we would -- I can remember we would leave the high school and we would walk down to, seems to me like down to the turnpike to catch a bus to come home. And seemed like we would go to school one morning and then when we got off that evening they'd be two or three more houses. And they just went up so fast and that just amazed me. I thought, well, that wasn't here this morning. And they just, I mean, start from scratch and build a house in a day. And they would just move people right in. Next time you'd go through there they'd be families and curtains on the windows. It was like that all over Oak Ridge, you know.

[2:11:21]

My mother, I started to tell you this a while ago and I forgot it. My mother, she worked in the cafeteria. She worked Tennessee Eastman (phonetic sp.) first and that was who had Y-12, where Y-12 is now. My mother worked for them and then she worked in the cafeteria over there where the soldiers were and we'd get off from school early and sometimes we'd get off the bus there and stay with her and then catch another bus going home. And she worked there and she really loved it too. She got such a pleasure out of just feeling like she was doing something, you know. They was a lot of soldiers here. I don't remember how many they were. Seemed to me like 40,000, but I don't know if that's right or not. They were a lot of them. They were everywhere. Just everywhere you looked.

[2:12:24]

**Callan, B.:**

What about your other siblings? You said you had several brothers and sisters and I know at least one of them was in the navy.

**Shanks, R.:**

Um-hmm.

**Callan, B.:**

Did your other siblings, did they work at K-25?

**Shanks, R.:**

No. None of them. By the time that my sister got married, she married a guy from -- he was here working. She married a guy

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from Mississippi. And my younger brother, my little eight year old, he ended up in the Korean conflict and he had to go -- he went in the army. He was in the army with Elvis Presley. He went to Germany and then my other two sisters -- they grew up here and the married and lived around here. One of them lives in Powell right now and my other sister lives on the same street I do. So, the baby one at that time. Then I've got a sister, the 15-year-old, she still lives in Mississippi. And my older brother come out of the navy and married a girl from New Orleans so he's still in New Orleans. He's been there all this time.

[2:13:39]

**Callan, B.:**

What was -- Oh, I remember what I was going to ask you. Being that your from this area, do you know any people that were displaced, that originally lived, or tell me what this place was like before the military came out here and set up K-25?

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, only thing that I really know is what was told to me back because we wasn't here at that time, but they were a lot of people -- my husband told me this just the other day, we were talking about it. He said that they just come in here and told these guys, these farmers, and they was some beautiful farmland in here, just told them, you know they had some many days to get out and they didn't have a choice. They just had to leave. And they's a lot of them still around here, of course, a lot of them is been passed on, but a lot of the families -- and I know that the Wheat Community, down through there, they were a lot of farms down through there and they still have that church down there. The Plant keeps it up, I mean, the government keeps it up and they still come in here and have funerals and everything at that church. And we have cemeteries just all over the place and they're -- they's fences around them and they protect and all. But they was -- there's a lot of sadness just having to pull up stakes and leave your home without much of a notice or anything. Of course, this happened back, cause I was here in '43 so, see, it happened probably '41, '42, along that time. And so they still, a lot of them are still here and we -- I don't personally know any of them, but it was just a sad time just to move out. And I know we lived up there in the Hackworth (phonetic sp.) place, the first house we lived in. It hadn't been long since people had lived in it because the farmland hadn't grown up. It was still cleared. And we, of course, had a little garden and that's all we did was put out a garden. They wouldn't let us put out anything else. Now why, I don't know. But we did have a little garden and --

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[2:16:26]

**Callan, B.:** And that was the first place that you had moved into when you came out here?

**Shanks, R.:** Um-hmm.

**Callan, B.:** And so it wasn't a government built house? It was actually --

**Shanks, R.:** No, it was just an old farm house. And Frills Cabin was too. You see, where it got it's name is the people that lived there was Frills. That was the Frills farm. And that's how they named -- there's a man that we'd been getting some research on Scarborough School, and in Oak Ridge they have no, at the library or anyplace, they don't have anything about Scarborough School. And so he's got a lot of names of people that lived and went to Scarborough School. It's amazing to me. I don't see why but they wouldn't have some kind of something on it because they have all the other schools. And now they've got, I don't know what they've got down there. The building's still there, the little Scarborough School's still there.

**Callan, B.:** Well, tell me about Scarborough School. What --

[2:17:34]

**Shanks, R.:** It was just a little school, but it was more advanced than what we were used to. They had more stuff and everything and I don't think that they had but maybe -- they had an upstairs. I'd say we didn't have more than a hundred rooms if we had that. Probably didn't even have that. But it was -- the teachers was just so nice and every -- it was just -- so I went there. I finished seventh grade and went there for the eighth grade and we had a regular eighth grade graduation then we moved on. But they was never children in that school any more after that. They started using it for storage or something. I don't know.

**Callan, B.:** So, most of the housing when you first came out here, was it mostly the old farmhouses that were already existing here or --

**Shanks, R.:** Well, most all of them except the ones that were just right down on the sides where they had to tear them down to build the plants. They stood for a long time and they moved those up there on Bethel Valley Road up there next to the cemetery before you hit Solway Bridge. They was several houses in there and they were

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there until, well, until I got grown, you know, and then they started -- I don't remember if they moved them out or it they just tore them down. Because they were good houses, but probably they just tore them down. But we lived in three different ones while we were here and in know this friend of mine, Cora Carter, she's still here in Oak Ridge, they was several houses that they lived in. And I don't know why they didn't leave them except the fact that, you know the roads have changed, they've had to build roads and it's just probably they had to move them for that reason.

[2:19:49]

**Callan, B.:**

What was life like for you with your husband working at K-25? I mean, was it kind of different that he, you know when he came home he couldn't really tell you what he was doing?

**Shanks, R.:**

No. He couldn't -- he told me when he first went down there, he said, when he first went to work, why, I was just so proud. He was a mechanic. And I was real proud that he got on at the plant and he told me, right, he said, Honey, we don't talk about nothing down there. I've just got a job and that's all. We didn't talk about anything. Yeah, he worked in the boiler plant. No, that's not it. Well, anyway, but I learned later that they made tubes, tubing, and that's what he was doing then, but the tubing, I don't know what they used it for. I know that's what my husband I'm married to now, that's what he said that that plant was. But my first husband didn't know. He didn't know nothing about it.

[2:21:05]

**Callan, B.:**

This is sort of an obscure question and we haven't gotten a definite yes or no answer on this, but you might be one who knows being that you're from here and you also have basically you were working with chickens as well, but the -- when they were constructing K-25 and on the top I think there's these structures that they used for ventilation, okay, and someone had said or we had read in an earlier history that those -- that the design for those was when they were, I guess, driving down a road here in Tennessee and they saw somebody's chicken coop and that the design for the chicken coop was gonna be perfect for these ventilation hoods that they have up there and this guy got a contract building them. And I don't know if you're familiar with that story or not?

[2:21:56]

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- Shanks, R.:** No.
- Callan, B.:** Or if that's just a crazy tale or --
- Shanks, R.:** No. I don't know -- I ask my husband when I get home if he knows anything about it.
- Callan, B.:** Okay. But, any other interesting stories like that that you've ever heard of, I guess, local contracts, you know, like yourself that the people got through the government to, you know, raise chickens or cattle?
- Shanks, R.:** No. I can't think of anything. If I'd worked in the plant after, you know, I got grown, I would've probably know a lot more, but my husband worked. He didn't want me to work. I could've gotten on, but I didn't work at the plant until after he died. He passed away in '69. I think I went to the plant about '73 or '74 or somewhere in there and I worked 17 years. But I never did work until that time.
- [2:23:09]
- Callan, B.:** Back in the original Oak Ridge Secret City when there was fences and security, what kind of activities were there to do and what was the social life like?
- Shanks, R.:** Well, we had the Wildcat's Den down at the turnpike and they've still got that building and that's for the kids and we had a bowling alley. We had the movies, you know. Don't remember if we had a skating rink or not. Believe we had a skating rink. It's in midtown there where the barracks used to be and then the (indiscernible) dance down on the turnpike. They had all kinds of social things for the kids there in that building. And that's all I remember. Mostly we just went to the movies and stuff. We'd go to movies for a little bit of nothing and so that's about all we did.
- Callan, B.:** What about -- you were talking about rationing earlier and you still had your shoe ration card?
- Shanks, R.:** Um-hmm.

[2:24:21]

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**Callan, B.:**

What was that like? I mean, was there a lot of lines or did people in Oak Ridge have access to better stuff than maybe outside of Oak Ridge?

**Shanks, R.:**

You know, I really don't know. We got a stamp or we got a pair of shoes a year. I believe it was a year. And then we had to have stamps for gas, to get gas. And so that's only stamps that I remember, but I have got my book that I had and I've also got my, I don't know if it's a pass or what it is, but I've got a pass. Maybe it's the first time we came in here. You get these passes so they could get the badges made. I have to look at that. I hadn't seen it in a long time. I'll look at that and see what's the date on it. It might've been before we got our badge.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. Initially out here in Oak Ridge, was there a lot more women than there was men out here?

**Shanks, R.:**

Oh yeah. They was a lot of women. Because, you know, women didn't -- most of the men -- and see they worked shift work. Most of the jobs were around the clock work. And so women didn't work there for a while, but then women started going to work because there were more, you know more men in the service and they needed so women were -- but now, like I say, when I first moved here I was just a kid and I didn't get out much. But later, they were most everyone was working. There wasn't many here that didn't work.

[2:26:19]

**Callan, B.:**

These are just some quick kind of final wrap up questions here. What do you think future generations should remember about K-25 and Oak Ridge?

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, you know, I've got grandkids and I've told their parents that they need to tell them about Oak Ridge and I have tried to keep them up on -- I think that the children, the young people, really need to know more about Oak Ridge. I think it's something that, you know, like I said, my husband and I've traveled everywhere and there's a lot of people don't even know about Oak Ridge. I mean, we'd say we was from Oak Ridge. Well, where's that at, you know, and once you get my husband started he can really kill them, you know, where it was at and what they did and all that stuff.

[2:27:24]

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But my grandson's in college and he interviewed me for special assignment he had in college and he wanted to know, you know, about -- I don't know what the topic of the, it was that he was doing but anyway, wanted to know how my life in Tennessee was back when I was growing up and so we talked a lot about Oak Ridge and my grandson was fascinated. He said, you know, said we need to get together and talk about this and I thought, you know, I bought the book, the Behind the, let me see --

**Callan, B.:** Behind the Fence.

**Shanks, R.:** Yeah. And I told him they want to read it because it's -- the time that the book was written, I don't know if they knew about all the information. I don't know if they couldn't put a lot of stuff in there, but still it told a lot about the city of Oak Ridge.

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

[2:28:31]

**Shanks, R.:** What topics?

**Callan, B.:** Yeah. What topics. What sort of things would you talk about?

**Shanks, R.:** Well, you know, just like the book, the City Behind the Fence, it was just -- that's a good topic. I don't know what I would do. I mean what I'd --

**Callan, B.:** Okay. Do you want to describe what the great accomplishments were here, again, and what should be acknowledged by history?

**Shanks, R.:** Oh just the work that K-25 did, you know, to help make the atomic bomb and I'm sure that it did win the war. It helped win the war. And that's just the most important thing, I guess. Of course, times have changed now, you know, a lot and we're more educated. We know more about what happened and you know, back during the early phase of Oak Ridge, they's many, many people got into stuff that, that's, you know was very, very bad and they say that they didn't know about it as much then as they do now. And they're so much more careful with the employees. But I know one man that's -- he was just young, maybe 34, 35 years old and he was in the worst spill that Y-12 ever had. And he didn't live but maybe less than a year after that. So, you know, it was really bad there for a

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while until we got more educated and learned more how to handle stuff like that, you know.

[2:30:40]

**Callan, B.:**

Is there anything else that you want to talk about before the interview ends?

**Shanks, R.:**

I can't think of anything.

**Callan, B.:**

Okay. Well, thank you very much. It was very --

**Shanks, R.:**

Well, I don't know how good it was.

**Callan, B.:**

It was excellent.

[End of Interview]