

Transcript of Oral History Interview with LuEtte Halladay
Interviewed by Kathy Bradford Brigham City, Utah, August 26, 2008
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Kathy Bradford: Today is Friday, August 29, 2008, and I'm speaking with LuEtte Halladay at Brigham City Hall where she works. First I would like you to give me a little background – where you were born, a little bit about your family and your growing-up years.

LuEtte Halladay: I was born in Salt Lake City, but my family lived in West Bountiful, Utah, which is west of Bountiful. At the time I think the population was 615, and we just had one ward. Now it's really grown in that area. I came from a family of 8 children. I was second to the oldest.

KB: You probably had a lot of responsibility.

LH: Yes, I feel like I did, but I learned a lot that way. When my three younger girls got married, I'd say, "Don't you know how to do this?"

They'd say, "Well, Mother, we've never had to do that." Because they were the youngest, and I just assumed they had done those things, but the older ones took care of them and the younger ones didn't have the same responsibility.

I went to Bountiful High School. At that time Bountiful High was just about five or six years old.

KB: When did you get interested in computers?

LH: That was in about 1973, and I was married and had six children when I saw the first computers. They had one down at Lake View School, and we went with Jay Stewart one night. He took us down to see it and I don't know what happened, but I really liked that! I asked around, but there were really no computer classes. I went down to Brigham Young University with my husband when he had a conference, and I looked all over and there was nothing about computers down there. I finally found a man at Utah State University who was teaching a class in computers. We went to that class, and he told me to buy computer books.

KB: Did you find them interesting to read?

LH: Oh yes! Really interesting! Then I joined a computer-users group in Ogden.

KB: But with your family, you weren't planning to find a job in computers, were you?

LH: No. I don't know why I liked it so well. Finally my husband said, "Well, let's get one." As far as I know I was the first one in Brigham to have a personal computer.

KB: Well, several people at the Library and other city employees have told me that when they have a computer question, they ask you. You're kind of a resource person for a lot of city employees. So being a full-time mom at home, what kinds of things did you do on your computer?

LH: I put my husband's books on the computer for his instructions. I had an Atari computer, and I learned how to do spread sheets and word processing. I'd just start playing around and learn how to do things.

KB: Were there other people by then that were doing that kind of thing?

LH: No, not that I know of. In 1987 I got my first desktop which was the Atari, and Microsoft didn't even come out with them that early. We had a desktop with a mouse and an Atari program called Swiftcalc. They did have a data base then, too.

KB: Don't you think computers have gotten more user-friendly over the years?

LH: Oh yes, in that way, but they've gotten more complicated because there are so many more things you can do with them. The little I pod and things like that are just little computers. That's all they are. They have many kinds of telephones where you can put in your own information and take pictures – all sorts of things.

KB: When you were doing all this, did your kids get involved with computers at all?

LH: Yes, they did, but now they wish they'd done more. They just thought everybody had a computer and didn't realize what they had or what they could have done with it.

KB: Did Norm, you husband, get into computers also?

LH: No, he never did like them much. I don't know why. He was really good at building that I couldn't, but he wasn't really interested in computers.

KB: Well, we all have different strengths and talents. When your children were almost grown, and you were divorced and single again, you went to work.

LH: Yes. My first job was over at the Library. It was just a part-time job, but I worked into full-time. I worked half a day at the Library in the Literacy Program. Then I'd go to the Lincoln Center half a day and tutor. I ran that program, and I really, really liked that. I miss that sometimes. We would have kids that would come in who wanted to learn to read or have help with their homework. The Library was the Literacy Program which was for adults. I tutored some there, too, but mostly I did the computer work and that kind of thing.

KB: That's where you started to get your reputation as a computer expert.

LH: I don't know if I have a reputation or not. At the Lincoln Center we used computers, and Abby Schinkle from Utah State gave us some of her old computers – five or six of them. I set them up in the room. After the kids would read for so long, we'd let them play on the computers, and they love that!

KB: They played games on them?

LH: Yes. The ones we had were like Arthur's Reading, which were fun, but they also helped them.

KB: Were you paid by the City or through grants?

LH: I think the Literacy program was funded through grants, and then we were part of the Library staff. I just really enjoyed that. If I could have stayed there, I would have. I really enjoyed it, and they always made me feel like I was part of their group.

KB: Everyone I've interviewed at the Library says it's like a family there among the staff, but you wanted a full-time job with benefits and you came here.

LH: Yes, so I came to interview with the City and got this good job as clerk and phone operator.

KB: Do you do a lot of computer work?

LH: Yes, I do all the _____ and pay all the bills. I do the _____ and _____. I answer the phone. When I came they weren't using the computer too much. I put a lot of things on the computer. The checks were all done by typewriters and I put it on Microsoft Word. It made it a lot faster. I couldn't ask for a better job. I was afraid I was going to have to work out of town and commute.

KB: How is the staff?

LH: You know, you can't work with people day after day and not develop relationships. They become your friends, and you're concerned about them. You have six ladies that work in the area and then Dennis Sheffield. He's our boss, and we're his harem. He's just a really good boss. He lets you do your own thing.

KB: I think everyone likes that kind of relationship with a boss rather than having him tell you every little thing. Is he still talking about retiring?

LH: Yes, he says in December. He's a good boss, and you also develop a relationship with Sharon upstairs and the secretaries in the different departments.

KB: You interact with a lot of people here, and probably a lot of city employees who work in areas outside City Hall.

LH: Yes, that's true. They all come in when they have to purchase orders or check on checks. It's fun to meet all of them. I always tease _____ that they bring me the bills and her the money. She takes care of the money coming in.

KB: How many years have you been working here?

LH: Seven.

KB: So you won't be retiring any day soon.

LH: No even though I'd like to. I like it here. It's not that, but there are other things I want to do.

KB: Well, you have a nice family. Tell me about that.

LH: Oh, I have five children that are living. I have 19 grandkids, and 10 years ago I had one. Then they kind of came along -- one, and then another one, and then two. One year I got five in one year. Each of my five kids had a baby within eight months. Then a couple of years they started over, and all of them had babies in less than six months, so we have two sets of five.

KB: So they're all little.

LH: The oldest one is 11, and there's a 10 and a 9 and so on down. In fact, the first set of five are all in school now. But not the second set, and we have four others.

KB: Does anyone have room to have them all over at once?

LH: Yes, they do. They all have nice houses, and we get together. We go to churches a lot and parks a lot.

KB: Tell me about your children. I remember Holly; she's the one that you lost.

LH: Yes, and then there's Tracy. He has three children -- all three adopted. There are four of them that lived in one little are at one time, but Jason has moved down to Farr West. Torry and Brad live in Perry, and they have four. Jason has five. They had four boys and just got a girl, so they were excited. Melinda lives in the 22nd Ward, and they've got four. Shalene lives next to Torry in Perry, and she has three.

KB: So Farr West is the farthest away of all your family.

LH: Yes, and we get together every Sunday. We trade houses. We meet after church and after dinner, and not everybody can come every time, but they come when they can. At first we tried to cook a meal, but it made it too hard, so now we have a little treat of some kind. That has been enjoyable.

KB: Working here full-time hasn't kept you away from your kids, has it?

LH: It keeps me away from them more than I'd like, but we're all close enough to get together for the birthdays and special days.

KB: Do your kids love computers like you do?

LH: They all do their own computers. They have fancier computers than I do, but we have a lot fun with computers. My grandkids send me e-mails and computer greeting cards. Every little while, I get a card that says, "I love you, Grandma." I think it keeps you close to them.

KB: It sounds like life is good for you now.

LH: It really is.

KB: You've had some rough times, like when you lost your girl. Tell me about that.

LH: When our oldest daughter Holly was five years old, her eyes started crossing. I took her to an eye doctor, and he could see that something was backing up the fluid in her eyes, and so he sent her down

to the Primary Children's Hospital. They found a tumor, and they operated on it. She was operated on a couple of other times, and then she was really quite well except for the last year. She lived for ten years after the surgeries. After the last operation, the surgeries had caused too much damage, and she had a bad year. By then we were ready to let her go and she was ready by the time she died.

KB: That was a terrible time for you, and then I know your divorce was hard. After the divorce, did you ever think of going back to your home town of Bountiful to work?

LH: No, because my kids were here. My dad died before our divorce. My mother is still alive. I'll go down this weekend to be with her. She's an invalid. She's had strokes and heart attacks, and she just keeps going. We call her the Ever Ready Bunny. She's 87, and she's never had really good health. She's had a colostomy and all these things, and yet she's outliving her friends with better health. So you never know.

I have a sister and a brother that stay with her during the week. There's another sister who works, but she's right in Bountiful so she can do a lot. Another sister and brother and I take turns on the weekends.

KB: It sounds like you have the best of all worlds right now.

LH: Yes, I do.

KB: What are your plans after you retire?

LH: I'll probably enjoy my grandkids, and I'd like to go on a church mission if I'm not too old. I'd miss my kids, but I think I'd miss my grandchildren even more.

KB: I understand that because kids change so quickly. If you went away for a couple of years, your kids would seem about the same when you got back, but your grandkids would be a lot different.

LH: That's true, but they have things now that you can keep in touch. You can send e-mails or pictures, and it's instant communication.

KB: That is a wonderful thing. Before we quit, is there anything else you want to say about your job?

LH: We're going to get a new boss, which should be interesting.

KB: Have you worked under more than one mayor?

LH: Well, I came in the first part of November when David Kano was Mayor. I think Lou Ann Christensen had been elected about the time I came but didn't start until January, so I wasn't really here under Mayor Kano long enough to notice a change.

One thing I will say is that you develop really good relationships with the secretaries in this building and in other places like the Senior Center and the other City buildings. I'd like to say if people really knew all the City does for the people, they would appreciate it more. When I started and was answering the phone, I had a hard time knowing what was where. I asked the Mayor if I could go around and meet all the people, and so she arranged for all the secretaries to go. She got a bus for us and a nice lunch. We went down to the Waste Treatment Plant and the Streets Department and all the city departments. I

told her then that every citizen should go around to all the departments and see all the things the City does.

KB: I really think most people have no idea about the extent of city operations. I know more since I worked for the City, but before that I had no idea.

LH: I didn't know anything about all the different aspects until I started working here.

KB: Do you have much contact with the City Council?

LH: I do because I prepare all the checks that are called claims, and then they have to come and go through all them for payment. Their terms overlap so they're not all leaving at the same time.

KB: Have you seen changes as the Council Members change?

LH: Only in our relationships with them because of their different personalities. For example, Holly Bell used to bring us treats and others are more businesslike, but they're all pleasant to us. It's another area where we get to know more people and develop new relationships.

KB: I appreciate the work you do here and the chance to talk with you here today.