A DWP "BRAT"

GROWING UP IN THE OWENS GORGE

DOREEN W. BLAIR

Interviewed by Dick Nelson

One of a series of oral histories covering the growth and development of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power as seen by the participants - its employees.

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CONTENTS

Biographical Notes

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Born in Bishop, California, August 3, 1928.

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Doreen has one sister, Colleen. (Colleen was born August 4, 1927).

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This is to certify that I have reviewed this transcript and attest that it is true and accurate. Also, by my witnessed signature below, I grant the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, or its designee(s), sole right to use this material in any way, and for any purpose, it deems appropriate.

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TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE ONE

DOREEN W. BLAIR

GIVEN WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1989 AT HER HOME IN LAGUNA HILLS, CALIFORNIA

THE INTERVIEWER IS DICK NELSON

NELSON: Doreen can you tell us something about your early life where you were born and details about your early life?

BLAIR: I was born in Bishop, California and my parents lived in the Owens River Gorge. I lived there until I graduated from high school and went away to business school. Living in the Gorge was probably an experience that I wouldn't have given up or I wouldn't have changed in all the world. It was a unique life.

(Miss Blair edited the transcript for clarity)

My sister and I were the only two children in the Gorge most of the time. There were about six families there and every few years a family moved in with a child, or two or three children. They did not particularly like living in the Gorge so they did not stay long and moved away.

The Gorge was 22 miles from Bishop which included six miles of dirt road before reaching the highway. In the winter time, and this was way back, it snowed more than it has in the last 25 years maybe, but groceries were brought out to where the dirt road began. They brought them out on a truck and then loaded the food onto a horse and sleigh and then drove the six miles to the top of the grade. Then they'd take the groceries from the sleigh and put them on sleds. Then the men, the workers, and the plant operators, would take the sleds and bring the groceries to whomever had ordered them. That's how they delivered the groceries in the winter time during the snow.

My mother, when my sister and I wanted to go out and help the men clear the road so that they could get the automobiles out, was too scared to let us go out in case we'd get lost in the snow drifts because the snow was so deep and we were so small.

When we went to school, my dad used to take us the six miles in the car to the highway and we would catch the school bus there. Then he would have to come and pick us up after school. We would get up in the morning probably around 5:30-6:00 and leave to catch the school bus. We would make a 72 mile round trip a day to go to school because there were no schools closer than Bishop. We'd have to go to Paradise Camp, make stops in Round Valley, then we'd go up to Bishop Creek power plants and

all up in through there and around the Indian reservation to pick up the kids and then on to school. We had to make the same trip back home again. So it ended up about 72 miles a day.

When we got to be old enough to drive the car, like eight or nine years old, my sister would drive the car so my dad wouldn't have to take us. She would drive the six miles of dirt road, and park the car at Chance ranch. When the bus would drop us off after school, we'd just get in the car and drive back home again.

During the war years with gas rationing and all the young men going to war, my sister drove the school bus during our senior year in high school. She would drive the bus out as far as Paradise Camp and we'd get the car and drive home and then in the mornings we'd go and get the bus and drive it back to school. That was the way we went to school.

There was a steep grade we had to go up and down and a sign at the top of the grade said, "30% grade, use low gear down." We would get up maybe 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, if there was snow on the ground, put chains on the car and start driving and maybe even dig our way out or clean the ice off. My dad had a blow torch and he would use it to melt the ice on the road. Boy what we went through to get to school. Sometimes we wouldn't get to school until maybe 9 or 10 a.m. My parents would take us because we had missed the bus and we'd be so upset because we'd be late. We had been trying to get there for hours!

Then, of course, living in the Gorge we had everything. We had a swimming pool at our back door, we had fishing at our back door, we didn't need anything, we didn't have to have toys. We

had our playground --- where we lived --- that was it. My mother, in the summer time, would look out the kitchen window and see we had left some of our clothes on a rock in the river with a rock on top of them so that the wind wouldn't blow them away and we'd be way off someplace swimming. We had to learn to swim. My folks taught us because the water was there and we were in it and so it was either that or drown. But we never ever had an accident. We never broke any bones the whole time we lived in the Gorge.

I guess, as they said, we were more like mountain goats than children. We could run over and do all kinds of things on the rocks like city kids did on the sidewalks. Then sometimes when kids from the city would come up, we'd take them hiking and go up through the Gorge and into the tunnels and scare them to death. That was big sport for us to do with "flatlander" kids.

NELSON: Pretty much tomboys.

BLAIR: Oh we were, absolutely! We didn't know how to play with dolls, we didn't have dolls. My parents bought us all those things and they just sat there. We were always outside. There was a family who lived next door to us for about three or four years and they had a boy and a girl a couple of years older than we were. We played outside games, we swam, we fished. Nobody ever had to plan activities for us because everything was there.

Then we had earthquakes in the Gorge, of course. That was pretty traumatic at the time. But then a few days after the place quit shaking, you'd forget about them. We wouldn't move away from there for the world even if there were earthquakes.

And we had quite a few. One time, I think it was in September, 1941, there was a big earthquake and people living in the Owens Valley could see the dust coming up from the Gorge and they thought we were dead. They thought the Gorge had caved in. But we survived that.

Then one time there was a flood. It was not too long after Crowley Dam had been completed (Crowley Lake) and there were heavy, heavy rains. The Department of Water and Power was concerned maybe Crowley Dam might break because of the water. I don't know whether they released water out of the dam or just what caused the flood, but it washed out quite a bit of the road and to go to school we had to walk probably two miles, up and down that long grade. Somebody had left a car at the top of the grade and we managed to get to school, but we had to walk over all of that dirt road and washed out area. And we survived that. We wouldn't have changed that experience for the world.

Many times my father had chances to transfer to different places. I can remember one time it was to Victorville and we thought, "Go and live in the desert when we've got all of this!" And we begged my dad not to ever move. That was home to us and we loved it. It was great. In the summer time it was always cool because the river was always there. Not all of the water in the Owens River went in back of our house because the water went through a penstock into the power plants, but when the plants would be shut down, be "off the line," the water would go down the river in back of the house and we had a "full river." Then you couldn't go swimming because the water was just too swift.

My mother cooked for the single men, the operators at the plant. She would cook their meals and we always referred to that as the "boarding house." She earned, back in those days, I think twenty-five cents a meal which included labor and cost of food. The Department had a project working on the plants and they brought in workers, mechanics, from Los Angeles and my mother would cook for those people. Maybe there would be eight or ten of them and she did the cooking.

During the war, to save on gasoline, when there were projects like that my mother did the cooking for those men. We were always working, there was always something to do. One time they built a new flume and there were a lot of construction workers. There were 33 men there for two or three weeks and we moved all the furniture out of our living room and put in saw horses with wooden planks on them and set up a dining room in our living room. And my mother, in her little kitchen on a four-burner stove, cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner for those 33 men. They brought in a helper for her. We would be doing dishes at 10:00 p.m. and getting meals ready for the next morning. All of this was when we went to school and we still helped her.

NELSON: Where did these men sleep?

BLAIR: At the power plant. They had one little house that was not used as a residence. They made it into kind of dormitory and some of them slept in that. But mostly they just set up a place in the power plant and the men slept there on cots. That's back in the ancient times when people did funny things. They worked.

NELSON: Let me ask you about the Adams Main and Adams Auxilary. Where were those plants located in relation to the three that exist today?

BLAIR: The present Middle Gorge plant is really between what was the Adams Main and the Adams Auxilary. It was maybe closer to the Adams Main but between the two plants. There was the Upper Gorge plant and then what was the Adams Auxilary, then the Middle Gorge plant and what was the Adams Main and then the Control Gorge plant.

My father started to work for the Department, back in the days of the Southern Sierra Power Company. He went to work in the Gorge, probably in 1924, I believe it was. He and my mother married and he took her there as a bride. He was the first person to put the Adams Main plant "on line" because they were building that when he was working at the Adams Auxilary and so he was the first person to put the Adams Main plant "on line" and the last person to take it "off line."

Over the years they have dismantled both the Adams Main and Adams Auxilary plants and moved the houses out. At the Adams Main plant there were three two-story houses and they moved those houses out of the Gorge and put them in Birchim Canyon. They built other homes there too, but they took those three houses out of the Gorge. From the Middle Gorge plant they built a new road and grade and so they were able to move those houses out on trucks. It was quite a project to raise the houses up, put them on a truck, move and relocate them in Birchim Canyon.

NELSON: Was the access out of the Gorge, at that time, down along the river going out to Pleasant Valley, or was it up the cliff?

BLAIR: No. The road now, to get to the Gorge, goes along by the top of the gorge from Birchim Canyon. When we lived there we went about halfway to Birchim Canyon, turned west and ended up out at the main highway near Paradise Camp, or just a little bit south of that. There was a place called Chance Ranch and the road came out there. Now you go through into Birchim Canyon. The road is mostly all paved now.

NELSON: When were those plants dismantled?

BLAIR: In the 195Ø's. They shut the Adams Main and Auxilary down in 1954 and then my folks lived at Birchim until my dad retired in 1958. So it would have been sometime in the 195Ø's that they actually dismantled them.

NELSON: When did he become a Department of Water and Power employee?

BLAIR: 1933 or 1934. The Department bought the Gorge plants from Southern Sierra Power Company or Southern California Electric, I can't remember now which one it was, but in 1934, I believe, the Department bought those plants.

NELSON: What was the quality of the housing? Can you describe the houses you lived in? Did you live in one house the entire time?

BLAIR: We lived in one house. I did. My mother and dad lived at the Adams Main for a short time, but I lived in that one house at the Adams Auxilary all my life (or eighteen years) until I left to go away to school. The homes were built with steep slate roofs. They were stucco, two-story, steep-roofed, so that the snow would slide off. The three houses at the Adams Main and one at the Adams Auxilary where we lived, were built like that. They were two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, and a living room and a kitchen downstairs. They were well-built homes. They were warm in the winter, cool in the summer. We didn't have air conditioning back in those days, but of course, you wouldn't have needed it. They had other homes. The one next door to us was wood construction. There were three constructed of wood and tar paper-like material, but those homes were built to house the construction workers of the plants, and then the operators lived in them. But the house we lived in was stucco and the one next door was wood construction.

NELSON: How did you heat the home?

BLAIR: Wood stove. They had wood stoves and also used oil to heat. Of course there was no way to have gas then. It was all electric actually. I suppose maybe some people used electric heaters, but we had wood stoves. We heated by wood. My mother had an electric stove in the kitchen, but one time she brought in a big Martha Washington wood stove and got rid of the

electric stove. She loved the way food cooked on that wood stove. She said it was better than electricity believe it or not. She didn't keep that wood stove too terribly long because it was too hard getting wood. She had a little two burner wood stove next to her electric stove and my father fixed coils in that little wood stove, and hooked water up to it. They burned wood in that little wood stove and that heated the water and so that way they saved on electricity.

To get wood for the wood stoves, the families would go back in the forest from Tom's Place. They would cut down trees, saw their own wood and haul it back down. Everybody had their own wood pile. They'd go every fall, cut wood and haul it all back down, and then chop it into small pieces to fit in their wood stoves.

Also, they had a caretaker who lived in a little house maybe a quarter of a mile above the Adams Auxilary plant. He took care of the lawns and yards and things like that and every Thursday, all the housewives would give him a grocery order and he would take the truck and go into Bishop and do everybody's grocery shopping and that's how they got their groceries. Every Thursday was "truck day" and so he would go in and do everybody's shopping. In the winter time people would order their winter staple supplies through Ralph's in Los Angeles. I can remember ordering maybe a gallon can of ovaltine or gallons of canned fruit, because my mother had the "boarding house" and she had to have the groceries. That's how we did most of our grocery shopping in the winter time. We would use canned milk instead of fresh milk.

DOREEN W. BLAIR

TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE TWO

NELSON: Do you remember the seven families living up there with you. Do you remember names and compositions of families?

BLAIR: Well, I can remember one immediately that lived next door to us. The one I mentioned previously with the two children. Their name was Reinmuth. Park and Ruby Reinmuth and the two kids were Vera and Verne. They were twins. Park retired from the Department and Verne went to work for the Department after he graduated from High School. He has since retired from the Department and lives in Oregon.

There was a family, Mott. Al Mott, they later moved to Boulder. He retired from the Department at Boulder. There was Kimball. Joe and Pearl Kimball and they had two children. He retired and they moved to Central America where he died. Then there was a family McGee. Warren and Ethel McGee. He retired from the Department. The caretaker that lived up at the little house above the Adams Auxilary, was Bill Miller. He retired from the Department. I think he was 90 + years old when he died. I have to go back --- there was a family, Turner. They had a couple of children but I don't know what happened to them. And Hess.

I'm not sure whether he retired. Another one was Senior, --- Harold Senior. He retired from the Department. Those are some of the names I can think of right now.

NELSON: I imagine, because of the isolation of the area that this was a close-knit little community, or was it? And what did you do to entertain? What was the recreation up there? What did you do to entertain yourselves during the winter?

BLAIR: Well, in the winter time, I don't remember what everyone did. I guess it was like in the "olden days," the ladies did embroidery work and knitting and things like that. The men probably did wood working. I guess I would go back to my father. He had his movies and his woodworking. He had his shop. My mother in the evening would knit, embroider and crochet. The families as such really didn't socialize that much. They listened to the radio. Their evening entertainment would be listening to the radio.

NELSON: There was good reception at that time?

BLAIR: Well we could get KMJ, Fresno, I remember that. During the day you could not get too many stations. In the evening you could get more stations and they came in quite clear. They had some kind of an antenna. It was like a long wire and I think they strung it up to the top of the Gorge somehow. I can remember a little bit of that. Some people maybe went to town on Saturday nights, there may have been a dance in Bishop or something, but not everybody went. Maybe they went to a movie once in a while. They had a theatre in Bishop, but other than that they seemed to make their own entertainment. They did what you would do in a small place -- you made your own. You formed your own whatever and did it.

I remember the single operators, the men who did not have famiies there. Some were married and some were not and when they usually started working for the Department, they would start in the Gorge. That's how a lot of the operators got started. They would go up there just because getting jobs wasn't that easy back after the war, and during the war, and so these young operators would start working in the Gorge. I can remember one Fourth of July they went into town and bought fireworks and troughs, or whatever those things are that they use to shoot rockets up into the air. When they shot them off they went over the top of the gorge and we never did see them when they exploded. You couldn't see them, they went up over the side and that took care of that.

One winter, I was quite small at the time, but I can remember the men made blocks of snow and built an igloo and I can remember having that igloo right beside our house. That was a great project. It was a beautiful igloo.

There was a lawn between our house and the neighbor's house. It was kind of a sunken lawn, and in the middle was a big 50-gallon corregated steel or some kind of a tank, put there to hold the water supply to go to the houses. The water came from a spring across the river and was piped over. There was a pump in the cellar of our house and it pumped the water from the spring across the river. That water was put into that big tank in that lawn. Then from there it was pumped somehow into the homes and that's how we got our drinking water. There was no filtration and nobody ever thought about that. You never thought about filtering your water. It was a clear crystal spring and so the water piped over was clear and cold. It

wasn't contaminated by anything. That's how we got our drinking water up at the Auxiliary. I'm not sure how the Adams Main got their drinking water, but that's how we got ours. During the time of the flood, it washed that pipe away so we were without water. I guess we just hauled water from another spring some place along the river. We brought our water in that way until they hooked the pipe back up again.

NELSON: You mentioned the flood. Were you given advance notice that this water was coming?

BLAIR: Yes. As a matter of fact, I can remember we had a cat, a Persian cat and he disappeared when the rain started. It rained hard for days that time and he disappeared. Shortly after that they said that there could be a flood. I can remember the night they gave the warning that something could happen. My mother picked the piano bench up and set it on the couch. I don't know why I can remember that so clearly. Instead of taking her jewelry and putting it in a safe place, she saved the piano bench. That was, I guess, a big thing to her. She didn't have many jewels. The cat came home a few days later.

NELSON: Did water enter your home?

BLAIR: No. We were high enough. It didn't get into our house. It got into the plant. I don't remember it getting into the Adams Auxiliary, but it did get into the Adams Main. And then the houses at the Adams Main, were even really closer to the

river than we were. There was just about a two foot cement walk in back of their houses and then a cement wall and the river came right up to that cement wall. Their homes were built right on the side of the river. And I can remember the one house where the water washed away part of that wall, but fortunately it washed a big boulder in underneath it and that kept that house from collapsing. Then water did get into the Adams Main. There were transformers just below the Adams Main plant. The water and rocks got into the transformers and washed part of them out.

When there were earthquakes, I remember the house next door to us. A rock came down, landed in the front part of that house and sort of moved the partition between their kitchen and living room across the room. That was really the most serious damage by rocks in the homes during an earthquake. That was one of the most serious ones.

One time my sister and I were playing in the yard. Our toys were a spoon and a pan and we were spooning sand into a pan and my mother came out and called us in. About two minutes after we went into the house, and for no reason, a big rock came down and landed right on that pan where we were playing. Rocks came down, I mean you didn't have to have a reason to have a rock slide there. In the Gorge it just happened.

NELSON: Did she have a premonition about this?

BLAIR: I don't know. It was funny. She just called us in and we no sooner went in and she turned around and looked outside and there was a big rock sitting on the pan where we were playing.

We always cut our own Christmas trees. All the families did the same thing every year. They took the truck and two or three people would go up into Mammoth area and get their own Christmas trees. That was back in the days when you didn't have to have a permit and everybody would go and get their own tree.

My dad planted all the trees that were growing at the Gorge plants. The trees, I guess they were cottonwood trees, my folks planted.

Then one time the Mott family bought a cow. They lived at the Adams Main and just a little bit below the Adams Main on the other side of the river was kind of a flat place, and they built a little old barn. There was a little bridge went over the river and they took that poor old cow, crossed over the bridge and put it in that little barn. It was a milk cow so they supplied the people with milk for however long they lived there.

When the Reinmuth family first came to work there, and I don't know what year that would be, there was no place for them to live. When they first came to work, there was a ranch, one of the ranches that the City (Los Angeles) bought, in the Round Valley area. They lived in one of those houses and then they bought a big heavy canvas tent, a great big one. There was a campground just below the Adams Main where they set up this big tent. They lived in it and he worked in the plant. They set up that tent, made it into living quarters and separated their rooms somehow or other and set up a wood cook stove. Eventually a house became vacant and they were able to move into it.

NELSON: You mentioned housing. What type of rent did you pay and utilities did you pay up there?

BLAIR: Rent was free. Usually operators houses were free. Electricity cost either a cent and a half or a half cent a kilowatt, I can't remember. But the rent was free. It was free housing and salaries were not all that high and so if they didn't have to pay rent that meant a lot to them back in those days.

NELSON: You had mentioned earlier about school, what school were those that you attended locally and were you able, commuting all that distance, to participate in all the activities, or did you find that a little bit of a hindrance to you?

BLAIR: No. Bishop had a high school and a grammar school. Eight grades in grammar school. We went to Bishop Union Grammar School. When my sister Colleen and I were five and six, my mother took us to Ireland. My parents were from Northern Ireland, and my mother took us to Ireland for a visit. We were gone for ten months and when we came back, in February, she put us in school. We started the first grade together in grammar school and went all through school together.

We went through grammar school and high school together. My parents made sure we were never deprived of any school activity or anything like that. When we were too young to drive the car ourselves, my dad made sure we got into town to go to any of the activities. Maybe we didn't have after school things like

the kids who lived in town, maybe we didn't do that, but they saw that we had piano lessons. The piano teacher lived directly across from the grammar school so during our lunch hour, we took our piano lessons.

Keough Hot Springs, which was about eight miles south of Bishop, was a community swimming pool. Every year the Red Cross sent an instructor to teach swimming for two weeks and, because my dad worked during the day when they taught the kids, we couldn't go. We went in the evening and took swimming lessons with the adults. We learned to swim, and the instructor, because we were such good students, took a little extra patience with us. Colleen and I could swim enough to keep from drowning in the river in the Gorge, but he taught us the correct way to swim. My sister, when she was nine years old, although she couldn't get a lifesaving certificate because she was too young, passed all the tests for lifesaving. I wasn't so inclined. Anyway we had our swimming lessons and as far as we were concerned we were never deprived of anything.

My sister was quite an accomplished musician. She played the piano. There was a little dance band in Bishop and every Saturday night they played for the dances and she played the piano with the dance band. That was all during high school. So as I say we were never deprived of anything that any of the other kids in town had. As a matter of fact, I think we probably benefitted more because of the fact of where we lived and what had to be done made us appreciate everything more.

DOREEN W. BLAIR

TAPE NUMBER: 2, SIDE ONE

NELSON: Doreen, would you tell us something about your father and his career?

BLAIR: My father came to the United States from Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1921 and went directly to Riverside, California. He started working for the Southern Sierras Power Company in Riverside. Then about 1924 he transferred to the Gorge. I guess at that time it was just the Adams Auxiliary and it wasn't on line. They were just starting to build the Adams Main power plant when my dad came. He worked for them and when they started the Adams Main, he was the person who put the Adams Main power plant on line and that was, I think, 1924 or 1925. He and my mother were newlyweds when they moved there. He started out as an operator at the plant and then he became, over the years, the Chief Operator in charge of the Gorge plants. When they (DWP) took the old Adams Main and Adams Auxiliary off line, and built the three new Gorge plants, he became Chief Operator of the Control Gorge plant. They moved then from the Gorge to Birchim Canyon and that's when all the families, everything moved out of the Gorge. When they built the new plants, they tore the old houses down and moved three out from the Adams Main. He stayed there until 1958 when he retired from the Department.

My dad used to read the meters at Long Valley before Crowley Lake was built. There was a constrution camp at Long Valley and there were two brothers, Gideon and Simon Bergstrom, who were the caretakers and lived there. We used to go up and spend the day with them while my dad would read the meters and go around and do whatever he had to do. In winter we used to ice skate on Crooked Creek where Crowley Lake is today. Then as they began to build Crowley Dam, my dad took movies of the construction and dedication. I gave those films to the Aqueduct Division. (Presently in DWP Public Affairs archives). We watched Crowley Lake grow from the very beginning right straight through to what it is today.

NELSON: Do you recall a John McCullough?

BLAIR: Mr. McCullough gave me my first typewriter. I always told him I was going to be a secretary and so one time he and my dad were at a mining camp over in Darwin. They had typewriters there and Mr. McCullough bought one of those old typewriters. It was an old Underwood as I recall, and he sent it home to me. I kept that typewriter, a big heavy, clunky typewriter for years. When you typed on it, the type came up underneath and you had to pick the platen up to see what you had typed. You couldn't read as you typed -- you had to pick the platen up to see what it said. Mr. McCullough always said that he started me out on my career as a secretary because he gave me that typewriter.

NELSON: I've heard Gene Barrows refer to the "McCullough electric system" in the Owens Valley. It was done a little differently there in comparison with DWP operations in Los Angeles. It was done the way Mr. McCullough wanted it done.

BLAIR: Of course. If you wanted something done you'd give it to someone who knew how to do it, and they'd get it done.

NELSON: What are your impressions of Mr. McCullough?

BLAIR: I'll remember Mr. and Mrs. McCullough forever. When I first started to work for the Department, I went to work in Independence and being a single woman, there was no place to live. They had a dormitory (bunk house) there for the single men, but they didn't have any place for single women. My first two weeks I lived in a motel. I lived at Ray's Den Motel in Independence. The McCullough's had an extra bedroom in their house and rented the bedroom to me. I lived in their house and ate my meals at Dora White's Cafe and the Pines Cafe in Independence for maybe six months. I also rented a room from Jean Piercy's parents for a few months. Then I was able to rent a tiny little house in Independence and I lived in that little house for maybe three years.

When they began dismantling Manzanar, a lot of the apartment units were sold to local citizens. One of the men in Independence made them into apartments and I rented one of those from him for a year.

The Department wouldn't rent houses to single people. They had housing in Independence for families and there was one tiny

little house ~~that~~ they were going to tear down and I said, "Why don't you rent that house to me instead of tearing it down?" They rented that house to me for $9 a month.

NELSON: What were you making at the time?

BLAIR: Probably $275 a month.

NELSON: You got a bargain.

BLAIR: Department housing in Independence was a bargain. Some places were $13 a month, some were $25. I think, as a matter of fact, the new Department houses they built were $50 or something a month rent. In Department houses the Department did some of the upkeep on them and I asked if I could paint it or if they would paint it for me. They said no, they wouldn't paint it for me, but they would supply the paint. So they gave me the paint and my sister and I painted that little house. We fixed it all up and I lived in it for about a year, then I transferred to Los Angeles and that little house stood there and was rented for many years after that. If they were going to tear it down I decided I would do something about it and I was able to get housing for single women. Guess that was a first on something like that. Then I transferred to Los Angeles.

NELSON: What do you remember about John McCullough?

BLAIR: Mr. McCullough collected everything. He went to all these old ghost towns and mines and he had a yard full of

"collectibles" as they would call it today. Then I think most people thought it was junk. He also had a yard full of probably the most beautiful lilac bushes. I can remember when Mr. McCullough lived at Division Creek, he broke his arm. We went to visit him. I think he had just broken it and I don't know that he even knew it was broken, but he was going to go to the doctor and I can remember him asking my dad, "Jack, do you suppose I'll be able to play the piano after they take care of my arm?" and daddy said to him, "Oh I'm sure you can." He said, "Good because I never could before." Little things like that I can remember.

NELSON: What were the employee's opinion of him? Was he held in high esteem? Was he taskmaster?

BLAIR: I really can't honestly answer that question, Dick, because I was quite young. I can remember my dad thought the world of him. He and my dad got along very well. But as for the other part I can remember him only as I would if he.....

NELSON: Going back to your father, did he learn the electric business on the job training or had he had some experience in Ireland? Did he come over here as a kid?

BLAIR: No. My dad was in the Army in the First World War and he spent most of the four years in France. When the war was over he worked in Ireland for a captain he knew in the army who also lived in Northern Ireland. After the war that captain went back to his home and my dad went back and worked for him. He

came to the United States in 1921. My dad never finished high school. He was self taught and I really don't know exactly when he came to Riverside. I don't know how he knew the family who sponsored him. Somehow he must have met these people or knew of them through someone in Ireland, because you had to be sponsored by someone when you came to this country. They apparently got my dad a job with the Southern Sierra Power Company in Riverside. I guess that's where he learned. That was 1921 and he moved to the Gorge in 1924 so that would have been about three years'experience. And everything after that was self taught.

NELSON: Your mother, was she Irish?

BLAIR: Oh yes. As a matter of fact my mother and dad knew each other in Ireland. My mother was from a little town, Banbridge, which was about 18 miles from Belfast and when Banbridge had dances my dad and some of the single fellows from Belfast would go to Banbridge to the dances. That's how he met my mother. They didn't go together in Ireland. When they came to the United States, my dad came first to Riverside. My mother then came to the United States maybe a year or so after my dad. She went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She had an aunt in Pittsburgh and she lived with this aunt and worked as a governess in homes in Pittsburg and surrounding area. Then my dad heard she was in the United States and wrote to her father in Ireland and asked for my mother's address. He sent her a letter and asked her if she would come to California to visit him and so she said she would. She came on Wednesday and they were married on Saturday,

on Christmas Eve in 1924. That was how they met and started life together in the Gorge. They lived in the Gorge all of those years. They moved to Plant 2 on Bishop Creek for a very short time and then moved back to the Gorge again. That was before I was born though.

NELSON: They were up in the Gorge 30 some years, is that correct?

BLAIR: Yes. From probably 1924 until my dad retired in 1958. We all loved it.

NELSON: Do you remember, it was a little ways away but, do you remember Manzanar before World War II?

BLAIR: I remember Manzanar when Manzanar was an apple orchard. And I can remember driving or going to Manzanar and getting apples. And I can see them packing them in wooden boxes with reddish, purplish colored paper wrapped around the apples. I was quite young then, but I can remember stopping in there. Then during the war when Manzanar became the relocation center for the Japanese people, I worked there. I can remember in high school on a field trip one day, the class went to Manzanar and we had lunch in the mess hall. I can remember tasting iced coffee for the first time in my life in that mess hall. And then during the summer vacation between my junior and senior years in high school a lot of Owens Valley kids went to work at Manzanar and I was one of them.

NELSON: What year was that?

BLAIR: 1945. I graduated in 1946 so that was 1945. I can remember I made a lot of friends. We worked directly with the Japanese. I made friends and stayed friends for years afterwards. I've lost contact with them, of course, but I worked with the Japanese girls in the offices and we got along so well. When I would go home on the weekends, they would ask me if I would buy them records or something. I would stop and buy a record for them in town because they weren't, of course, permitted out of Manzanar except when getting married. Guards took the couple into Independence, got the marriage licenses at the court house and then back to Manzanar.

I can also remember seeing the young Japanese men when they were going into the service. I remember the buses would stop to pick them up at Manzanar and the families would all be standing waving good-bye to them.

I can remember the man in charge was Merritt, Ralph P. Merritt. The young people would sit around in the evenings outside and we'd sing and talk. I could walk around, I could go any place. I lived in a dormitory on the American side, I guess that's what you would call it, but we could visit any of the Japanese and we used to walk around and walk between their barracks. They had built little bridges between some of them. And the gardens were just absolutely beautiful. They had their regular flower gardens and they also grew vegetables. They planted vegetable gardens. After the war, some of them wanted to stay and farm but, of course, on city (Los Angeles) land they weren't permitted to do that. But I can remember cabbage, my goodness they used to grow cabbages that were so big.

I worked there one summer vacation for about 2 1/2 months I guess. It was interesting. I didn't know how to pronounce Japanese names but I sure learned. It was my first experience with Japanese names. We didn't see many Japanese people in the Owens Valley.

NELSON: You mentioned the apple orchards there. That must have been in the 1930's. Then were the apples orchards cut down to build the camp or did they gradually get removed prior to the relocation camp?

BLAIR: I don't know. There still are some of the apple trees around Manzanar. I can't answer that, Dick. I don't know. It may have been just desert country where they built Manzanar. I don't know that they cut any trees down, it was just desert.

NELSON: What was your first recollection. How old were you— your first recollection of living in the Gorge. You were a girl of..?

BLAIR: Two, three.

NELSON: Okay, so you still have some recollection going back that far?

BLAIR: Oh yes. I can remember things. I can remember the river was there. You naturally went swimming. I can still see that. I can remember my dad, I can remember the trucks, I can remember working and fishing, I can remember the people, I can

see that. I remember, I was very small at the time and my sister and I were in the yard, in the garden and somebody had set a trap to catch skunks. I was pointing out to my sister where the bait was and I pushed down on it and I got my hand caught in the trap and they had to come and pick me up and take me down to the plant and my father had to pry the thing apart and get my hand out of the trap. That was a traumatic thing for me. I was very small at that time.

I can remember just going back and forth with my parents. I can remember going up and down the grade in the car. It was just such a natural thing.

NELSON: The grade you are referring to was Sherwin?

BLAIR: No, no, no. This was the grade down into the Gorge. That was the thirty percent grade, "Use low gear down."

NELSON: That was probably an exciting ride.

BLAIR: It was funny, Dick, because they had--that was a one-way up and a one-way down, believe me. I mean if there was a car going up and one going down, always the car going down had the right-of-way to the car going up. The car going up had to back down if there was a car coming down. There was no place you could pass each other on that grade. There was never a guard railing along that grade and it went down however deep the Gorge was, 500 feet or whatever. There was no guard railing on that grade, until they started bringing in safety laws I guess it was, and when they started building the Control Gorge plant.

Then they put up a cable guard railing all the way down that grade. Who needed that. Nobody ever went over the side of the Gorge until they put that thing up and then a couple of people ran into it. Before then people were cautious. Then they built the new grade and closed the old one completely.

DOREEN W. BLAIR

TAPE NUMBER: 2, SIDE TWO

NELSON: Doreen, what about going through your Department career positions and where you worked and locations.

BLAIR: When I graduated from high school I went to Long Beach (California) to business school for a short time. I started working in a doctor's office and then I took a civil service exam. I was living with a girlfriend in Long Beach and she decided to go back to Bishop so I took a Civil Service exam and got called for a job in Independence as an Intermediate Clerk Typist. I started working in Independence August 2, 1948. My birthday was August 3 and it was the saddest birthday. I was so lonesome. I remember that because I didn't know anybody and I was living in a motel because there wasn't any place to live and I had to find someplace.

I started working in the accounting section and I hated numbers! And there was nothing else in the accounting section except numbers and I worked there for five months and I just hated it. I swore I was going to quit and get a job someplace else.

In December I had an appendicitis attack and went to the hospital in Lone Pine and had to have my appendix out and while I was recuperating from that the Intermediate Clerk Steno in the Chief Clerk's office quit and I was on that list and so when I

came back from leave of absence I got her job and from then on, it was great, life at the Department started then.

I worked for the Principal Clerk who was in charge of personnel, that was Red Austin and for Herold Frew who was Chief Clerk and he handled all land matters. He was in charge of all clerical in the Northern District. And I loved working in the personnel office. That to me was the greatest job because I worked with the people and the guys out in the shop area were just fantastic people. They were down to earth people, anything you wanted all you had to do was go into the shop and see them. And they respected the people in the personnel office. They didn't pay any attention to Civil Service rules or retirement or any of that kind of "stuff." They expected the people in the personnel office to keep them informed of what was happening. They could care less about anything that would come up, any new Civil Service ruling or retirement or any personnel problem. It was up to you to keep them, the field workers, informed. They respected you for that--and they were real and true. As I say there was no better group of people than field workers. I believe that. I also have always said and I always thought everybody in the Department should start working in an outlying district because that way you always learned from the ground up. You learned the whole system and that's the one thing I did enjoy about working in Independence.

I worked in the personnel office for about three years and then I went to work for Bob Phillips (Robert V. Phillips). He was the office engineer at that time. I worked in that office for three years. I was in Independence from 1948 until 1954 and then I transferred to Los Angeles.

There was one "dear" man in Independence and he was a bear. Nobody liked to work for him and I always got along with everybody. Never had any problems working with anybody except this one "dear" man. He told me I had to do some, what I considered personal, work for him and I said I was not going to do personal work. I guess he said something to somebody so the Chief Clerk told me, "Doreen you will have to do that work or we might have to suspend you. But you can do it under protest." So I said, "Okay, I'll do it under protest, but I refuse to do it." I wouldn't work for him. They didn't know what to do. I immediately went back to the personnel office, got a little green paper that said, "Request to Transfer," filled it out, sent it in and two weeks later I got a call from Paul Pollock, the Civil Defense Coordinator in Los Angeles. I packed my little suitcase and moved to Los Angeles.

NELSON: That was in 1954?

BLAIR: Yes. But that was just one of about three bad periods in my 37 years with the Department and it didn't last too long. It wasn't all that bad. It was probably a good thing that it happened, because it moved me to leave the Valley. I may have still been up there, who knows.

Anyway in Independence I worked for Bob Phillips. He transferred to Los Angeles and I started working for Wells Abbott when he transferred to the office engineer position.

I worked for the engineers. They were great people too. All of those people up in the Valley were really marvelous people. Matter of fact I remember when I was working in Los Angeles

after I transferred to Los Angeles, there was one of the men who worked on the bull gang came down to Los Angeles for something and ran out of money. He came into the office and borrowed $5 from me. I can remember this so well now. At the time I forgot about it. I gave it to him to get him back home again. Maybe a couple of years after that, it was at Christmas time, I stopped at the office in Independence on the way to Bishop. I was going up to spend Christmas with my folks, I stopped at the office and I went over to visit the shop where this man worked. He paid me that $5. He never forgot it. I cried. I couldn't believe that anybody could be that honest. He said he never forgot me giving him the money to help him get back home. I had great faith in those people.

Then I can remember one time when I first started working in Independence, there was a terrible accident. During the shut off. One or two people were killed and some very badly injured. These were men hired to work on the shut-off. All of the employees contributed money and did everything they could to help those people. They were a very giving group of people. I loved working in Independence. I loved the people and I loved working there.

NELSON: Before we get back to Los Angeles then, let me ask you two more questions on the Owen's Valley. One is unrelated to Owen's Valley. What's a bull gang?

BLAIR: The bull gang is the field labor force -- M & C Helpers, laborers, etc. They do all the labor jobs. They cleaned the ditches, the aqueduct, etc.

NELSON: They are not career or professional classifications?

BLAIR: No. They were good workers.

NELSON: And the other is, we've heard all of this talk over the years about hostility to Los Angeles in the Owens Valley, what were your reactions. You grew up in the Owens Valley. Maybe you've mixed emotions over it. But was there this hostility or is there the hostility.

BLAIR: Yes, there is hostility and I could be hostile too if I thought about it. I can remember some of those beautiful ranches and I thought the Owens Valley was a beautiful valley. I can remember the Abalour Ranch, between Bishop and the Gorge. When we used to go past there and see those long lanes of trees- and I saw them drying up and well, Manzanar, the apple orchards. There were apple orchards around Bishop. I can remember after the City bought the land, the trees were beginning to die and people used to go and pick the apples. And the Owens Valley was green. I did have mixed emotions about it and I probably still do.

I can remember my parents telling about when the ranchers, etc. were going to dynamite the aqueduct. They asked my father if he would go along with them and he said he couldn't because he had to work.

I can remember Jack Cowan when he was head of the (DWP) Water System, or Assistant General Manager, he always called me "rebel" because I used to argue with him all the time about the Owens Valley but he said, "Look at it now Doreen, just look at

what the City did for it." And I said, "I know, but you stop and think what might the Owens Valley have been with modern machinery and farming equipment and all of that, if the City had not come in and taken over the land up there." I said, "Who's to say what the Owens Valley would have been like." So he called me "rebel" and I did wear two hats.

I have to admit it's sad to see Mono Lake like it is today. I can remember swimming in Mono Lake believe it or not. Great place to swim. You swam in Mono Lake and then you'd jump in the stream in fresh water, rinse yourself off. It was great. Now there aren't a lot of people who have done that, but we did. When "flatlanders," would ask us, "Where's a good place to go fishing?" we'd send them to Mono Lake. Good place for "flatlanders" to go fishing. We didn't like "flatlanders" and there are no fish in Mono Lake.

NELSON: Okay, you are now back into Los Angeles.

BLAIR: Now I'm back in Los Angeles. Paul Pollock used to come up with Salary Standards to Independence and take surveys on salaries and I got to know him there. When he saw my name for a transfer, he called and asked me if I would be interested in transferring down and working for him and I said yes.

So I came down to Los Angeles and started working for Paul Pollock. He was Civil Defense Coordinator at the time. 1954 wasn't that long after the war, in a sense and Civil Defense was still a very active project.

When Mr. Morris retired and became a consultant, he needed a secretary. The duties of the secretary in the Civil Defense office were combined with the work for Mr. Morris. I did work for Mr. Morris, Paul Pollock and the two legislative representatives, all in the CAO.

I also did relief work for Bob Lee's secretary when she was away.

NELSON: Do you remember her name?

BLAIR: Alice Rankin. She died not too long ago. When she retired I went to work for Bob Lee and that was probably the best job. That was in 1961. Bob Lee's job and working in the personnel office in Independence were probably the two most exciting jobs I had. It wasn't work, it was fun. I looked forward to going to work. I never even wanted to take a vacation because it was so exciting.

NELSON: What is your impression, you saw then working in and around the Chief Administrative Office. You saw then several of our General Managers, top executives, what are your impressions of the General Managers, both personally and as administrators? They had different styles I suspect.

BLAIR: I would say Mr. Morris was probably all the way around, my favorite. I thought he was the most professional of any general manager that I remember. Then after Mr. Morris, oh boy I'd have to go back.

NELSON: What about Sam Nelson?

BLAIR: No. Mr. Peterson was in there. Mr. Morris was a very professional type person. I can remember one time when I was working in the Civil Defense Office after I came to work in Los Angeles, Mr. Morris was still General Manager at the time, I was going to get into the elevator and Mr. Morris was just getting out and I wasn't thinking. I had one thing on my mind. I had to go where I was going and I jumped into the elevator and ran right smack into Mr. Morris. And oh my gracious I can remember, I can see the look on his face. He was a tall man and I looked up at him and he looked down at me and smiled and I think from then on I thought Mr. Morris was more than just General Manager. He was a person. I really thought he was a nice person. And after working for him, he was a gentleman and a scholar. He was an exciting person to work for because his work took him all over the world actually and so you got to be part of that -- working with him.

And then the other General Managers were Mr. Nelson. He was very outgoing; Mr. Peterson was kind of a quiet man. You didn't see too much of him, but Mr. Nelson, of course, was a very outgoing type person. If I was "sneaking home from work early" or something like that, he always caught me and he'd say, "where are you going Doreen?" and I said, "I'm going home" and he'd say, "Okay" and that was it.

Mr. Grant, Burton Grant, was the Assistant General Manager. He was sort of a Mr. Morris type person. He was a very strict person. But you had great respect for him because you knew what he stood for and you knew where you stood with him and so I had

great respect for Mr. Grant. Unfortunately, I would say unfortunately, he did not get to be General Manager probably because of his very strict ways and sometimes that always didn't go over with people.

Mr. Kanouse was an inspiring, intelligent man in his field. And I'll say I thought he was a very poor administrator. He knew his business very, very well, but I would say the other people in the Department carried him when he was General Manager.

Bob Phillips. I can remember Bob Phillips used to say he thought the best job in the Department was head of the Aqueduct Division. I used to think that too because in that job you got in on the power part of it, you got in on the water part of it, you got in on disasters and everything. Everything happened in the Aqueduct Division so you got a true knowledge of all the workings of the Department.

Then Mr. Winnard, of course, was a disaster for the Department. That was probably the worst thing that ever happened. Jim Mulloy probably was the best thing that ever happened to the Department because he brought it back from Mr. Winnard's disaster.

Then who came after that? Paul Lane I guess. Paul Lane was a very personable type person. I think he gave a lot of responsibility to people under him.

NELSON: Delegated.

BLAIR: Yes. He was a great delegator. I could add another sentence in there, but I won't.

NELSON: We're getting close to the end here and I did want to pick up on a little bit of your work with Bob Lee and the media section. Just how did the Department handle it's media affairs during that period of 1961 to..

BLAIR: During my Department career it was the most exciting job because Bob Lee handled media affairs. Most all media calls came into that office. The only time it ever went to Public Affairs probably was when Bob was on vacation. He was the Assistant General Manager and Director of Media Relations, I believe his title was at that time, and so he represented the General Manager at many outside affairs all over the country. He went all over, to Washington, D.C., Sacramento, etc.

But the media came to Bob Lee. Anything that was happening the calls came into that office. In that job, back in those days, the secretary was almost an assistant to Bob Lee because if Bob wasn't there and the call came in the media didn't want anything tomorrow, they wanted it yesterday. And so you had to get the information and get it back to them and they accepted that. I can remember one time this reporter called and said he understood there was some kind of a betting organization or something down at 1630 North Main Street and I said, "You're kidding!" I said, "Let me check it out and I'll call you back." I called the Power System and they said no, that that was wrong information and so I called the reporter back and told him and he said, "You know, somehow or other I believe you." And that made me feel good. And then they would call and as I said if Bob wasn't there, it was up to me to find the information. I got it, I gave it to them. I even remember one time I think it

was Tom Brokaw called and I got the information and gave it to him and he accepted it and it went on from there.

I remember a reporter called about something and I could tell I didn't like the way he put the question and I got angry with him and said, "You're not going to print what I'm going to tell you are you?" And he said, "Yes I will" and I said, "No you won't, because I'm not going to tell you." And so he said, "Okay, okay." I gave him the information and he printed what I told him because I didn't take any of his guff. I learned what they were like and if you gave them back what they were trying to hand you they accepted what you said. That's why I enjoyed that job.

DOREEN W. BLAIR

TAPE NUMBER: 3, SIDE ONE

GIVEN WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 1990 AT HER HOME IN LAGUNA HILLS, CALIFORNIA

NELSON: Bob Lee in the DWP Press Office had a title that was something like Executive Assistant to the General Manager and that seems to imply more than just running the press office. In your recollection and knowledge, what did Bob do and what were some of those other duties that he apparently had beyond being the chief press contact?

BLAIR: I believe his title was Assistant to the General Manager. He worked directly for the General Manager. He handled more than just press relations actually. He also worked with members of the Board and he would write speeches for the Board members and for the General Managers. Matter of fact he wrote speeches for top management people and he represented the General Manager at a lot of affairs. He would go to Washington, D.C. if there was some big water project coming up. Maybe something that would have to be voted on for money or trying to get more water for Southern California. He would go back and meet with maybe the Senators or representatives from California. He would meet with the press at the White House in Washington. Actually water at that time was the most important subject. There were power problems too, but water seemed to be uppermost at the time -- trying to get more water to Southern California.

And then he would go to Sacramento. He met with legislative people in Sacramento and set up meetings. As a matter of fact I can remember one time he set up some kind of a meeting and at that time he met directly with Governor Reagan. He also set up news conferences at the Department. Maybe there would be some kind of an affair at a hotel where there would be legislative people or some kind of big meeting and he would make arrangements for Department people to attend these meetings.

He represented the General Manager when it came to affairs where there might be a lot of press coverage. He would take care of management if there were problems and the press would be there. He would have written a news release and had that ready to hand out when they were at these meetings and if there were press people he would hand out these press releases to the press to inform them of the Department's background and attitude on the subject.

NELSON: From what you are saying he was somewhat of a lobbyist too.

BLAIR: Actully, yes.

NELSON: He represented the Department solely sometimes?

BLAIR: Yes.

NELSON: He was also active at this time on the Colorado River Board or how did that relate to this?

BLAIR: He was manager of the Colorado River Association. He also worked with MWD very closely on Colorado River subjects. The CRA was an organization made up of businessmen in Los Angeles. The president of Bullocks was on the advisory board and ~~CRA~~ when Bob would write a release or have some kind of information or had to get information to give out to the press or whoever, he would have to get these advisory board members' okay. That was another "hat" he wore. He did that while he was working for the Department. He did not get paid for it. That was an "outside activity" I guess you would say.

NELSON: During this period of time, late 1960's, during the time that you worked with Bob, you were just a two-person operation? Were you involved in any of these trips?

BLAIR: No I did not go on any trips. I did go to meetings in Los Angeles if they had a luncheon meeting or dinner meeting, I would go and help pass out papers or assist Bob Lee in introducing people from the Department to press representatives. I worked that way, but I never went on trips.

NELSON: When Bob was away and a new situation concerning the Department of Water and Power occurred in Los Angeles, how was that handled then within the Department?

BLAIR: All of those calls came directly to Bob's office. He was very well known in the newspaper business in Los Angeles. And if any of the papers wanted any information, they would "call Bob Lee," that's all you heard. And so when a call would

come in if Bob was not there, then it was up to the secretary and fortunately for me, it was up to me to call whomever, whatever person handled that particular subject in the Department. I would call them directly and get information and then call the newspaper back and tell them or I would find out the name of the person handling the problem at the Department and have them call the newspapers directly.

NELSON: You then, when Bob wasn't around, many times made the decision as to who might best handle the response from the Department?

BLAIR: Oh yes. I had to do that because newspapers never wanted anything tomorrow, they had to have it yesterday and they did not have time to wait. So you just got on the phone and started calling. That was one good thing about that job because you really knew in the Department each division and what their specific job was and then if a newspaper called, no matter whether it was a power problem, an outage someplace, or water main break or anything that was of interest to the newspapers, they would call Bob. You would have to find the section that handled that particular situation and get the information from them. You had to know the whole working area -- every area in the Department so you could go right directly to them in the shortest amount of time.

NELSON: I imagine during the years that you worked with Bob you met many of the local reporters. Do any of them come to mind? Were these the stereotype of the early newspaper men, and I guess most of them were men at that time?

BLAIR: Ray Hebert, who just recently retired from the Times newspaper. In those days, water was his speciality. He was excellent. Bob could go to him and give him information and Ray would write a very clear story of what the problem was in the water field, Ray was very good at that. I think of the editorial writers of the newspapers, Bill Thorson of the Times was excellent. Bob would meet and talk with the editorial writers. Maybe in a sense it was easier to write editorials or have editorials written in favor of the Department in those days because the reporters had respect for Bob Lee and they always felt that what he was telling them was correct information. Harry Mullany was with the City News, in City Hall. He was considered the "grandfather" of the reporters at City Hall and if you ever wanted to find anything out or wanted information you would call Harry Mullany. If he wanted anything or if anyone at the City News wanted to know something, Harry would call Bob and so he was "the person" at City Hall. Each newspaper had it's own reporters there, but Harry seemed to be the person you went to if you <u>really</u> wanted to get information. He was very nice, very interesting and fun to work with. Joyce Peterson was an excellent reporter too.

NELSON: On this "Watergate" period in our nation's history, there seemed to develop a lot of investigative-type reporters reporting and a lot of environmental-type reportings and a lot of people were looking for stories. Did that occur in the earlier days? Did they generally take the Department's word or were there people continuing to try to dig deeper for a different meaning to the story?

BLAIR: Well I always had my own personal opinion of reporters and many of them I did not trust and a few I did. They always were digging. I can remember one time there was a fire in one of the stations and men were burned, some critically, and I believe one died and the reporters would keep calling and I can remember that day Bob was not there or maybe he was taking calls on it too, but this one reporter called and he said what was the man's name that was critically injured and I said I can't give you his name until his family has been notified. His family had not been notified and this man just kept badgering me to get the man's name until finally I said, "Look I told you once, I can not give out that information. Don't call me back." And I just hung up. He accepted that. They would hound and they would keep hounding. If someone saw a DWP car parked at a coffee shop someplace and maybe the car was there for half an hour instead of what should have been a 15 minute break time, then they would call and say, what was that car doing parked out in front of such and such a place for so long? Then you'd have to call and find out from the division whose car that was and what were the men doing there and then you'd call back and tell

the reporter that they were meeting with someone from another office and they were going out to look at something. Well the reporters didn't always believe those kinds of problems existed in the Department. People, citizens, would call the newspapers and report those kinds of things. Maybe there was a water main break someplace or maybe a sprinkler head had come off and it was not a big problem, but there might be twenty people there and the citizens would call the newspapers and say there are twenty men out there on that project and fifteen of them are sitting around and five are working, what's going on? So then the newspapers would call in to find out what happened and how come there were so many people. Sometimes they were minor problems, then the newspapers tried to make major problems out of them. I guess that's what a reporter is supposed to do, but I didn't follow through on too many of those stories when it came to things like that.

NELSON: You described the relationship between the press office and the media, what was the relationship between the press office and Department managers? Did they work well with you? Did you get the information that you wanted or was there a reluctance there to provide information for the press?

BLAIR: No. I would say the Department knew what Bob Lee's function was. Every manager in the Department knew what Bob's function was and if Bob or someone from his office would call and say I need this information right away, they got it. Management was very good. All management people worked very well with Bob Lee. I really feel that they respected him. He

was business. He was always business. He did not go around to the different offices unless he had a specific reason to get information. His time was spent getting information for a certain reason, not just to go and carry on idle conversation.

NELSON: Your career in the Department spanned how many years?

BLAIR: 37 1/2.

NELSON: In summation then over 37 1/2 years, what did you think of the Department and your career?

BLAIR: I really enjoyed working for the Department. I was born into it and so I grew up with the Department. That was background for me. It was security. It was a good place to work and then my job, the jobs that I had were to me fun jobs. I would say 30 years of fun and maybe the last seven were work. That's when I was beginning to think about retirement and I guess I had a reason to retire. Working became a chore and when work became a chore to me it was time to start thinking about retirement. But every job I had was an exciting job. My very first job, as I said earlier, I did not like and I did not think I would be there more than five months. I was ready to quit. Then fortunately I was able to move into a better job and from then on it was all uphill until the last few years. I learned I had Multiple Sclerosis and work became "work", it no longer was "fun." When you get to that point in life, you know it's time to begin thinking very seriously about retirement. But those other 30 years were great years. I got paid for having fun.