

INTERVIEW WITH LUCY CHRISTIANSEN
BY DOROTHE NORTON OCTOBER 19, 2001

[Transcription note: this tape recording is flawed technically. There are many points at which the tape skips forward and conversation is not recorded.]

MS. NORTON: What is your birthplace and date? Could also tell us your parent's names?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Lillian and Leal Hehn were my parents.

MS. NORTON: Did they have a High School education?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yes, but they didn't go any higher.

MS. NORTON: Where and how did you spend your early years?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: In Madison. We visited northwest Wisconsin where my parents were born. And all of the relatives were up there. As I got a little older, I'd spend my summers up there. I got a little farm life that way.

MS. NORTON: What hobbies, books or events influenced you the most?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: At the time I liked a lot of mystery novels. I liked to read those. I always wanted to be a Secretary for some reason.

MS. NORTON: Even as a child?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Not as a child, but as a teenager in High School I'd get let out of school early so I could go [to work or training]. I first job I had, I didn't make anything. I worked for an Insurance Company and I stuffed envelopes. But it was experience. Then, the second one, I worked uptown in Madison on the Capital Square. And I worked for Collections Company. He was a collector of unpaid bills, and that type of thing. I also fished with my Dad.

MS. NORTON: What High School did you go to? And when did you graduate?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Madison East High School. I graduated in 1943. I did take some courses at the Vocational School. I took some brush-up courses on typing and shorthand.

MS. NORTON: Who most influenced your education and your career tract?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I guess because I enjoyed the studies that I took. My parents didn't push me. Sometimes I wish they'd have pushed me to go on to Madison Business College to become a Court Reporter. But they thought it was great if I graduated from High School. They weren't brought up any different from that. I thought of becoming a WAVE once, but I changed my mind. You don't have to put that in.

MS. NORTON: How about your husband, what are his birthplace and date?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Deerfield, Wisconsin. He was born July 4, 1925.

MS. NORTON: What were his parent's names?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Lydia and Irvine Christiansen.

MS. NORTON: What were their jobs and education?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: They were farmers. His father went to a Vocational School and took up a class in farming but I can't what it was all about it. But it was quite an opportunity at that time for him to do that.

MS. NORTON: And how did Arlo spend his early years?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: On the farm, and enjoying that. He had his chores and things to do, but when he became a teenager he got drafted at age 18 into World War II. He got out in 1945. He always says that he didn't have teenage years.

[Ms. Norton asks a question about Mrs. Christiansen's children. Tape is erased or has technical problems.]

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: ...that's in Wisconsin, on June 10th, and that's all, Debra and Cathy.

MS. NORTON: How are they all doing now?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Cathy, due to health cannot work steady. [Tape skips] ...works for the, I don't know what it's called now, it was Wisconsin Power and Light but it's been bought out by, I think, an Iowa firm.

MS. NORTON: Why did you want to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I lived next door to a gentleman that worked for the Agriculture Department. He said that the office next to him, Marshall Stennent's office needed a

Secretary. So I called Marshall Stennent, and he said I had to take the test as soon as I had an interview with him.

MS. NORTON: What was your first position, Secretary?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yes, I started right at the hunting season, working on the hunting season. He gave me the books and told me to go through them. I learned by the book. He believed in learning by the book.

MS. NORTON: Are you talking about the manuals?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yes, the manuals. Then, at that time, we sent out those Bird Pamphlets all over, so I was busy doing that.

MS. NORTON: Was this in Madison?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Right. And it was always secretarial.

MS. NORTON: What were the pay and benefits like?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: They were all right for part-time work. I only worked part-time. I started out with twenty hours a week. But then, I think it was when I worked for Bob Thomas, I think he was the one who wanted me to work longer. And they let me work for thirty-two hours.

MS. NORTON: Were there any promotion opportunities?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: No really, but they did give me an upgrade in pay. [Tape skipping] I was a grade 5; I couldn't go up any higher than that. But I could go up in that grade to step ten.

MS. NORTON: Did you socialize with the people that you worked with?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: A little bit, not a lot. Once in a while we'd get together and we'd have them out to the house or something.

MS. NORTON: How did your career affect your family?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: They were all for it. It worked out very well.

MS. NORTON: Why did you leave the Service?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I retired.

MS. NORTON: What sort of training did you receive for your job?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Like I said, I learned from the manuals for one thing. And each one that I worked for had their own way of doing the work. So I learned from each Agent that I worked with.

MS. NORTON: What hours did you work? You said you worked part-time.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: At first I think it was eight to twelve o'clock. Then, Marshall thought it was better if I could come in the afternoon because in the morning he would be in the office, where in the afternoon he'd be out in the field. So then I transferred from one to ... answering the phone and giving our certain information that I was taught that I could give. And if I could give some, I could always refer them to the Agents when they would back in the office. A little bit later on they let me go and pick out my own typewriter.

MS. NORTON: That was great!

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: It was! It was a Panasonic, and I could just put that stuff in there and I could type away. And if I made an error I could correct it, and it was great.

MS. NORTON: Did you come across in inventions or innovations?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I think using LEMUS, and being taught that. I don't know if it was a tool, but it was important. ...Learning and using computers.

... only not with animals. Not with live ones. Occasionally I had to go and pick up the dead ones that were shipped to Madison, Eagles.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel toward the animals.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: ...had a house full of animals.

MS. NORTON: What support did you receive locally or regionally?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: If I had a question I could always call Dorothy, or Barb Anderson, or I could talk to whoever the SAC was at the time. I could call them if I had to. And there were also the Agents that I worked with; I could get advice from them.

MS. NORTON: How do you think the Service was perceived by people who did not work inside of our Agency?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I think most of them approved of it. You'd have a few that would say, 'oh yeah, the Federal Service' in a sarcastic way. But I think that basically people approved of it and were happy that we had a Federal Service.

MS. NORTON: What projects, if any, were you ever involved with?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: ...especially the [unintelligible] Goose Program. That was a big item in the fall. That, and at one time, oh, what was it? Where they do those surveys on certain birds. ...I don't that, as much as it was given to the Refuges, or to some other organization to do later on.

MS. NORTON: What do you think was the most pressing issue in your job?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Trying to work for five Agents at one time!

MS. NORTON: Did your feeling about that change with time?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yeah. It didn't bother me; it's just that once in a while, it got a little hectic.

MS. NORTON: Who were the Agents that you worked for?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Stennent was the first one. Then it was Miles Camry, Gus Bondy, Bob Thomas, and Ernie Mayer.

MS. NORTON: And Marshall Stennent was the one who hired you?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Yes.

[Tape skips question]

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: ...I think all of the, it would be all of the Agents that worked in Eau Claire and Oshkosh and Milwaukee, because they were a big help.

MS. NORTON: What were some other people that you [could depend on?]

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: There was Barb Anderson. And there were some other gals in the Regional Office that I knew. Right now I can't think of their names. And you'd get acquainted with the other Secretaries in the other areas like in Missouri.

MS. NORTON: Do you think you could all still be able to work for the Service today?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: We probably could, but age-wise. Back when I was, or when all of us were working all of us were about the same age. And this many years later, I don't know if they'd want to.

MS. NORTON: Do you recall the names of the Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior or Directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: The ones in the office there, [tape skipping frequently, conversation difficult to follow]

MS. NORTON: Tell me about the high point in your career.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Just the idea of being involved in the Law Enforcement part of the Fish and Wildlife Service was very exciting. I really do. I looked forward to it. I didn't go out with the Agents, or anything like that in the field, but I always waited for them to come back. I'd type up the reports and everything.

MS. NORTON: Was there ever anything like a low point?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I don't think so, really. Everybody has a low point once in a while. It depends on your health, or your mood or something. But I think basically I really enjoyed the job. I only intended to work for a year, to get out of the house after all of the children were in school. I liked it so well, that I kept up.

MS. NORTON: How many years total? [tape skips, answer erased]

Do think you would have done anything differently in your job while you were doing it?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: No, not really. Because the only way I could get a bigger advancement was to move to Chicago or Minneapolis or one of those places. And after all...

MS. NORTON: What was your most dangerous or frightening experience while you were working?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I wouldn't call it 'dangerous', I just called it 'kind of weird' when these people would come in because they wanted to have wild animals in their yards; Lions and Tigers and things like that. I just didn't think that was right. I didn't think they should do it. I guess that would be the thing. They were kind of rough looking characters and I guess I was just a little leery of them. But I did tell them that I didn't think it was right for them to have those animals!

MS. NORTON: Good! What was your most humorous experience?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Oh shoot, what would that be? I guess when Dorothy called me that I was supposed to wear a uniform. And I laughed and laughed. I had Bob Thomas take a picture of me with my uniform. I was saluting and I sent it to Bob Hodgins.

MS. NORTON: Have you talked to many people about your career?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Not exactly about my career, but I have tried to tell some people that I have met down here in Missouri, 'go on to school'. And then I said to apply for a...and go in and take the Federal test, or a State test, either one. But take the Federal one. There is a lot of benefits and opportunities available. I don't think they followed my advice. They were already in their forties when I was talking to them. They were complaining that they were making enough money, and things like that. I told them that it might be worthwhile to take the test and see if they could pass it.

MS. NORTON: What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service during your twenty-two years?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: The money. I think they became stricter in their rules and regulations. Which I guess is good.

MS. NORTON: Were there any changes in the personnel?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Well there were a lot of changes in personnel, but I think that in our office any way, they all worked out very well.

MS. NORTON: ...in the environment?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: There is a lot of controversy over the environment. I think that even today they are still complaining that we're cutting down too many trees and not preserving areas for the future. [tape skipping]

MS. NORTON: Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade or so?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: I hope they will keep improving. I think they are doing a great job. The organization started in different areas, all-pertaining to the betterment of our wildlife and our environment.

MS. NORTON: Are that any documents, or anything that you would like to donate for the Archives?

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: ...my certificate that was signed by Harvey Nelson when I retired. Otherwise, I have little certificates for advancement and things like that.

MS. NORTON: Thank you so much for allowing me in interview you. We will send you a copy of the transcript.

MRS. CHRISTIANSEN: Well thank you for interviewing me. I thought that it was rather interesting.