Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with Jean Crooks

July 21, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

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Table of Contents

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[00:00:00] Begin Disc 1.

Suzanne Becker: *So now, if you just want to begin by stating your name and where you're from and a little bit about your background, where you grew up, where your family was originally from, that sort of thing?*

Jean Crooks: My name is Jean Crooks. My legal name is Jeanette but I've never been really known by that name, so I always go by Jean. And I was born in Richmond, California, which is on the east side of San Francisco Bay on May 20, 1924. So I'm eighty years old now. And we grew up there. My parents were from Ontario, Canada, and we didn't have any relatives around. The nearest relative was in British Columbia. But I had a lot of friends around. And I grew up and went through the regular public school system. During the war years, I did go to Marin Junior College, which was the nearest one to us, and I used to take a bus and then take a ferry across the Bay. One time, I got off the bus and the ferry had taken all the lines off and they said, `Come, jump, jump. We'll catch you.` Which I did.

And you made it?

And made it. Otherwise, it would've been kind of bad. But anyway, I spent two years there and then I went to the University of California in Berkeley, and I graduated from there. And that's where I met Larry. And of course, he had been in the military and so he was a year later than I was in graduating. But I graduated in '47 and he in '48. And we were married six months after we met. He had another year to go, and all of the time, why, he says, `This isn't right that you work and I go to school.` He would fill out these forms to leave the university and I

would tear them up, and I said, No, you only have six months to go. You only have this to go. You're going to get it. So he did, and then we started, oh, shortly thereafter, we had two children. We had a boy and a girl.

What are their names?

Their names are James Lawrence Crooks and Kathryn Jean Crooks. And we started building a house in Berkeley, up on top of the hill up there, and we had a beautiful view. We could look over top of San Francisco and see the ocean out there, and see the Farallon Islands out there.

Oh, wow. A lot less populated then.

Oh, yes. And we were among the eucalyptus trees. There were a number of fires up there, but we weren't in one. We had sold our home there before one of the big, major fires that destroyed hundreds of homes up there. I worked as a teacher of preschool children in a system that was really quite unique in Richmond because they had a lot of shipbuilding in that area. And they had twenty-four-hour people going twenty-four-hours a day during World War II. They had to have places so the preschool children, and even after school children, were kept in a system that was governed by the public school system. They had places for them to sleep at night, and they had dinners and, you know, kept them whenever needed.

So this was a twenty-four-hour school.

[00:05:00] Yes, it was twenty-four-hours. And it was a rather unique situation. Each preschool was set up just for that purpose, and it had a play yard and, oh, the whole thing. So I taught there for quite a while when the children were growing up and so forth and they were in school.

Was that what your initial degree was in, education, or what did you graduate in?

No, no, my degree was in, what did they call a general curriculum? But I went back and got a degree in education afterwards. It wasn't a degree, I guess, it just fulfilled other requirements and

got a certificate and so forth. They said it was lifetime but I don't think so. I don't think if I went back it would be that.

Anyway, Larry was asked, after a number of years at Livermore—he worked for Grove Regulator and then, it's called CR&D [California Research and Development?]. When it folded, he went across the fence, as they say, to the University of California, I think they called it a radiation laboratory, Livermore Radiation Laboratory. So he commuted quite a few years, just from Berkeley down there to Livermore. Then he was asked to come down here to Las Vegas as a resident manager for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Now, what specifically was he doing at Livermore?

He was an engineer and he worked in, they called it, device engineering. Well, at first, he was the engineer for a linear particle accelerator, a great big machine that they thought they would, oh, I don't know, change the plutonium into something else. I don't know all about that. He was the chief engineer for that. And I guess they found another way which was better. But then, he came down here [Las Vegas, NTS] and worked as device engineer, designing the nuclear devices. And he would come down here. He would be down here for a week and come home.

In Las Vegas?

No Berkeley. And he would come home, I thought, just to change his clothes.

And leave again.

And leave again. That's about what it was for a couple of years, and then—

What years, roughly, were these?

Oh, dear. I think he joined the lab in like '52, something like that, and he must have worked at the laboratory, I mean in Livermore, for ten to twelve years, something like that, and we came down here in '65, the whole family did. But he had been coming back and forth quite a bit. So

we came down here in 1965. And the children were, by then, in high school. And they graduated from Western High School in Las Vegas.

So during the time, and of course, he was extremely busy out there at the test site, and then there was always these phone calls back and forth, in the middle of the night, saying someone had left something open and what should you do and, you know, this kind of thing.

So he was extremely busy, and they had what they called an AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] Women's Group. It was a good thing for the women because the men were gone for so many hours.

And this was here in Las Vegas when you got here.

Yes. Yes. We had various activities within that, and we had parties, and we got to know people.

So essentially, these were mostly the wives.

[00:10:00] The wives. But, you see, most of them were from all over, and they were from all over the country, the people coming here, and it was for all of the contractors for AEC, Atomic Energy Commission, at that time. It got so that the women would know the other women more than they would know the men, and the men would know the other men. And we would get together and have parties and have a good time.

So basically social things and probably a good source of support also.

Yes. Yes.

What was that like, having him gone so much and raising the kids?

Well, and the children are young, and he had to go out to the Pacific. He went to Enewetak and Christmas Island, and he'd stay out there for, you know, three months. And I know my little girl at the time said, `Mother, I forgot what Daddy's face looks like.` And that was sad. But I would imagine it would be the same thing with the military going around. So it would be kind

of difficult for the children. I got along all right. I was kind of independent at the time, so I was able to get along. And most of the time, why, I had to take the children to school and back. From where we lived in Berkeley, I had to take them to school, except when they got their bicycles and they'd ride down, and that scared me. But anyway, when we got back down here, we had a real good time with the social aspect of the Women's Group. It has folded now because everything has gone down a great deal, but it served the purpose at that time.

How large was it? How many people, do you think?

Oh, I think there were between two hundred and three hundred women in it. And we had a lot of different groups within it, like a book club or a bridge club and a painting [club]. Some of them are still painting that were in that. So it was worthwhile for us at the time.

Are you still in touch with some of those folks?

I'm in touch with only a few of them left, but an awful lot of them have left this area. A good portion of them have. And they've gone on to other things. So, let's see, and I then became involved in the local politics, which was good because in California you're one little, tiny entity in a *great* big state, and here, when we came, I remember going to Paul Laxalt's inauguration. They had a ball.

Right. So it was very much a smaller town?

A smaller state, and you could get acquainted with your representatives and your senators and various people. And so I became involved with the Republican Women's Group. I was also the president of the AEC Women's Group at that time.

Oh, really? OK. What years were these?

Oh, don't ask me that. I can't tell you.

Seventies, roughly?

Oh, probably. Probably. Yeah, probably in that range.

I was just curious.

And I also became the president of the Republican Women of Las Vegas and then of the Republican Women of the State of Nevada [Nevada Federation of Republican Women]. And involved in the central committee and what have you of that sort of thing. And I became involved also in various campaigns and so forth. Polling and that kind of thing.

So as president both on the local level and the state level, what types of things did you do? What was—?

Of the Republican Women?

Yes.

[00:15:00] Well, the main job was to elect Republic[an] people. And of course, we liked to promote some women along the way, too. We had one member who was an assembly member, and Jane Ham was an assembly [member] for quite a while. I think she's still in the area. But that was our main objective.

So basically to get the word out about certain candidates and organize, I don't know if publicity is the right word, but just—

Yes, and give them a forum to speak, because when we had a monthly meeting, we usually had somebody speak to us.

And then I couldn't run for another term because we went back to Livermore. And we stayed there for a couple of years, and then Larry was assigned to the AEC, I guess, in Washington. Anyway, we went to Washington, D.C. And he was in, I don't know what the name of it was. He worked in like a locked place.

So it was a very top security.

Security. I'm trying to think of it. International—anyway, it had to do with explosions internationally. I don't know any of the details. They picked the right person when they wanted Larry not to talk about anything, because he doesn't talk very much. And he didn't tell me. In fact, we were there two years—[the name is] ISA. ISA [Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Department of Defense]. And we were there two years, and I called him one time. I don't like to call him at work, but I called him one time and this man said, ISA. And I had to call him two or three times for something particularly and the man still said, ISA. And I thought, who is this person who's name is ISA? And I asked Larry, and it had been two years, we were back there two years, and Larry laughed and he said, No, no, that's not his name. And I asked him if he was Asian or what he was with a name like ISA. I didn't know anything about it.

But we enjoyed [it] back there because we had never lived on the East Coast. And so every weekend, we would go up and down the coast, and Larry had to go down to Florida. It was an Air Force base down there. And we went together. We drove down and went in and out of every nook and corner. And I went to the various museums down there, and of course we had to go over to Disneyland down there, too. So we had a good time and going every weekend. And we went to the Smithsonian, too. We'd spend like two hours at the most because after a little while, they all run together. If you live there, you can spend a couple of hours and then go home and enjoy it completely.

The luxury.

Yes, where we lived, we lived on the tenth floor of a condominium, and overlooked the Pentagon. We had a beautiful view out across the Potomac and Washington. But we were within two blocks, long blocks, mind you, of the subway. What do they call it? [Metro].

Oh, the train in Washington?

Yeah, the train, yeah.

Yeah, I forget what it's called, but I know what you're talking about.

[00:20:00] It's not the Underground. That's in London. But anyway, why, we would walk down there, and even when it was snowing we could walk down and get on it and go over to the Smithsonian.

So you were pretty centrally located.

Yes.

So if we could just back up a little bit, I'm just curious [about] what you thought of all of this, from the very beginning when he started working for the labs, to the weapons or the devices at the test site. Because it sounds like he was involved in a lot of work that he just could never talk about.

Yes, he was. He was involved in it. At first, he was working for this CR&D, and it was working on a linear particle accelerator. It was a very technical building of this big accelerator, and he was very, very involved in that, intellectually involved and emotionally involved in it. And what I thought at the time was that it was something that was right up his alley because he was a mechanical engineer and he specialized in machine design. And so that fulfilled his need. Then gradually he went over to the device engineering, and of course that was building a device of some sort, too. And I never really thought too much, until we came down here, about the explosions that occurred. I did think about it, but I always found out afterward what the problems were. One of the ones that he had put together up on a platform didn't go off, and he had to climb up this high, I don't know whether they were five hundred feet—?

They're pretty tall, the towers out at the test site.

Yeah, they were, the towers out there, and he had to climb up there and take it apart. And it could have gone off. But, you see, I didn't know about that until afterwards. And then he told us about people in Livermore who had never seen an explosion and how they had wanted so badly to come down and see it. And some were women. They got them in the bunker and everything, and I guess it was a little more powerful than what they thought. And Larry says, `Well, you hold on,` because he could see the wave coming, a shock wave coming, and he says, `It tossed people around a little bit.` They didn't want to come back again. It was very forceful.

But again, *I* didn't know anything about this until after the fact. I did know that he was exposed to something and they had to check his blood for a number, I don't know, six weeks or something like that. But I know that my daughter at the time was in high school, and she and I talked about some of the things that concerned *her* about these explosions and things, and that her father was working on these things. So we had talked about it, and I don't know what you would say. She was, well, she had been pressured a little bit by her fellow students and that kind of thing about it and how they disliked it. There was antinuclear [sentiment], as there is today, but it was more prevalent at the time. And I tried to help her through it because it was kind of, as far as Larry was concerned, it was a gradual going from very intense design things to **[00:25:00]** to another intense design and so forth. Only when he had to go out to the Pacific and that kind of thing, and down here for these detonations, did it really affect me. I never really felt that it was a *bad* thing because I felt that ending World War II with the Japanese was good for both the United States and for the Japanese. There would have been millions killed. And my brother had been killed in World War II, and my other brother had been missing in action for quite a while. He escaped through the underground in Europe. So anything to stop this. I also had an uncle that was killed in the British Tank Corps in North Africa, and another one, a Canadian, that was

killed in Italy. So whatever I felt about it, I was glad that the war was *over* and that more of our people—it would've hurt the Japanese tremendously because they wouldn't have given up either. And I know it was a terrible, devastating thing for those cities. Terrible. But you're saying that maybe eighty thousand people compared to a millions.

Right. So it's sort of the lesser of two evils.

Yes. Yes, lesser of two evils. So I never felt that was a bad thing in itself. I *did* feel that between the Soviet Union and ours, that that would've been a terrible thing if we had any kind of a conflict with them. And I'm glad that isn't the case now. But in the long run, I think it was just as well. I can't say that I was terribly upset by them working out there.

Right. Were you ever, I mean, basically because *you had a family and because you have kids, was that ever a concern—the connection between the possibility of nuclear weapons or…?*

You mean for having a war with—?

Yeah, and just the fact that we actually have this capacity, these types of weapons, to do this.

Oh, yes, there's always that concern. Even today, there's that concern because some terrorist could easily get—not easily, or they would've already done it—could get nuclear devices of some sort and it would be terrible.

So the potential is always there.

Yes. But that's like saying you can't stop, even though you may not want, the sun to shine or rise at a certain time, it's going to do it. There's a time and place for everything, and if something is discovered, they're going to utilize it. It's like the stem cell argument, whether they should have it or not. They're going to use it. So whether it's good or bad is—?

Sort of irrelevant?

Yes, it is.

Right. Wow. I guess, going back too, I'm just curious what your perceptions were? I mean were you aware of the test site and at least the above ground tests that were going on when you guys were out in California? Do you remember—?

[00:30:00] Oh, I was aware that it was because Larry had to come *down* here all the time. I knew that was going on. He wasn't involved in the first, you know, in Alamogordo [Trinity].

Where the first one is, yes.

Anyway, when the first one went off, he was not involved with that. That was before he was into it. But I certainly was *aware* that it was going on. But we didn't know as much the danger of it at that time, either. Now, we went as a family on a burro trip. This is kind of interesting. Larry was down here, and I took the two children and my nephew, who was Stuart McTaggart. I think he was thirteen or fourteen years old, and the children were, I don't know, eight, nine. With Sierra Club, we were going on this burro trip. And Larry says, `Well, I'll meet you there.` It was in Lone Pine, California, which is on Highway 395 east of the Sierra. So I drove over the Sierra on the Sonora Pass. At that time, it was one-way most of the way. We got down there and, of course, he wasn't there. So we waited around for a while and I decided, `I'll go on up to the place where we were supposed to go`, about ten miles up in the mountains. We went to the sheriff's office and we told him that I would be back in a few hours; if he [Larry] showed up, why, let him know. Well, it [the test] had been delayed and delayed. A lot of times they delayed these tests because of the weather and so forth. And so he went from the test site and went up to Tonopah, then went from Tonopah down, and he thumbed a ride all the way down. When he got to the corner there in Lone Pine, he went to the sheriff's and found out I would be back.

But he was standing on the corner and around the corner came a man who was with his family. They were going up [the mountain] and he knew them and he says, `Larry, hey, what are you doing here?`

And he said, Well, I'm going up there on a burro trip.

Oh, he says, get in and I'll take you up there.

So we went, and he kept thinking, Well, that should go off at any time now. Oh, it should go off. We were in the burro trip about, oh, maybe a week, and all of a sudden, *boom! Early* in the morning, it lit up, and he says, Well, it went off. So that's kind of interesting.

Wow. And how far away were you guys from the test site? Where were you in relation? That's pretty far, isn't it?

Oh, gosh, we were—oh, as the crow flies, it must've been a hundred miles, maybe.

Had you ever seen a cloud before? Had you ever seen an explosion?

No, I haven't. I've felt them, of course. But there are very few people nowadays who have worked out there that have actually seen it. Larry says sometimes he wouldn't even get up for them anymore. Oh, we had a few visitors at the time, too. We had people from England who were testing out at the site, We had two families that stayed with us. And it was supposed to go off and it was delayed and supposed to go off, so they were here about six weeks before it finally went off. We got to know them and we still **[00:35:00]** communicate with them in England. We've visited them in England, too. He was the chief engineer at [Atomic Weapons Research Establishment] Aldermaston [England].

And they were testing out here also.

Yes, they were testing. So we were able to meet them and it was kind of fun. They'd come out again at times—borrowed our car and went to Disneyland— you know, things like that. So that was fun to do that kind of thing. And Larry coordinated going, when they had a, I forget, what, a joint test, testing with the Russians?

Yes, the JVE, the Joint Verification [Experiment]?

Yes, for verification. They wanted him to go but he was sick at the time. He didn't know it at the time, but he had like a growth on the parathyroid and it caused a lot of problems. So he didn't want to go where he couldn't get a doctor. There were a lot of different things that happened, and he had to coordinate getting the things over there, the equipment and all of that. They couldn't drill a straight hole, the Russians couldn't, and so they had to take the big drill rigs from here and put them on big airplanes and take them over. And of course, everything had to go through Moscow. I think it would've been easier, shorter, to go the other way, but that was their problem. And then the various things that we've heard about that, too, was that the people over there were real—they wanted salads. After a while, you know, they had the Russian cooks and they wanted salads. So they shipped a great big load of lettuce over. And the cooks didn't know what to do with it. They boiled it like they would cabbage. So, you know, little things like that.

It's a good thing he wasn't over there. Boiled lettuce.

Yeah, it was. And another time, they had a sandwich over there, and they ate it of course, and they said, `What is this?` Well, this was a slab of lard between two pieces of bread. That was their sandwich. And that kind of thing wouldn't have been good for him at all, at the time. Then when they went to bring all that stuff home, he was able to convince them that they could ship the whole thing by rail to Vladivostok and then by ship, and they would save millions of dollars doing that. So that is the kind of thing that he was involved with.

When did he retire?

Oh, I'm trying to think. Eighty-seven, I think. He's been retired for a while.

So, thinking back to the early days when you first got out here and he became really involved in the test site, to now, have your perceptions or your ideas or opinions, I guess, changed or shifted at all about the testing or what was going on out there?

I don't think they've shifted very much on that. It was something that was just done.

It just was.

Yes.

How about the culture here in Las Vegas? I mean I know Las Vegas has changed a lot, too.

[Laughter] Oh, my. We had [J.C.] Penney's, we had [Montgomery] Ward's, and we had **[00:40:00]** Ronzone's downtown. That's it. There wasn't anything else. And I think the city itself was about 150,000. Henderson was a little tiny place out there, and Boulder City was a little tiny place. We bought a house and it was kind of on the edge of town in the northwest section. We still have that house and still live in that house. But the growth. Of course, there was the Nellis Air Base, but you would go out and go down to Nellis and you were out in the desert. There was nothing there at all. And there was always something in North Las Vegas, but the town center wasn't there. Along Las Vegas Boulevard, there was a few things. And I guess the main casino was the Riviera and the Stardust. And they didn't have a convention center at the time.

So it's really changed.

Oh, yes. Yes. Completely changed. The Tropicana was kind of a nice place to go to, also. And then there was one—the Hacienda, I guess, and it was one that I know our next door neighbor used to take her children, which were six children. He was working at Area 51. They'd take them down for the buffet, and they said with those six children, that was a great deal for them. But you could go and you would have a drink and you could hear all kinds of good entertainment,

real, real good entertainment. Occasionally we used to go down and we'd say, We'd see all the kooks coming in gambling. We're not gamblers, at least not at the casinos type of thing. As far as shopping, there was *very*, very little shopping. And [Ed] Von Tobel had a lumber yard, I think it was on Second or Third Street.

And that was pretty much a big part of business downtown, right?

Oh, yes, it was. That was downtown. And when Von Tobel moved out onto Maryland Parkway, a big thing. We used to go down there just to walk around and look at things, and we'd see our friends there. You could run into them, you see. So it was quite interesting. Then, of course, they built the Plaza, I guess it is, at the end of Freemont Street where there used to be the Union Station. It used to be Union Station. They tore it down and built a hotel there.

OK. Downtown.

Yes, downtown. The Golden Nugget was there, but it was [not] *anywhere* near what it is now. And Binion [Binion's Horseshoe]. We used to go upstairs in the Binion and have a good steak dinner. And out at the Sahara, the top of the Sahara had dancing and things, and we used to do that occasionally, too.

Nice. Wow. So it's a whole different city, it sounds like.

Oh, absolutely. And, of course, the Dunes. The top of the Dunes was one. And what did they just tear down?

The Sand[s]?.

The Sands.

So along with that shift in culture and all of the changes in Las Vegas, since you've been here for a while, do you think that that impacted the role that the test site played in Las Vegas culture?

[00:45:00] It became a smaller role. Much, much smaller role. Because the more people came and the more the casinos, the more people came to work at the casinos. And before, why, there must've been ten thousand people working out there [the test site] at some time, and that was a big employer for this area. But it became less and less important, and of course, it diminished. After the test ban treaty, it diminished considerably.

Do you think that also shifted or changed opinion or perceptions of the test site within the public?

Yes, I think so. I think so. [To] the new people coming in, it was just out there. It was not important to them. And so, although they don't want the nuclear waste dump out there and I don't think any of us do, but it wasn't very important to them to do anything. They *did* have protests out there, but they were very small, mostly.

Right. What do you think about that?

What, the protests?

Yes. What's your take on all that?

Well, everybody has a right, I guess, to their opinion on things. And I always think about some of these people that go places to protest. I wonder who supports them because somebody has to. They have to have a living somehow.

To be able to get there.

Yes. And I know there's some idealists, but there are quite a few that have some political interests, one way or another, on these things. I think some of them that camped out there in the summer have to have their heads examined.

It's pretty hot.

Yes, it is.

Yeah. A lot of it seems to have come in the eighties, a lot of antinuclear movement. It seems to have died down a bit.

So I don't know about them, how they really feel. There are some people that were like opposed to the Vietnam War and, of course, who would *not* be opposed to war? But to take signs and hit people over the head and do things of this sort seems to me kind of ridiculous. But people can march and do whatever they want to do, as far as I'm concerned. Everybody has their own ideas of importance.

That's a very good point. It's all perception, I guess. So I know you said you're not currently involved in the things anymore, the women's Republican—the politics or anything like that, and the AEC, the women's groups of the AEC, have disbanded. I'm just wondering if there are any other things that you're currently involved in.

Well, I'm involved in my church, of course. I'm an elder in Westminster Presbyterian Church. And we're involved in trying to start a Hispanic ministry at the Presbyterian church, and all of the problems that involves. You have to have it done right to establish it, and you have to have meetings and that kind of thing. I'm not crazy about meetings anymore. And if monthly meetings have to be a certain time and a certain place anymore, why, I'm not terribly interested in that kind of thing. But I will serve out my term as elder and do what I can.

[00:50:00] And I am more involved with my children and my grandchildren.

Do your kids live out here?

My daughter, who is a medical doctor, lives here. She is practicing now at the Veterans Clinic. She had a private practice, a solo practice. And at the time, cell phones didn't reach to Red Rock Canyon, and she was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It was starting to affect her health. The veterans clinic wanted her to come on Wednesday afternoon or whatever, and

then they wanted her more, and so she decided eventually that she would close her practice and go with the Veterans. And it's better for her because her health has improved. She works eight to nine hours a day and doesn't have to work six days a week more than, oh, once a month, and has time off. So I see her quite often. And I have two grandchildren that are here. I see them fairly often, or I call them or e-mail them. The youngest one is twenty-two and she is, I think, in the last year at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas]. Let's hope it's the last year. And my grandson works full time in computer things, and he takes classes at UNLV when he can, and eventually he'll probably get his degree, but it's just taking a long time.

It takes a while these days.

Yes, when you're working full time, and especially if they want you to work ten, eleven hours. So anyway. And I'm glad that the university nowadays allows for that kind of thing. We used to think of it, going to university, you'd go four years and that's it, but not anymore. I think it's real good that they have some arrangement like that, that they have the evening classes.

More flexibility.

Yes, and I think the community college is excellent, too.

Here?

Yes. Well anyway, my other granddaughter is a corporate attorney in Portland, and gosh, I think she's thirty-three years old, and I say, `Well, it's time for her to settle down and get married and have a family.`

I tell her, `I want some great-grandchildren.`

And she says—when she gets angry with me, she kind of says Grand*mother*. Otherwise, it's Grandma.

And she says, `[Grandmother], don't you think I ought to get married first?`

I said, `Well, you know, I didn't think it was necessary nowadays.`

And my son lives up in Oregon, near Roseburg, and he worked at the test site for a long time.

Oh, he did? What did he do?

Well, let me see. He worked on heavy equipment. I guess that's what it is. And he was kind of a—I don't know what you would call him, a manager or head of a group for heavy equipment, working on that.

Sort of overseeing it or getting it to other areas?

Well, he worked on trucks and on these big cranes and you know, all this big, heavy equipment. And they would have to go out and tow some in and work on that and get it ready. And he used to always say, `Well, I have the striper truck in again,` the one that makes a stripe down the center of the road. And he worked there for, oh, twelve to fifteen years, something like that. And then he worked out away from there for a while, but he says, **[00:55:00]** `It's just too hot to be working out in the sun like this,` and so they moved to Oregon. And it's real nice. I just talked to him the other day. He going to build a house. He has about seven acres, and a lot of trees and so forth, and he has to take out some of the trees before he can build a house there. He has like a house trailer that's there, but he wants to build a house. So that's my family.

So he obviously didn't have, I guess, some of the same thoughts and concerns as your daughter did?

No. No. She's always been more sensitive to this sort of thing. She was involved in the Indian Teacher Corps in Wisconsin. And she graduated in anthropology and political science, and went in the Indian Teacher Corps and lived on the Indian reservation in Wisconsin, and got her master's degree from the University of Wisconsin before she ever decided to become a [doctor].

She said she was sick and she was out on the reservation and she couldn't get anybody to come and see her. She said, I could've died there and no one would've cared. And she had long, dark hair, and she said it was hard for her to even cash a check because they thought she was an Indian. And she asked me if they had any classes, find out if they had any classes in the summer here, to fill in for what she needed to go on. And I found out yes, they did, and so she came back. And she had already signed a contract with the—she was teaching in, I think it was a Catholic school, I'm not sure there. But I told her, Listen, if you want to be a medical doctor, it's a long, hard pull. Here it is only June. They can get another person. You can go and call them and cancel it, and start working on it, if you're going to do it. So she did, and so she became a medical doctor. She's very *sensitive* to other people and she would take anybody in to her office that needed anything. In fact, she took people who had AIDS, and I've been in the office when men were there in chains and a policeman, you know. Anybody who needed anything—so it was hard for her to close her shop because [of] her people. They would come in and cry and want her to help.

That's a pretty hard life, though. I mean it's very busy. Stressful.

Oh, yes. Yes. It's very, very difficult, and when you're working with people with AIDS, at the time that she was working with them. She says, It is very difficult because they're all going to die. And you can make their life as easy as you can up to now. And, of course, now, why, it's better. But she still says there's quite a few in the Veterans Clinic that have it. So it's one of those dreaded things.

Yeah. Do you have any idea what her current thought are these days on the whole test site issue?

No, I haven't really talked to her about that. We have breakfast with her every Saturday morning, which is real nice for me because we have become good friends as well as mother and daughter. Of course, you know, she'll say something about—she'll have an egg and I'll say, Well, what

you need is this and this and this. And I think, What am I saying? But now I've gotten so that the doctor will say to me, Take this, and so forth, and I forget. You know, they have you in and out so fast. So I ask her, How does this affect my system and **[01:00:00]** with all my other medications? And she will tell me, of course

That's great. It's good to have a doctor in the family for that these days.

Oh, well, I thought it would be good to have a doctor and a lawyer in the family. So I couldn't get my son to do that, but my granddaughter is.

You've got all the bases covered, or at least all the big ones. Very good. Wow. Well, I definitely thank you for your time.

Oh, sure. Sure. It's been kind of interesting to talk about that and reminisce a little bit.

It sounds like you've led just such a very interesting, almost exciting, life, but maybe from your shoes, it's just what was going on every day. But I'm just wondering, as far as having an impact on the marriage or not, it sounds like your husband was gone a lot. And then there was just so much that he could not talk about pertaining to his work. I'm just wondering how that was or what that was like?

Well, I knew when I married him that he was not very involved in—I mean he did not express himself too well on things, because he would call me up when we were dating and he would call me up and he'd say, Hello, you know. And then *I* would have to more or less carry on the conversation. So we are quite a bit alike in a lot of different things. Our background is a great deal alike because his mother was born and reared about a hundred miles from where my parents were in Canada. They didn't know each other, of course. And his father was from North Ireland, and he was very much an Orangeman, and so we were Presbyterian and he was Presbyterian. We met at a Masonic club that was a building just out on the opposite side of the street up at the

campus, the University of California. It was a great place for us to come. And we both lived at home and commuted, and a great place to come and leave some of our things and then go to the university. So that's where we met. His father was a Mason from Ireland and my father was a Mason. You know, we have similar backgrounds. So that part was easy. And the kinds of foods and all of that were all kind of similar. And there was no problem there, although there are times when I think, `I wish he would talk more. I wish he would just chat.` But he is not a chatty person, and he thinks that I should understand what he's thinking. So he is not very outgoing. That's why I hoped that he [Larry Crooks's interviewer, Robert Nickel] would start asking him questions that would elicit some of the things because he may then go into a detail—as our daughter said, `It was more than what I wanted to know.` And he could go into a great deal of detail. And the children, they were afraid to ask him because of getting in too much.

Because he would go off into such great detail.

Yeah, detail of things, and why things work this way. So, anyway, I just accepted it. At that time in the history of our country, you got married, you had children, and you stayed with **[01:05:00]** them, for the most part. Most all my friends did. And if you had a little problem, so you had a little problem. That wasn't something to get a divorce over. And we grew up knowing that our parents were our parents and we were to eventually obey and there was no rebellion. There may have been inside you, but you did not do anything. And if you got in trouble in school, you got in worse trouble at home. That's what happened with us. It was kind of a disciplined life, but I remember my father never came to the dining room table without a coat and tie on. It was more formal. It was more a formal life and this is what you did, and there was no question that that's what you were going to do.

And so if you chose your husband, you lived with him and you did with him. I wasn't entirely sure I wanted to go back to Livermore because at the time my son had gotten a divorce and there were two little children that he was taking care of. I was going over there every day around five o'clock in the morning because he had to leave to go to the test site and drive to the test site. And I would take care of them, and then I'd take them to nursery school or take them to a neighbor that took care of them for a while. I was very involved with them. My little grandson, he had white hair, and they used to tease him at school and he would say, `It's not my problem because I have white hair. My grandmother washes my hair with Clorox.` [laughter] And you know, you get involved with children like that and it's real hard to leave them. But where your husband goes, you go. And that's kind of the attitude of my generation. But my son has been divorced twice, so I hope this last one sticks. I think it will.

I don't consider my life—I think sometimes that I could've done more with my life, that I could've done much more, but it didn't happen that way. It was more important for me to get married and have children, and I enjoyed my children. I was *not* one of those that was glad to see them go back to school.

Get them all out of the house.

Yeah. I wasn't that kind. They went with us wherever we went. When we went on vacations, the whole family went.

Yeah, it sounds like you did a lot, actually, which is nice.

We always went on a vacation of some sort. Up in the Sierra, a lot of the time.

You were up in some beautiful country.

Oh, yes. Yes. A change. A change.

You know, I'm just going to pause—

[01:09:04] End Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Disc 2.

(Talking begins a few seconds before CD begins to record).

They were trying to get people out to vote, and a lot of them are not residents or not legal residents of the country. A lot of them don't know that they can't vote if they aren't—they have to be a citizen. And I don't know how they get registered, you see. There's a lot of chance of fraud that could take place in *all* kinds of different ways, in the absentee ballots and all kinds of different things. So I think people have to be aware of this and if they see anything or—I really don't think illegal aliens should be voting.

I think all people that are eligible should at least register to vote. I think you're right about that.

Well, they should vote. Not complain. Just vote.

Right. Well, again, I certainly thank you for your time.

Well, that's fine. It's my pleasure, really, to help with your project. I don't know what it will do for your history, but whatever.

Well, it's sort of the unique thing about oral history as opposed to just being able to open up a book and read something. You actually get to hear people's stories that fit in with certain historical things.

Well, yes, and when you take in all kinds of different people's stories, you can put it together.

Yeah, and I think that's very unique. It forms a much bigger story when everybody's voices are put together.

Oh, I've been thinking about doing this kind of thing just for my children and grandchildren. I would've loved to have had something written by my grandmother, you know, and even though you think your life hasn't been very exciting and just mundane. For example, when I was growing up in the Bay Area, every season that bay would be black with ducks and geese and

things of this sort. Nowadays, of course, you're not doing that. And when we lived in Berkeley, I remember we sat out on our porch and watched the geese and ducks fly over for two hours at a time. And I'm not sure—I don't think they have that kind of thing anymore. You know, things of this sort, they might be interesting.

Well, history is unique, and every person's part in it is interesting, I think. And things change. Things change so much.

Oh, yes, they do. They do. And I can't believe the transportation and the communication, the way it has changed. Goodness, when Larry was going to college, he had a slide rule at one time. Now, you say something about a slide rule to an engineer that's just graduated, they haven't any idea what you're talking about. And so it took quite a bit for him to learn working with computers because of the fact that, you know, you don't grow up [with them], and how children from the age of two are out there punching the keys and seeing what's coming up in the computers. And the television and all of this.

Yeah, our technology has just become, I think, overwhelming, almost.

And medicine. Tremendous.

The advances that we've made?

The advances. Tremendous. And I know we complain about the drug companies, but some of the drugs that are coming out are just marvelous, what they can do.

Right. No, there's no doubt that we're making advances. It's just that technologically it can be very overwhelming, I think.

Yes, it can, and everybody is specializing. When Larry went to college, there were four kinds of **[00:05:00]** engineers, and nowadays, they have all kinds of subdivisions. There weren't any nuclear engineers at the time.

Yeah, he must have really seen some changes in the industry.

Oh, yes. Yes. Because nowadays, I know at the University of California, I don't know that they require a five-year study for engineering, but they recommend it. Taking like seventeen or eighteen units a semester is pretty hard with some of that technical stuff. And so they do recommend that, and of course, there, why, they said that he had to have a specialty, and they called it an option at that time, and so his was in machine design. And that was a good option for him.

Yeah, it sounds like that's what he ended up doing.

But there were only, I think, chemical engineers, civil engineers, mechanical engineers. What's the other engineer? Electrical engineer. That was all there was. And now, of course—

It's pretty huge now.

Oh, yes. Yes. In everything.

And sub-divisions, I guess, or whatever it is.

Oh, sub-divisions of it. So anyway, why, it's been a pleasure for me to help you along with this study.

Well, I thank you very much. It's been great to talk to you.

[00:06:35] End Disc 2.

[End of interview]