

INTERVIEW WITH LUCILLE GEARHART
BY DOROTHE NORTON AUGUST 21, 2002
HUDSON, WISCONSIN

MS. NORTON: We are going to do this interview so that we can send it in to the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown and it will become part of our Archives. Lucy can you please tell your birthplace and date?

MRS. GEARHART: Bemidji, Minnesota on January 3, 1928.

MS. NORTON: What were your parents' names?

MRS. GEARHART: John and Loretta Schmid. [Spelled out]

MS. NORTON: What were their jobs and education?

MRS. GEARHART: My father only went through the fifth grade in school. My mother went through the eighth grade. They were farmers.

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

MRS. GEARHART: I started out at a little country grade school near Knapp, Wisconsin. Then when I was in the second grade we moved to Sheldon, Wisconsin. The community had two grocery stores and a tavern. The name of town was Arnold.

MS. NORTON: How did you spend your early years?

MRS. GEARHART: Picking rocks on the farm?

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

MRS. GEARHART: I was always interested in sports of all kinds, and I liked music.

MS. NORTON: Did you have any jobs as a child?

MRS. GEARHART: No, just picking rocks on the farm.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever hunt or fish?

MRS. GEARHART: No.

MS. NORTON: I started out in Stanley, Wisconsin because the bus came to pick me up. But when I was a senior, the bus from Stanley no longer came. The bus from Holcomb came then, so I graduated from Holcomb High School in 1945.

MS. NORTON: Did you go to university then?

MRS. GEARHART: Out of high school I went to what was then Eau Claire Teacher's College. It's now the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

MS. NORTON: Did you get a degree?

MRS. GEARHART: No, I got married while I was a freshman in college. I think I finished my second year at Eau Claire. Then we moved to the cities where my husband went back to the University of Minnesota. I went there also.

MS. NORTON: Who most influenced your education?

MRS. GEARHART: I can't really single out any one person.

MS. NORTON: Did you have mentors, or courses that especially stuck with you?

MRS. GEARHART: That's a long time ago! I really liked history and math, and of course music. I played in the high school and college bands.

MS. NORTON: Where and how did you meet your husband?

MRS. GEARHART: I was going to college in Eau Claire and while I was a freshman there, he came to teach at Holcomb High School. I had a Friday off so I went with my girlfriend to visit school in Holcomb. He stood up in the front of the class and winked at me, and that was it!

MS. NORTON: When and where did you marry?

MRS. GEARHART: We were married February 4, 1946 in Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

MS. NORTON: Did you have any children?

MRS. GEARHART: No, just dogs.

MS. NORTON: Why did you want to work for the USFWS?

MRS. GEARHART: We were living in Fergus Falls, Minnesota and I happened to tell a girl who was singing in choir with me that I was interested working. I just asked her

where she worked. She worked for the Soil Conservation Service. I told her I was kind of interested in working part-time. [Tape skips] ...vacancy, so I went and interviewed for it and got the part-time job. Six months later, she got married and moved away. I took over her job.

MS. NORTON: What did you do?

MRS. GEARHART: My title was called Administrative Assistant.

MS. NORTON: Where did you go from there?

MRS. GEARHART: We moved to St. Paul in 1963 so I transferred in to the State office of the federal Soil Conservation Service. I worked there until 1967 when I was offered a job with FWS at the Bussard Building on Lake Street.

MS. NORTON: What attracted you to the Service?

MRS. GEARHART: You know, I don't remember. It must have been more money!

MS. NORTON: What were your duty stations? Were they all in the Regional office?

MRS. GEARHART: Yes, all in the Regional office.

MS. NORTON: Did you hold different positions there?

MRS. GEARHART: I started out as a Personnel Clerk. Then I think I worked in the front office first, and then went down to Personnel. Then I was lured up into Flyway Management by Ross Hansen. From there I went to the Depart of Public Affairs and then to River Basin Studies. After that I went to Federal Aide as an Accounting Technician. It was from that position that I... [Tapes skips].

MS. NORTON: What did you think of the pay and benefits when you first started with FWS?

MRS. GEARHART: I thought they were great. In pay I got up to a GS-7. At that time it seemed adequate for me.

MS. NORTON: You must have had some promotion opportunities along the way.

MRS. GEARHART: Yeah, I have always been one who was happy in my job rather than looking for more money.

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

MRS. GEARHART: I did.

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

MRS. GEARHART: I think my husband liked the paycheck that I brought home. Other than that, I can't think of any way it affected us.

MS. NORTON: And you left the Service when you were eligible to retire?

MRS. GEARHART: Yes.

MS. NORTON: What training did you receive for your jobs?

MRS. GEARHART: There were several courses along the way. There were a few accounting courses. I can't remember all of them but there was some training that I took.

MS. NORTON: What hours did you work?

MRS. GEARHART: They had what they call flextime when I retired. I remember starting at 6:30 in the morning and being through at three in the afternoon. That came in maybe three or four years before I retired.

MS. NORTON: What were your day-to-day duties?

MRS. GEARHART: At the final one in Federal Aide was that I took care of money that was allocated back to...I think it came from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses if I recall. It was allocated back to the State.

MS. NORTON: Did you see any new Service inventions or innovations?

MRS. GEARHART: No.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever work with any animals?

MRS. GEARHART: No, but that would have been fun.

MS. NORTON: What kind of support did you receive from [Tape skips]?

MRS. GEARHART: I don't think I can answer that one.

MS. NORTON: How do you think the Service was perceived by people outside of the agency?

MRS. GEARHART: There was always the ongoing comment that government employees don't work very hard. But I think overall, people were okay with the Service.

MS. NORTON: Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

MRS. GEARHART: I was involved in a grievance at one time.

MS. NORTON: What was the major impediment to your job or career?

MRS. GEARHART: I don't recall that there was any.

MS. NORTON: That's good! Do you remember your Supervisors?

MRS. GEARHART: Ross Hansen, Ray St. Orrs, and some others. [Tape skips a lot].

MS. NORTON: Can you recall any of the people you worked with who helped shape your career?

MRS. GEARHART: Well, there was you.

MS. NORTON: Well thank you!

MRS. GEARHART: There were several, it's difficult to remember all of them.

MS. NORTON: Do you remember the Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior, or Directors of FWS that you worked under?

MRS. GEARHART: I think I can answer that. The Presidents would have been Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Reagan. I'm not getting these in the right order.

MS. NORTON: How did the changes in administration affect your work?

MRS. GEARHART: I didn't notice any at all.

MS. NORTON: In your opinion, who do you think the individuals were who shaped the Service?

MRS. GEARHART: I am really not sure.

MS. NORTON: What was the high point of your career?

MRS. GEARHART: This is going to sound like I didn't go to the office to work, but I did. When you ask me that, I just think of the many nice people that I met.

MS. NORTON: Was there a low point in your career?

MRS. GEARHART: I think having to get up at 5:30am to be to work at 6:30 was not so good.

MS. NORTON: What was your most dangerous or frightening experience?

MRS. GEARHART: Riding in a carpool full of men. Not because they were dangerous, but because they picked on me.

MS. NORTON: What was your most humorous experience?

MRS. GEARHART: I could go on forever about that. Can you come back tomorrow and continue this?

MS. NORTON: So you have a lot more humorous than dangerous ones?

MRS. GEARHART: Yeah! I have a lot more humorous than dangerous ones!

MS. NORTON: What would you like to tell others about your career and the FWS?

MRS. GEARHART: I do believe that federal employees are very dedicated. They take their work conscientiously. I would say that they shouldn't believe it when they hear that federal employees don't like to work.

MS. NORTON: Were there ever any changes that you observed in the personnel or environment?

MRS. GEARHART: No. If there were, I don't remember.

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

MRS. GEARHART: I kind of feel there's going to be nothing but cutbacks along the way, not only in the federal government but in private enterprise as well.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever receive any awards or commendations?

MRS. GEARHART: I got a superior performance award one year.

MS. NORTON: Is there anyone that you know of who should be interviewed that I don't have on my list?

MRS. GEARHART: Anybody who is retired!

MS. NORTON: Well Lucy, this has been a nice time; just to see you and visit with you. I am glad that you still feel strong [positive] about the Fish and Wildlife Service.