

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH JANKE
BY DOROTHE NORTON, NOVEMBER 11, 2003
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MS. NORTON: Today in November 11, 2003. This interview will be between Ruth Janke and Dorothe Norton. Ruth retired from the FWS Bureau of Law Enforcement in 2002. Ruth, what is your birthplace and date?

MRS. JANKE: I was born in Superior, Wisconsin on June 5, 1939.

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

MRS. JANKE: My father's name was Gust Luostari. Luostari of course was my maiden name. My Mother's name was Mabel Pearson. Luostari is a good Finnish name.

MS. NORTON: Where did you spend your early years? Where they all in Wisconsin?

MRS. JANKE: Yes, I grew up on a farm in Maple, Wisconsin, which is east of Superior. I graduated from high school there. Then I went on down to Minneapolis to work.

MS. NORTON: While you were younger, and still in school did you every have any jobs?

MRS. JANKE: My junior and senior year I worked in the Co-op store in the area as a check out girl.

MS. NORTON: Did you have any hobbies, activities or books that influenced you a lot? You probably didn't play golf back then!

MRS. JANKE: No, I didn't play golf then. Growing up on a farm I was outside a lot; in the woods. Nature was a big thing in my life. Our hobbies back then were that we would go roller staking. We lived in the country. We weren't in the city so it wasn't going to the movies or that type of thing.

MS.NORTON: So your Dad was a farmer and your Mom was a housewife?

MRS. JANKE: Right.

MR. NORTON: Did you ever hunt or fish when you were younger?

MRS. JANKE: No, I didn't really. My father hunted and did a little fishing but other than that; we had a creek going through our property and we would make fishing poles out of string and a little hook and fish for "chubs" as we called them.

MS. NORTON: What were chubs?

MRS. JANKE: I think they were small suckers that weren't developed yet, or smaller fish. Of course we would catch tadpoles and butterflies and all the other normal things that kids do outdoors.

MS. NORTON: So you graduated from high school in what year?

MRS. JANKE: In 1957 I graduated from Northwestern High School in Maple, Wisconsin.

MS. NORTON: Did you go to college after high school?

MRS. JANKE: No I didn't. I had taken a secretarial course and went to work in Minneapolis at Northwestern National Bank.

MS. NORTON: So you didn't go to college, and you probably were never in the military service?

MRS. JANKE: No, I wasn't.

MS. NORTON: Can you tell me how when and where you met Roger?

MRS. JANKE: I worked in Minneapolis for two years. Then I went back home and worked in Duluth for Minnesota Power and Light Company. While I was working there I was Secretary to the Purchasing Agent. I met Roger while I was working there while I was roller-skating back in my hometown. I think we were married a year and a half after I met him. We got married in Poplar, Wisconsin, which is right near Maple in July of 1960.

MS. NORTON: How many children do you have?

MRS. JANKE: We have four sons. Rick is the oldest. He works for Schwing America. He is a computer program manager. Rob is the second son. He works for Federal Express. Rodney works for Northwest Airlines and Russell, the youngest, works for a company out at Forest Lake. I am not exactly sure what he does, but it's some type of computer work.

MS. NORTON: So all of your boy's names begin with an R, just like yours!

MRS. JANKE: Right!

MS. NORTON: Well, that's all of the personal information. Now we'll go to your career. You told me the different companies that you were with, the bank and the power company. Why did you want to work for the Service? Did you really know anything about the FWS before you came to work for us?

MRS. JANKE: It was kind of strange how I got there because I had worked for H. A. Rodgers Company right after we were married. Then when the kids were growing up I worked part-time for Montgomery Ward. When Montgomery Ward closed in January of 1986, we were all given the chance to further our education in computers, which was all going to be paid for. I took some computer and typing courses and different things at St. Paul Technical College, which was called TVI at the time. They were offering the federal test during all of that summer. Everyone was taking it so I thought I might as well take it too. I did and got on the list. I was still taking some computer course in the fall of 1986 and I had gotten to know a lot of different people. One of the girls said that she had been called and was now working for the Federal Aviation Administration; FAA. I said that it was strange that I hadn't been called. She asked me what areas I had put down. I told her Minneapolis and St. Paul. She told me to call back and make sure I got on for the airport and Fort Snelling. There were a number of different lists I needed to get on so if there were openings they would look at my resume. A couple of weeks after I got that straightened out; I received a letter from the Housing Authority and one from another agency. I got one from the FWS and I got all excited and said, "Oh, that's where I want to work!" Anyway, I right away signed up for an interview and it was with Refuges. It was Jerry Schotzko who interviewed me. He hired me! So I started in Refuges in 1986.

MS. NORTON: Where did you go from there?

MRS. JANKE: I moved over to Law Enforcement in February of 1990. I stayed there and liked it, so I was there until I retired.

MS. NORTON: When you came to work for the government, how did you feel about the pay and benefits?

MRS. JANKE: I guess I felt like I had a secure position when I came on. That made me feel good. I think the pay was equal to what I would have been getting from the courses I had taken; had I gone in as a beginning position at that time. The one thing I know, and Jerry always used to tease me about, I had been used to a "crack the whip" situation. You had to be so busy all of the time and you never had a chance to breathe. Jerry used to laugh and say, "Slow down, you have time to do this!" I guess I just wasn't used to that part of it. But I enjoyed in.

MS. NORTON: What grade were you?

MRS. JANKE: I started as a GS-4.

MS. NORTON: But you had promotion opportunities, right?

MRS. JANKE: Right. I think I moved to a GS-5 shortly after I was in Refuges. And I think when I went in to Law Enforcement I got a GS-6 right away. When I retired I was a GS-8.

MS. NORTON: That's great! Were you still considered a secretary? Or, what was your title?

MRS. JANKE: I was Executive Assistant to the Assistant Regional Director for Law Enforcement.

MS. NORTON: That's a nice title. And you had to earn it, I know! Did you socialize with some of the people you worked with?

MRS. JANKE: Oh yes. I am quite a socialite anyway; I talk a lot so yes, I made a lot of friends.

MS. NORTON: What sort of recreation did you do with people from the office?

MRS. JANKE: Actually, that was mostly the different office/work parties and things. I had my family and everything, and a husband. We didn't get together so to speak like going to the movies, or play cards at each other's houses, or anything like that. But it was the Christmas parties and picnics and different things like that.

MS. NORTON: But you did enjoy seeing the people you worked with away from the office?

MRS. JANKE: Right!

MS. NORTON: Did your career with FWS affect your family at all?

MRS. JANKE: If it did, it was for the better I think. In my family the boys are all great fishermen and so is my husband. They enjoy their boats and hunting. I think they would have had that anyway but... I don't know. I just enjoyed it. I just enjoyed the subject and being with wildlife and that type of thing. I should have gotten in to that when I first got out of high school!

MS. NORTON: And when you left the Service in 2002 you were eligible for retirement?

MRS. JANKE: Yes.

MS. NORTON: What kind of FWS training did you receive for your different jobs?

MRS. JANKE: We got the computer training that we needed and I did get to go to Shepherdstown to the Training Center for the Secretarial course. I am not sure what year that was.

MS. NORTON: How did you like the Training Center?

MRS. JANKE: It's a beautiful place. When I went there it was the first year they were open to everything was brand new. We were all quite impressed.

MS. NORTON: It's almost like being in a sanctuary because you don't hear a lot of airplanes, or telephones ringing. I hope you can make it next year to the meeting of all retirees because it will be there. Possibly in the following year it will be on the other coast. We try and move it like we do with Law Enforcement reunions to either side of the Mississippi to try and get more people to come. Did you ever work any overtime hours?

MRS. JANKE: It was mostly just the regular Regional office hours; the eight-hour day.

MS. NORTON: What were your regular duties?

MRS. JANKE: My day-to-day duties were just about everything! I would usually start at 7 am and work until 3:30pm. During the summer for a few years I worked a compressed week so I'd get every other Wednesday off. So people started work at 6:30am. I'd get there and the phone would start ringing and I'd talk to the Agents. There was a lot of work with the Agents in the field and the other secretaries. There was a lot going on all day long, so it was a busy position.

MS. NORTON: Would you care to tell us what you did on Wednesdays when you had that off?

MRS. JANKE: Well, I've belonged to a golf league for twenty or twenty-five years. That's what I would do on the every other Wednesday day when I had that off. I would play golf. And I am still in the league!

MS. NORTON: When you retired, what was one of the best gifts you got?

MRS. JANKE: Of course, everybody knew I played golf, so they gave me a new set of clubs, which I really am using and enjoying.

MS. NORTON: They must have thought a lot of you and your work! We all thought you were a pretty good secretary!

MRS. JANKE: I was pleased! I couldn't believe it when they brought them out! It was just too much!

MS. NORTON: I never had any problems with you as secretary when you were there. You were cooperative and you helped whenever you could. And if you didn't know something, you'd ask and then learn! That was very good. Did you every have any special tools that you used other than the computers?

MRS. JANKE: I don't think so. I know I had to keep track of the entire inventory. My husband always used to tease me that I needed a gun safety course because I had to count the guns and keep track of where they were.

MS. NORTON: Were you ever involved in any special projects?

MRS. JANKE: I am sure I was, but offhand I can't think of them.

MS. NORTON: Did you have to deal with any major issues?

MRS. JANKE: I am sure there were. There were problems with vehicles. Those are sometimes an issue. I don't know.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever feel that there was ever a major impediment to your job or career? Was there anything holding you back, or a promotion that you would have liked to have gotten?

MRS. JANKE: Well, I worked pretty hard to get from GS-7 to 8. I was a 7 for years and wanted to get to 8. I think the job qualified for it, but it took quite a while for it to go through. One other thing was that I would have liked to have had the chance to see our Washington, D. C. Law Enforcement office. I didn't get a chance to go there in my career. I think I would have enjoyed seeing that, and where everybody worked. I had met the different people but it would have been nice to visit the office.

MS. NORTON: Who were your different Supervisors? I know that when you started Jerry Schotzko was the Supervisor.

MRS. NORTON: Yeah, Jerry was in Refuges. Then I had Chuck Gibbons. I was his Secretary while I was in Refuges. Then I went on to Law Enforcement. Dorothe Norton was the Administrative Officer. At that time, Larry Hood was the ARD. Bill Zimmerman was the Deputy. After Larry left, then came Dave Perrington. He was there for two years and he retired. During that time, Gay Inman came in as the Administrative Officer. After Perrington left, there was three months stints where we had Kevin Adams, Rick Thornton and somebody else; he's up in Alaska right now. He's the ARD in Alaska now. Then Richard Marks came on. John Neal came as the Deputy. When John Neal

left, Mary Jane Levine came on as the Deputy. When Dick went back to Washington Mary Jane became the ARD. She is still in that position. Nick Chavez came from Washington and he is now the Deputy.

MS. NORTON: So you had many supervisors! And they were probably all very pleased with your work!

MRS. JANKE: Yes, and I liked all of them also.

MS. NORTON: Were there any particular individuals who helped shape your career?

MRS. JANKE: I don't know. I think that everyone was so helpful. I got along with everyone. I think we just worked all together.

MS. NORTON: That's good! Do you remember who was President, Secretary of the Interior or Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service during your career with the Service?

MS. JANKE: Senior moment! Gee, who was in when I came on? I know there was Reagan and Bush, Sr.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever feel that changes in the administrations affected the work that we were expected to do, as in Republicans versus Democrats?

MRS. JANKE: Yes, I think it did. But I don't know how to pin point exactly how the changes came. I know that it affected our budget with the different administrations. At times we had more to work with and at times less. We had to pull in the reigns some time. But other than that, I don't know.

MS. NORTON: Who do you think some of the individuals were that we worked with, that helped shape the Service and how it has improved over the years?

MRS. JANKE: The Service in general?

MS. NORTON: Yes. Or was there anybody that you worked with who you felt was making a big impact?

MRS. JANKE: Well I know that Region 3 always had good Regional Directors because we were always spoken of very highly by the other regions. I think that just the way the Region was managed was good.

MS. NORTON: Are there any Regional Directors that you remember the most?

MRS. JANKE: The ones that I remember to have been....well, they were all friendly with Law Enforcement. It seemed like Sam Marhler was good. Jim Grittman was there. Harvey Nelson was before him. In fact, I would see Harvey in different places and he would always say hello. I was rather impressed that he would remember the secretary in Law Enforcement. I think that the Directors made a lot of difference in how the region was run.

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

MRS. JANKE: I don't know, just the whole job. I just enjoyed it so much. I kind of hated to leave but I felt that with my husband's health problems and things that I needed to do; I felt that I needed to retire and spend more time with him and the family. Otherwise, I probably would have kept on for a few more years.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever get any special awards?

MRS. JANKE: Oh yes, every year I think I got performance awards. There were different things each year. They were always substantial so that was nice.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a low point in your career?

MRS. JANKE: When I was back in Refuges there was a point that I felt that I didn't get a rating that I deserved and I did carry it a little bit further with Dick Tolsman. I felt that I didn't want to push any further and I accepted what I had gotten.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience?

MRS. JANKE: I was pretty much in the Regional Office. I really don't think I had anything that was dangerous or frightening to me.

MS. NORTON: That's good. How about humorous?

MRS. JANKE: Oh, we had a lot of fun! There were a lot of laughs? I know that at the last Law Enforcement district meeting that I went to down in Indiana; my birthday happened to be during that time. I was given a shirt that said, "Happy Birthday—Give me a Dollar!" I still have the shirt! Different agents were giving me dollars throughout the day. That was kind funny.

MS. NORTON: That was kind of cute. You probably got enough so that you could probably buy a golf ball or something! What do you like to tell others about your career with FWS, your neighbors, friends and relatives?

MRS. JANKE: Like so many others, when I say I worked for the FWS, they think it's the DNR. Of course, I always have to correct them and say, "No, federal Fish and Wildlife Service." I like to tell them about what a wonderful place it is to work and what a wonderful agency it is. That's my opinion anyway. I think we do a lot of good for wildlife and for the Service.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever notice any changes in the Service during the years that you worked there as far as personnel and the work environment? Did you ever feel that they had made some changes that you wished they hadn't?

MRS. JANKE: Things always changed, but I don't know that I ever noticed anything that wasn't right. Nothing sticks out in my mind that I was really upset about.

MS. NORTON: What are your thoughts for the future? Where do you see the Service heading in the next decades?

MRS. JANKE: I would hope that they would continue. I get letters on this well drilling up in Alaska and I've stated my opinion to Nick Coleman and others of our Washington people on that. I get the magazine Defenders of Wildlife and I keep up on the magazines and stuff. I read up on how things are going along.

MS. NORTON: So you feel that the Service is still on an upward swing?

MRS. JANKE: I feel it is, yes.

MS. NORTON: Do you have any photographs or documents that you would want to donate to go with your tape into the Archives?

MRS. JANKE: No.

MS. NORTON: Is there anybody else that we should be interviewing?

MRS. JANKE: No, because I think you are doing a good job of covering everybody Dorothe!

MS. NORTON: I am trying to get everybody I can in Region 3, especially and any others I can get to. I want to thank you Ruth! I appreciate your time. It's good to see you! I haven't seen you since last year, at your party!

MRS. JANKE: Thank you!

