

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY ORAL HISTORY
PRESENTATION PROGRAM**

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOANNE S. GAILAR

FOR THE

**OAK RIDGE NATIONAL LABORATORY
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INTERVIEWED BY

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STOW: Today we're going to be talking to Joanne Gailar. Joanne came here in 1945 as a young twenty-year-old bride from New Orleans, and she has a lot of stories to tell us about her early days in Oak Ridge, as well as what she did at Oak Ridge National Lab, starting in 1965.

Joanne, what brought you to Oak Ridge in 1945? I think you were recently married at that point, and your husband was coming here. Is that right?

GAILAR: Right. My husband was already here, Steve. He was working in the Special Engineer Detachment. He was an engineer. He had graduated from Tulane University, and I joined him when I was a bride of twenty. And, I had to get a job, because he was in the Special Engineer Detachment, which didn't pay a lot of money. So, I did get a job at K-25, which became the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant, and I worked at K-25 for three months.

STOW: What were you doing at K-25?

GAILAR: Nothing very significant. I was a lowly clerical worker. In fact, I think I was called a third-class clerk. It was mostly clerical work, filing, things of that nature.

STOW: Did you have any sense at the time of what was going on around here?

GAILAR: Yes. My husband had told me exactly what was going on.

STOW: Oh, shame on him.

GAILAR: I know, but he knew I wouldn't say anything, and I never did. I didn't say anything until years and years later. But, I did know, and one day-- this might be of some interest -- we were in the bus commuting from Caryville, Tennessee. We lived at Cove Lake Inn, and there was a little article in the Knoxville Journal that mentioned the possibility of developing an atomic bomb. This was before we had used the bomb. And, he didn't say anything, but he took me into our room that night and closed the doors, and he just pointed to it. And, I had already known what was going on. So, I thought that was interesting that this appeared in the paper before it happened.

STOW: What did your husband do? Was he at Y-12, or ...

GAILAR: He was at K-25. He was a chemical engineer there.

STOW: Did you know that this other plant over here at X-10 existed?

GAILAR: Yes. I did.

STOW: You knew?

GAILAR: Because we lived at Cove Lake, along with a bunch of GIs and their wives, because we couldn't get housing in the area. The Army didn't provide that for their GIs. So, we lived with many people, some of whom worked at X-10.

STOW: So, you pretty much knew about the entire project in various ways.

GAILAR: Well, I didn't know what they were doing at these other plants, but I knew that they existed.

STOW: Okay. What was your impression when you first saw Oak Ridge?

GAILAR: (laughs) Negative. When our bus pulled in, the first thing I noticed was the cloud of dust we were enveloped in, and I didn't think much of it. But later, I had a bad cough, and they took me to one of those GI doctors here, and he told me, "Honey, what you got is just the Oak Ridge croup." A lot of people had coughs, so ...

STOW: From the dust, right?

GAILAR: ... I noticed the dust, and the slushy mud that the dust turned into when it rained, and the houses that were being carried around on trucks -- fully assembled flattops that were dumped wherever they wanted to put them it seemed like. And the signs, telling people to keep their mouth shut about project information. You couldn't miss those.

STOW: And, you and your husband -- did you get a house, or did you have to live in a dormitory for a while?

GAILAR: No, we did not get a house. Our first three nights, we spent at what they called the Guest House -- it became the Alexander Hotel. And, I remember that when he told me that was the most beautiful place in town, I sat down and cried, because it was nothing like my old New Orleans. We were lucky enough to be able to move to this Cove Lake Inn, which then was a group of about seventeen "Tourist Courts." You'd call them motels now. And, seventeen GIs and their wives, including Ralph and me, were able to live in these Tourist Courts we rented out there, share a communal kitchen, and commute to work.

STOW: Did you ever, in your wildest dreams, anticipate that you would spend your life in Oak Ridge?

GAILAR: Oh, no! Never! I didn't get my wedding presents sent to Oak Ridge till after I was married five years. If anyone had told me I would spend the rest of my life in Oak Ridge, I would have either laughed or cried -- I don't know which.

STOW: And, you never would have imagined that it would turn into a very pretty location.

GAILAR: Oh, no. I ended up -- as my first husband called me -- a "one-person Chamber of Commerce for Oak Ridge." I love Oak Ridge.

STOW: What about buses and lines? You've written in some of the pieces I've read about the long lines and the bus systems.

GAILAR: Oh, yes.

STOW: Tell us a little bit about your experiences.

GAILAR: Well, you had to stand in line for just about everything -- for transportation you had to wait to get on a bus. You had to stand in line for movies, and even stand in line, or sit in line, for medical attention. And then, you didn't see the doctor of your choice but rather whoever was available to see you at that time.

STOW: What did you call the cafeterias?

GAILAR: Well, some of the GIs called them "vomitorias."

STOW: Vomitorias, huh?

GAILAR: Because the food was so doggedly bad.

STOW: What about women and the way they were treated during those war years? There was, I understand, some discrimination toward women, right?

GAILAR: Well, at that time, women at K-25 did not have significant jobs. Some of the lucky ones analyzed samples at the Lab. But, most women had lowly clerical jobs. Some were secretaries, of course, but women were asked questions that they would never ask men, such as, "If your husband or father or brother gave out any secret information, or revealed a secret, would you tell on him?" Well, they didn't ask if we would tell on our mother or sister because they didn't have any significant secret information.

STOW: What about women and being able to own a house or serve as head of a household? Do you have an experience there?

GAILAR: Well, no. Most women who were single lived in the dormitories, as did some single men, and I didn't know of any women there. Of course, nobody owned a house at that time, anyway.

STOW: Well, that's true, yes. When you joined K-25, did you go through a security clearance?

GAILAR: Yes. We went through a three-day orientation program, when they asked us various questions, fingerprinted us, and showed us movies about the treacherous enemy. And, we had a man from the FBI talk to us about what would happen if people revealed secret information. And then, we -- the women -- had a special session, in which a Miss Ransom gave us a book, "Between Us Girls and The Gate Post," and told us, "Be very careful we don't distract the men from their important jobs." We were not to wear distracting clothes, like midriffs, or skirts that were too short, and we were not to use our feminine wiles. Very outrageous, when you think about it!

STOW: What did you do to keep yourself occupied during the day? I mean, you worked for a short period of time, but outside of the work environment, what did you do? Were there women's clubs and other activities?

GAILAR: Well, there were at that time, but when I worked as a bride of twenty for those three months at K-25, we worked six days a week, including all day Saturdays. See, we had to commute from Cove Lake. At that time, there were no interstate highways. It took us two hours to drive to K-25 from Cove Lake Inn and two hours to drive back.

STOW: My goodness.

GAILAR: We had to get up at 5:30 in the morning and catch a bus at 6:30 a.m. We didn't get home till 6:30 p.m., and that was also true on Saturdays. So, on Sundays I would have to get the clothes clean and the room straightened up. I would sometimes walk in the hills and talk to some of our Cove Lake neighbors. And we would rent rowboats and go rowing in Cove Lake. We tried to just take it easy as much as we could on Sundays.

STOW: Have you maintained friendships with any of your Cove Lake neighbors, or did most of them move away after the war?

GAILAR: Well, a lot of them did, and a lot of them died. One person left that I know of who worked at Cove Lake is Jack Goodwin. And, he and his wife lived there as we did.

STOW: Is that right?

GAILAR: They worked at K-25, too.

STOW: Where were you on August 6, 1945, when the bomb was dropped?

GAILAR: I was working at K-25 that very day. And, there was quite a reaction then, as you would expect. One person said, "Well, the genie is out of the bottle." I often think of those words. There was a feeling of elation and joy and accomplishment, but also some concern, some awe. And, my own feeling – because, remember, I was just twenty years old -- was, "Now we can go home. I can get out of this place."

STOW: Did you celebrate?

GAILAR: I don't remember celebrating. We didn't go home, either. We continued to remain in Oak Ridge and got a victory cottage when my husband was mustered out of the service, and we remained in Oak Ridge.

STOW: Where was your husband from?

GAILAR: He was from New Orleans, too. We were both native New Orleanians.

STOW: Okay. Your maiden name was what?

GAILAR: Stern.

STOW: Stern. Well, that's not a good southern New Orleans name though, is it?

GAILAR: Well, I was a fifth-generation New Orleanian.

STOW: Let's jump to 1965 when you joined Oak Ridge National Laboratory to be involved with the Civil Defense Program, as I understand it.

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: Tell us a little bit about why you came over to ORNL then. Why were you hired and what was the Civil Defense Program all about?

GAILAR: Sure. Well, my first husband died, and I was a widow at forty years old. I had three children, so I had to get a job to support them. I wanted to get a job at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, because my first husband worked ten years at Y-12 and earlier, ten years at K-25. Even though he really loved his work at Y-12 and got twenty patents when he was there, he still would joke about it and call it "the factory." And, I didn't want to work at a factory. I wanted to work on a campus. So, I wanted to get a job at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. At that time ORNL had the Civil Defense Research Project, which was about a year old. I wanted very much to work in that. It was interdisciplinary, and I thought, "That's where I want to go."

STOW: What was the goal of the Civil Defense Program at that point?

GAILAR: Well, its purpose was to guard against threats to our nation from chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare. And, I found it ironic that twenty years after I was working at K-25, during which time the atomic bomb was dropped, I was now working in a project to guard against the very effects of that bomb.

STOW: I'd always thought that the Civil Defense Program was strictly to protect people from an atomic bomb and its radiation, but you suggest that was also established to find ways to protect people against chemical and biological attacks, too.

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: Explain that if you can.

GAILAR: Well, it was a multidisciplinary group of about twenty staff members. Eugene Wigner established the program the year before I came. He was there as project head for a year, and then at the time I came, at the end of 1965, Jim Bresee headed the group. Well, the group consisted of about twenty scientists, engineers, and social scientists who looked at all of these various threats. Each person had a specialty in the project. For example, Larry Dresner, who was a physicist, was designing baffles -- structures that hung down from the ceiling of underground blast shelters. These baffles attenuated the shock waves. Then we had Conrad Chester, who was looking into chemical and biological warfare agents. I find it interesting that some of the biological warfare agents he was looking into we hear about today, such as smallpox and anthrax. And, in addition to that, he was working on botulism, other pathogens, and equine encephalitis, which I have not heard mentioned in the context of today's problems. Then, we had David Nelson study the possible threats and thermonuclear effects of nuclear warfare on small components of electronic equipment. And, Claire Nader, who was a social scientist and sister of the famous consumer advocate Ralph Nader, was looking into the problems cities might have from weapons of mass destruction. Apparently, for mayors civil defense was very low on their list with crime, poverty, and other problems having far greater significance. And, we had Margaret McKee, an economist, examine the locations of petroleum around the country and determine whether any bottlenecks were present that would prevent oil from being circulated around the country to places where it was needed. We even had a part-time veterinarian look into how to protect cattle and other domestic animals from the effects of radiation. If these animals were irradiated, how would the meat be decontaminated so that it could be safely eaten? I guess one of the most specialized specialists was another man whose first name was Carl -- I don't remember his last name -- and he looked into how resistant bees were to radiation, because they were needed to pollinate the trees on the west coast. So, that was his specialty, and by the way, bees are very resistant to radiation. Oh, and very important -- I don't want to neglect Cresson Kearny.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: Cresson Kearny was our do-it-yourself guy. He worked on designing homemade fallout shelters that anybody could build, to protect people from radiation from a detonated atomic bomb. And then, he also looked into other equipment and wrote about how people can make homemade dosimeters to measure radiation levels outdoors and determine when it was safe to leave a fallout shelter. And he also tested six-foot-high Punkah pumps, which were fans to ventilate the shelters.

STOW: I want to come back and ask you more about what you did in a moment.

GAILAR: Yes, I'll talk about that -- I'll get to that.

STOW: You made me think of one thing. When I got out of college in 1962, I had a summer job mapping caves in Middle Tennessee for fallout shelters. Did your program here at Oak Ridge have anything to do with caves?

GAILAR: Well, I'll tell you something. Anytime there was anything already underground, whether it was a subway station or any hole in the ground, our director Jim Bresee wanted us to look into it, to see what the feasibility was of using it.

STOW: I remember that very clearly now. Let's come back to what you did. I think you were involved with monitoring the Russian Civil Defense Program, right?

GAILAR: Yes. My job was to monitor the Soviet Civil Defense Program. But I'll tell you, Steve, I got into that in a very interesting way.

STOW: Tell us about that.

GAILAR: My first job -- the reason they hired me in the Civil Defense Group -- was to develop a computerized subject index to the many documents that were pouring in on all of these subjects. They didn't have a subject index, so what I fastened on was a computerized key word index. Computers were rather primitive then, but they could store key words of titles, abstracts, introductions, and tables of contents that indicate the meat of each of those reports. Now, the Soviet military translations of documents in their Civil Defense Program had no titles that were usable. I remember one that was titled "At the Crossroads." Well, that doesn't tell you anything.

STOW: No.

GAILAR: And then, their documents had no summary, no abstract, no table of contents, so I found myself reading some thirty to forty documents to get the gist, to find a few relevant key words. And then, one day Eugene Wigner -- who stayed with us one week every month the whole time I was there, even though he no longer headed the project he started -- said he wanted all of us to meet and say what each of us would do, if we knew we had to get ready for a nuclear attack the next day. Well, the only thing I could think of that made any sense was what the Russians were doing. Those translations showed that they told their population what to store -- water and several days of food -- gave them some information on how to build hasty shelters and how to evacuate. For example, if I remember right, Moscow had eleven railroad tracks that were routes out of town. The people could follow those routes and evacuate Moscow. The elementary schools had gas masks and instructions on how to teach children to use gas masks. Well, I presented a summary of what the Russians did for civic defense, when everybody else said what he or she would do personally. Eugene Wigner was extremely impressed with what the Soviets were doing. Frankly, I hadn't seen any other information like that in any of the other materials we were getting. And, he asked me if I would write an article based on the Soviet military translations on their Civil Defense Program. And, I did. Writing was something I knew how to do. I wrote an article that was published in the *ORNL Review* article and picked up by the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* and one of the medical journals. I remember the title in the journal, "Seven Warning Signals."

STOW: My goodness.

GAILAR: And, it was also translated into French and published in Switzerland. It got wide coverage. From then on, Wigner told me, "Let somebody else do the key wording. I want you to track the Soviet civil defense effort."

STOW: Well, were you reading the Soviet articles in their native language?

GAILAR: Oh, no. They were translations. I don't read Russian.

STOW: Well, I was going to ask you if you did.

GAILAR: No, I don't. I read them. There were many, many translations of them. They kept flowing in. Eugene Wigner, I think, was instrumental in starting a magazine published in Florida titled *Survive*. I wrote regular articles for that. In fact, I found it amusing that I wrote about twenty articles on Soviet civil

defense. And, three of them were co-authored with Eugene Wigner. And then, I found myself going to the Institute for Defense Analysis and giving talks about the Soviet Civil Defense Program. This was a far cry from anything I had been trained to do.

STOW: You keep mentioning Wigner. You got to know him pretty well, didn't you?

GAILAR: Oh, we all did. He was a darling.

STOW: Tell us a little bit about him and your impressions of him.

GAILAR: Well, my association with him went all the way back to the time when I taught nursery school. Here in Oak Ridge, I taught nursery school for about a year and a half. I had his son in nursery school. Usually, the mothers asked me about their children. Well, one day, Eugene Wigner phoned me and made an appointment to talk to me about his son.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: Well, the mothers never did that. They'd just button-hole me on the way in and on the way out. They regarded me, more or less, as a glorified babysitter, while they did more important things. Well, Wigner kept his appointment to the minute. He was extremely courteous, and, at the end of our appointment in which we discussed his son, he thanked me profusely for my time. What a courteous man! That was a far cry from one woman who tried to tip me fifty cents when she left her child there -- her little darling -- two hours past closing time. But then, I didn't meet him again until eighteen years later, when I found myself in the Civil Defense Project.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: I was sitting in a little carrel off the Central Research Library at ORNL for the first three or four months, until my clearance came through. I was pretty much forgotten there while I learned about information handling and read frightening books like Herman Kahn's *On Nuclear Warfare* that would keep me awake at night. But whenever Wigner came to town, he would come talk to me. He would come get me and make sure I had lunch with everybody in the group. He brought me up to any meeting that was not classified, and then later, in 1968, when my son had brain surgery, Wigner was the most empathetic caring person. That was when I discovered he was superstitious. He said, when he asked me what day ...

STOW: You anticipated my next question here.

GAILAR: Well, that was one of his characteristics. It was really funny. He asked me how my son Ralphie was doing and I said, "Well, Eugene, I'm glad to report he's doing much better." And then Eugene turned away from me and walked all around the room looking for something and I thought, "What's happened? Has this man forgotten a telephone number or something? Does he have an appointment?" What he was looking for was a piece of wood to knock on, because I said that Ralphie was doing very well.

STOW: Knock on wood, huh?

GAILAR: Knock on wood.

STOW: Well, it's harder to do that nowadays, because there's a lot less wood and a lot more artificial stuff around.

GAILAR: Yes. Right.

STOW: I find it interesting that you've mentioned gas masks and all these preventive measures. I was thinking the other day about the old phrase that was common back then in school: "duck and cover." And then, I'm thinking about today and what's going on in our country and worldwide with regard to terrorists attacks ...

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: Isn't it weird how things come back and haunt us decades later?

GAILAR: It certainly is.

STOW: I wonder where we're going from here. You were in the Civil Defense Program for nine years.

GAILAR: Right.

STOW: All the time, working on the Soviet documents?

GAILAR: All except the first three years when I was devising a subject index and looking into establishing an information center on civil defense research.

STOW: Well then, what happened after you wound up the Civil Defense Project? Did the government actually stop that or did it just ...?

GAILAR: No, it went on for a while but at a greatly reduced level.

STOW: All right.

GAILAR: There were rumors that it would not continue, and our boss Conrad Chester was looking into other places for us to go at the Lab. He was going to put me into a coal liquefaction or gasification research program -- an information center. I didn't want that, so I volunteered to be an Affirmative Action Coordinator at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and I got the job. That was a great change, especially after working in the Civil Defense group on what one of our social scientists described as avoiding "negative contingencies"-- in other words, the possible use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. It was a nice thought to me to switch to a job that had the title "Affirmative Action."

STOW: Gave you a positive outlook ...

GAILAR: Especially since I had had some pretty bad experiences. I discovered that, at the time -- when my work was being funded for forty thousand dollars a man year -- three agencies were funding it -- the AEC (Atomic Energy Commission, which later became the Department of Energy, or DOE), the Office of Civil Defense (OCD, which later became the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA), and ARPA, which later became DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency).

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: Those three organizations were funding my project, for a total of the same \$40,000 a year that my male colleagues were getting. Those men were getting \$20,000 a year, when they were funded for \$40,000, because \$20,000 went to overhead, but I received under \$8,000. I realized what an outrage that was. I also had had other experiences that were very negative toward women. Did I tell you about the talk I heard at the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA?

STOW: No, no. Tell me about it.

GAILAR: When I went to hear this talk at the CIA, I had to get some special top clearance to be there. And then, they wouldn't let me participate in the first session, because, as the women in the office said, "If you had been a man, you would have been let into that first session." But, as Eugene Wigner told me later, it was okay. I didn't miss anything, because all they talked about was how they got their information. And, how the CIA gets its information is very, very secret. So, I didn't really miss anything because I wrote for the unclassified literature, and I didn't want to know.

STOW: Yes, so, it was better off not knowing then.

GAILAR: But still, I thought it was discrimination [against women that kept me out], and it hurt.

STOW: Well, there was a lot of discrimination, as we are realizing today. Of course, that wouldn't be tolerated at all today.

GAILAR: No, it would not. Well, affirmative action [as a federal policy] was a welcome change, Steve. At that time, we were able to accomplish a great deal in promoting and developing minorities and women for several reasons. I guess the main reason was the presence of new regulations, executive orders, and laws mandating affirmative action and equal opportunity [for all employees regardless of their race, religion, national origin, and gender].

STOW: Sure.

GAILAR: The Office of Federal Contract Compliance required that any contractor of the federal government, such as ORNL, have a written affirmative action plan on what we were going to do to hire, develop, and promote minorities and women. Because of these executive orders, we had compliance reviews. These orders had teeth. People from the federal government came to ORNL annually to give compliance reviews, to see if we were complying with the regulations and laws and actually hiring and promoting minorities and women. If we were found to be in noncompliance, they used a word I never heard before. They could "debar," not "disbar," the company from doing business with the federal government.

STOW: Well, it's tough enough to put a law into place and to put these criteria out there, but then it's even tougher for somebody like you to make sure that the Laboratory is adhering to the law. You probably encountered division managers who didn't particularly want to go along with the rules. Did you have some challenges there?

GAILAR: Some great ones. And, I'd like to tell you about those. But, let me first say that the EEOC, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, had teeth because any employee who felt he or she was discriminated against could bring a lawsuit against us. And, some of these went to court. So, those actions kept us honest. But, I do want to say that Herman Postma, who was the Lab Director under whom I worked, and Roger Hibbs, who was the head of the Union Carbide Nuclear Division, and the top managers in Martin Marietta Energy Systems, were very much committed to the Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity laws, but they were busy people. They gave me the cloak of authority. It was up to me to see that we complied with the regulations, using their cloak of authority. But, there was a tremendous amount of resistance against affirmative action regulations from 1974 through most of the decade.

STOW: All right. What was some of the resistance that you experienced?

GAILAR: Well, I have captions for some of the problems. One was the "We 'haven't seen any' syndrome." Okay. What does that mean? An affirmative action goal meant making a good faith effort to find a minority or a woman for a job for which there was an opening. If you couldn't find a minority or

woman who was not qualified, you didn't have to hire anyone. "We haven't seen any" would suggest that no qualified minority or woman candidates had been interviewed.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: So, to keep the division heads honest, I would look at the applications sent to them, and, sure enough, in one case, I found a black engineer with a master's degree from MIT, who looked to me to be a perfect fit for that division. So I asked the manager, "Well, if you haven't seen any, what's wrong with him?" He said, "Well, he got a C in French in his undergraduate program."

STOW: Shame on him. And, what ever came of that -- anything?

GAILAR: I don't remember. There were other problems with minorities. There were different kinds. One was what I came to call the "little Indian game." You know, one little, two little, three little Indians?

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: Well, one division that had a lot of crafts people was resistant to hiring minorities. And so, the division head took a survey and asked all of the members of the division to look into their ancestry and see if any of them have any remote connections to an Indian [Native American] tribe. And, you can't imagine how many Indians were in that division. It turns out that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had a definition for "Indian." American Indians are covered by the Affirmative Action law, as are Blacks (African Americans), Orientals (Asians), and Hispanics. An American Indian was someone who had at least one grandparent who was an Indian, had a card from the tribe, or another document showing affiliation with the tribe. And, that ruled out most of the people in that division. And then, there was nepotism.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: Especially when it came to apprenticeship programs for crafts workers. Being an apprentice was a great thing to be, and many people at the Lab who were craft workers had a cousin, an uncle, or a brother who would love to be an apprentice. Since almost all of [our crafts workers] were white back then because there weren't many who had black brothers or ...

STOW: Sure.

GAILAR: So, that was a problem -- nepotism. And then, there were "attitudes." And, you wanted to ask me a question?

STOW: No, go on and tell us about the attitudes now.

GAILAR: Well, a lot of people had biases that were totally ill-founded. For example, I asked one of the engineers when he was about to retire what he thought about minority and women engineers. "Well," he said, "Take a black engineer and put him in production -- that's fine -- but don't put him into design and analysis -- he doesn't know anything about that. But women, put them in design and analysis -- but don't put them out in the field." So I asked him, "Have you ever worked with any minority and women engineers?" "No," he replied. And, the bias got into the language. I used to go to the Ph.D. recruiting meetings that Dan Robbins held with the divisions to see what kind of Ph.D.s they wanted -- and one man who came from one of the divisions said, "You know, I really would like you to find us some women." I said, "Fine." So, he said, "I want you to find us a man who can do this, this, and this and a guy who can do that and a fellow ... " and so forth. So, I said to him, "You know, if you're going to look for that guy

and that man and that fellow, you ain't gonna find a woman for that job." So, the language often expressed biases.

STOW: It did. It persisted for decades.

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: It started back in the 1940s. You made me think about a letter I found that Harrison Brown wrote. Harrison Brown was with the Chemistry Division in the mid-1940s, and, as the war was coming to an end, he wrote to Martin Whitaker, who was the Laboratory Director: "After the war's over, Clinton Laboratories (which is, as you know, Oak Ridge National Lab now) is going to continue to be here for many years. It should be, and we need to think of ways that we can recruit and hire the best men and women that are out there." And, this was on the first page of his letter. The letter was six pages long. He went on and referred twenty-three times to men ...

GAILAR: (laughs)

STOW: .. and never again to women.

GAILAR: That goes to show you, right? (laughs)

STOW: It sounds like you had a little bit of the same ...

GAILAR: Encountered the same thing ...

STOW: ... same problems, what thirty years later, I guess.

GAILAR: Yes, yes.

STOW: How long were you in the Affirmative Action Program at the Laboratory? You went on to do something similar for Martin Marietta Energy Systems, didn't you?

GAILAR: Yes, to coordinate all four installations of first, Union Carbide, then Energy Systems. But before I leave biases, I'd like to talk about some of the ones against women, if that's okay.

STOW: Okay, fine.

GAILAR: When it came to promoting women, one thing I noticed -- and it takes a few instances to notice that this occurs under various circumstances -- was what I came to identify as the "He didn't think of it" syndrome. The first time I noticed this syndrome was when a senior lab technician came to my office and told me she wasn't allowed by her division manager to work with the loops. She said that she would like to become a technologist, but without diversified experience -- field work, like working with the loops -- she wouldn't have that opportunity to be promoted. So, I went to see her division manager, a very fine gentleman, and he was just amazed. He asked, "Does she want to work with the loops?" He had let her analyze samples ...

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: ... and do nothing else. Because working with the loops was rough and dirty. He said, "I didn't think of it." He never thought of how this was holding her back. So, that was the first time I noticed that. It wasn't a syndrome then -- just one instance -- but then, it came up again and again. In cases of two

women at different times -- one was a woman who was a professional -- her husband was asked by the division head to head an important committee.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: And, he said he couldn't do it right now. They were both Ph.D.s. He said, "I'm so sorry, I can't do that right now, but let my wife do it." And, the division head said, "Oh, I didn't think of it." Well, the same thing occurred when one man suggested that a woman colleague of his be allowed to go to an international meeting and give a talk, because his research was keeping him from doing that.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: And, again, the division director said, "I didn't think of it." Well, those were two examples, and there were many other examples of "not thinking of it." And, one I can think of that further illustrates the "she didn't think of it" problem was the woman at the Lab who was asked by Laboratory Director Herman Postma to give him a list of people who would have a chance to take a job with great exposure, by introducing people at forums and other meeting.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: ... and, she gave him a list and Herman Postma looked at it and asked, "Why don't I see any women on this list?" and she said, "I didn't think of it."

STOW: It runs both ways, doesn't it?

GAILAR: It runs both ways. Yes.

STOW: Tell us a little bit about expanding the Equal Opportunity Program work into the other plants in Oak Ridge.

GAILAR: Well, all the Oak Ridge plants had an Equal Opportunity Program, an Affirmative Action Program, and an Affirmative Action Coordinator. Just as I was a coordinator for the Lab, each of the other Oak Ridge installations, and the Paducah uranium enrichment plant had an Affirmative Action Coordinator ...

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: They had their laws and regulations. And then, in 1973, affirmative action policies were extended to the handicapped and veterans of the Vietnam war and disabled veterans. And, in that case too, we had to have affirmative action plans written to hire and promote employees, to review our employment processes, and to see that they didn't discriminate against handicapped persons or veterans. And, talk about resistance! Resistance to hiring handicapped people was particularly evident with safety directors and medical directors. Medical directors were afraid of attendance problems and safety directors thought, "Well, they'll cause accidents." "How do we get a deaf employee out when he can't hear the alarm signal to vacate the Y-12 plant?" There were all kinds of concerns. I'd like to cite one of our affirmative action coordinators who was here when I was EEO coordinator for the whole Nuclear Division ...

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: He -- the one at K-25 -- realized what the obstacles were going to be, to bringing in handicapped people in a production facility. So, he went to see the medical director and asked him, "Do you see any problems in hiring handicapped people?" Oh, you bet he would. So, this coordinator let him talk on and on and then he said, "Okay. Tell you what. Our plant manager is going to hold a meeting, and he wants you to come to his meeting and to tell everybody there what you're going to do to surmount these problems and to get around these problems of hiring handicapped people."

STOW: (laughs)

GAILAR: Well, then he did the same thing with the safety director, pretty clever.

STOW: Kind of set him up, didn't he, yeah?

GAILAR: He set them up, but he gave them ownership of the problem. So, therefore, the problem became their problem. They had to figure out how to do it.

STOW: That's a smart way to do it. How many years did you serve in this capacity, with EEO and AA?

GAILAR: Altogether I served fourteen years, Steve.

STOW: Up into what, the late 1980s?

GAILAR: When I retired in 1988. I did that for a long time, and it was a very rewarding and interesting job, because when I was there -- thanks to the laws and the supportive management and our good Affirmative Action organization -- each division at each installation had an AA rep that helped the coordinator do his or her job. And, we were able to make great strides in hiring minorities and women and promoting them into management and higher-level professional jobs -- all kinds of jobs that they had not been hired into in the past.

STOW: And, you were located where at the time that you retired?

GAILAR: At the Central Employment Office in Oak Ridge. That was the right place at the time, because our Affirmative Action Office was going to move to the Y-12 Equal Opportunity Office.

STOW: All right.

GAILAR: I guess a while after I retired, Energy Systems became segmented, so they didn't have a four-plant coordinator, you know.

STOW: That's right. We went away from the centralized system. But, you know, we're still faced with the same problems today ...

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: ... of trying to get women and minorities into higher positions. So, thank you for your help years ago, anyway. You've rubbed elbows with a lot of prestigious and famous individuals over the years. You've mentioned, of course, Eugene Wigner. But, let's put Wigner aside for a minute ...

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: Because he's in a class by himself. What other individuals come to mind ... ?

GAILAR: Edward Teller. [He was the father of the hydrogen bomb.]

STOW: Edward Teller? Where did you meet him?

GAILAR: Well, he came to the Lab for information meetings on civil defense.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: He was a good friend of Eugene Wigner's.

STOW: Oh, yes.

GAILAR: And, he seemed to be rather disliked among some of the members of our group, especially the social scientists. They didn't like him and he didn't like them. He thought all social scientists should be "eliminated," he said. So, we had some ugliness going on there. But, he came to the Lab -- and I didn't know him well. He did ask me at one time if I would write an article for *Reader's Digest* at the level that a sixth grader would understand.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: So, I wrote the article for *Reader's Digest* -- I guess Teller had a friend named Louis Strauss, who wanted such an article written for *Reader's Digest*. So I wrote it, but it was never used. But, that was one of my associations with Edward Teller.

STOW: Strauss was head of the Atomic Energy Commission.

GAILAR: Yes. Teller and Wigner were good friends, and I'll tell you an aside that I think is a very funny story. I have an audiotape of the memorial service for Wigner, sent me by his daughter. The service was held at Princeton, and Teller, after mentioning Wigner's reputation as a warmonger, told this story about him. Wigner was at the beach, where a bunch of ants were crawling on him. "Eugene, aren't they biting you?" asked a friend. "Yes," said Wigner. "Well," his friend asked, "why don't you kill them?" Wigner's answer: "Because I don't know which ones are biting me."

STOW: (laughs)

GAILAR: So, he said, "That shows you what a warmonger he was." (laughter)

STOW: Oh, boy. Anybody else come to mind among the famous individuals that you may have rubbed elbows with over the years?

GAILAR: I'm trying to think.

STOW: Okay. Did you have many interactions with Alvin Weinberg over the years?

GAILAR: Not when I was working in the Civil Defense Group, even though he was director of the Laboratory.

STOW: Head of the Lab then, yes.

GAILAR: We've become good friends in the years since then, you know. We belong to a supper club with him. We're very good friends with him ...

STOW: Sure.

GAILAR: ... but when I worked at the Lab, of course, he came to our Civil Defense Information Center meetings. And, I always feared him because I had been told that he sat on the first row ...

STOW: He sat on the front row and asked questions.

GAILAR: ... and he asked the only question you don't want him to ask. Well, I never had that problem. (laughs)

STOW: Lucky you.

GAILAR: I was lucky.

STOW: A lot of people did have that problem. As you look back on your accomplishments -- first of all -- as you started at K-25, and then went on ultimately to the Laboratory here and then to Energy Systems -- can you identify one thing that you're especially proud of that you've done to contribute to the work environment out here?

GAILAR: I think it was the Handicapped Program, which became vitally mandated when I was the Affirmative Action Coordinator of all the installations, and one of the things that was very gratifying to me was that we got recognition for that program. And, believe me, I'm not taking all the credit. I had lots of help.

STOW: Sure.

GAILAR: But, while I was the EEO and AA coordinator of all four installations for Energy Systems and before that, the Nuclear Division, we awards for the Handicapped Program for four successive years. We even won a national award. CNN wanted the movie we had made, but I don't think they ever used it.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: But we made a movie using four handicapped employees who worked at each of our four installations. The movie was titled "They Traveled Far to Reach Our Door: Can We Do Less than Open It?" So, we made a videotape of these four people and their experiences, and that helped win us awards. I think that was one of my proudest accomplishments.

STOW: Good.

GAILAR: And, another thing I forgot to mention [in respect to all] the concerns of the Medical Department and the Safety Division ...

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: ... that handicapped people present a risk to safety and have bad attendance -- it was a fallacious worry. I directed a study on the attendance, performance, and safety records of our handicapped employees after we had a bunch of them. We had over twenty hearing-impaired people, we had blind employees, we had paraplegics. When we did this study, many had lesser handicaps, of course. And, when the study was done, we found that the performance and the safety records of employees with disabilities were every bit as good as anybody else's, and their attendance records were better.

STOW: Now that you can look back on your career, is there one thing that you wish you'd done that you didn't have an opportunity to do, or tried and failed at?

GAILAR: I'm thinking. I'm sure there's a lot more that I could have done, but right now, I really can't think of anything. It was a very gratifying job. I'll just tell you a little interesting aside that has nothing to do with most of this.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: When I worked in the Civil Defense Group, I would often have to go to the Army Library in the Pentagon and have meetings with the Office of Civil Defense, which we said has become FEMA. When I met with these people and others at the Institute for Defense Analysis, I noticed they were very formal people. On the other hand, when I got into the Affirmative Action program and went to AA national meetings attended by AA people from all the DOE national laboratories, everybody hugged and kissed one another, and it was a great joy getting to know people of different ethnic backgrounds from myself.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: That was very, very gratifying -- getting to have good friends among people who were African American, Asian, and American Indian. One woman, an American Indian who worked here at the Lab, was killed by a car when she was pretty young.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: I mean, getting to know people like that was very gratifying to me. It enlarged my soul.

STOW: Well, it's evident to me, just in talking to you, that you light up. You're beaming now that you talk about all that. You've enjoyed it, haven't you?

GAILAR: Oh, I loved it. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

STOW: Good. Are there other topics here that you want us to talk about while we're ...

GAILAR: Well, let me look and see what I've left out ...

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: I mean, you've done such a good job of interviewing me. I'm going to have to look at the papers I brought. Let's see ...

STOW: They'll edit all this out.

GAILAR: Yes -- that's fine. I do want to look, because there were some other little stories I thought that were kind of interesting.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: A few here and there ...

STOW: Now, you went back to school in the early 1970s and got a master's degree, didn't you?

GAILAR: No. I was working toward one when my first husband died, and that was in the 1960s.

STOW: Yes. I see.

GAILAR: Oh, and then I went back to school again in the 1970s, when I was in the Environmental Group, where I worked part-time. And, then I got the job as Affirmative Action coordinator, so I quit my graduate studies.

STOW: All right. Okay.

MCLAUGHLIN: You might want to mention the book you've written.

STOW: That's right.

GAILAR: Well, does that have anything to do with anything? (laughs)

MCLAUGHLIN: It has to do with Oak Ridge.

STOW: Yes, it has to do with Oak Ridge. Go on ...

MCLAUGHLIN: I mean, it's all about your perspective as a young bride and how you grew from that and ended up not hating Oak Ridge anymore and ...

GAILAR: Yes, I also wanted to have a conclusion about how these issues continue to be a vital concern today -- the three things that I spent my career on, and how the Lab continues, just in general, to work on vital concerns.

STOW: Yes. I should have asked you about your book. I've read your book. You've written a book called *Oak Ridge and Me* that tells a little bit about your early experiences and thoughts about living here. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

GAILAR: Sure, I'd be glad to.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: The book was written in three parts, and even though I was the author, it was written by three women. It was written by me when I was twenty-two years old. I reviewed some of the experiences I just finished telling you about my coming to Oak Ridge and working at K-25. And then, the second part of the book had to do with how my life changed as a widow in Oak Ridge after my first husband died, how this town I had helped to settle rallied around me, and how my wonderful neighbors made sure that I could stay here and helped me.

STOW: I've read about some of that, yes.

GAILAR: Yes, it was a very heartening experience. And then, I had a lot of bad things happen to me. For example, my son had brain surgery.

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: And, anyway – the neighbors helped me a great deal. And then finally, the last part of the book is titled “The View from the Hill.” I wrote about the great changes that had occurred with Oak Ridge and me, how we had grown together from youth to maturity, how I thought of Oak Ridge as mother, sister,

daughter, and child. A child in the sense that I had been on the ground floor of many of the volunteer organizations that started, like the League of Women Voters and the Girl Scouts. I was on the boards of these organizations, which was a heady experience for young people because in our own home towns it was the older people, not the ones in their twenties and thirties, who did these things.

STOW: True. It was a unique environment here, to say the least.

GAILAR: Yes. I felt proud, and, in that sense, Oak Ridge was daughter. And, it was mother, in the sense of how it helped settle me when I became a widow -- all this rallying around and tremendous support. And, Oak Ridge was sister from the standpoint of -- we grew together.

STOW: Okay.

GAILAR: We started out young and became older. And, I really feel that I'm one of the luckiest people in the world to have been able to spend my life in Oak Ridge.

STOW: Well, Oak Ridge is lucky to have you spend your life here too, Joanne. Let's wind up by drawing some analogies here, if we can. You worked in the Civil Defense Program, you worked in Affirmative Action and EEO, and you worked in an environmental program.

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: But, as we look at some of the issues that we're faced with today in our environment, and I mentioned them a moment ago ...

GAILAR: Yes.

STOW: ... with regard to terrorism and Civil Defense ...

GAILAR: Yes, yes.

STOW: There's some great parallelisms there, between what you've done over the years, and what our modern environment is. Can you reflect on those parallels a little bit?

GAILAR: Yes. I do think it's interesting indeed -- as recently as President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address -- when he cited having appointed a Secretary of Homeland Security ...

STOW: Yes.

GAILAR: And, he also mentioned that he was going to propose directing funds for reducing pollution from nuclear plants and other power plants over the next fifteen years and for a hydrogen-powered automobile that would protect the environment. He was talking about issues that I have worked on -- preserving the environment and Civil Defense. And then, anybody who is alive today must be aware of the brouhaha at the University of Michigan over the University's preferential racial policies ...

STOW: That's true, yes.

GAILAR: And, that case will go before the Supreme Court. So, not only has my career reflected these interests and my work at the Lab, but I find it wonderful that this Laboratory continues not just with those issues, but also with the many issues that are of vital concern to our nation today.

STOW: Well, it goes to show you that the more things change, the more they stay the same, don't they?

GAILAR: Doesn't it, though? Yes.

STOW: I'll make you a deal. We'll get together again in forty years ...

GAILAR: (laughs)

STOW: And, see if those same issues are still cropping up in our society.

GAILAR: (laughs)

STOW: Anything else that you feel you want to pass on as we wind the hour up?

GAILAR: I might have left out some things, but I think we covered just about everything.

STOW: Okay. Well, thanks a lot.

GAILAR: You're welcome.

STOW: It's been a good talk.

----- END OF INTERVIEW -----