

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

TERESA FISCHER



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OPEN FOR RESEARCH



Interviews Conducted and Edited by:  
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## Statement of Donation

### STATEMENT OF DONATION OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF TERESA FISCHER

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Date 12-12-94

Teresa Fischer  
Teresa Fischer

INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Gandy  
Bill Allen, Sr.

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## Editorial Conventions

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency for International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

## **Introduction**

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

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For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:

[www.usbr.gov/history](http://www.usbr.gov/history)

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**Oral History Interviews  
Teresa Fischer**

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Teresa Fischer of the Montana Area Office, in her offices in Billings, Montana, on November 15, 1994. This is tape one. It's about 1:30 in the afternoon.

Ms. Fischer, will you tell me where you were born and raised and educated, and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation, please?

**Beginnings**

Fischer: I was born right here in Billings, Montana, 1956, and we traveled around. My grade schools years were throughout Wyoming, and ending up here, in the sixth grade, and junior high and high school here. I graduated in '75, and during my senior year of high school, I took the civil service exam, and at that time, it was given automatically to seniors in the clerical, seniors in the secretarial field, to get a rating and be put on the registers, when they had open registers. O-P-M [Office of Personnel Management]. They don't have that anymore. But I graduated in June and in December I was offered a job, of '75, and that's when I started.

Storey: Here at the Bureau of Reclamation?

Fischer: Yes. I only spent a year and a half out of the Bureau, and it was for one of the federal judges here in Billings, in the Clerk of Court's Office. But I came back to Reclamation.

Storey: And what position was that?

Fischer: When I started?

Storey: Yes.

Fischer: I was a GS-2 Clerk Typist. Those were in the days of mag card two, the old mag cards, and the long-carriage electric typewriters. I was in a word processing—well, it was a steno pool at that time, where all of the Regional Office's [Great Plains Regional Office] work was done by the steno pool, a lot of their typing. So I got to know work of almost every division, and got to know most, if not all, of the people in the Regional Office here.

Anyway, and that was 'til about '81. No, excuse me, '80. And in '81, I went to Programs Division for a year, before I went to the Clerk of Court's Office. When I came back, they had upgraded the steno pool to a Word Processing Section, and we had C-P-Ts, baby word processors, if you will, and I came back to supervise that, and I supervised four people, and was there two years before I went to Canyon Ferry [Dam] with Reclamation.

Canyon Ferry Dam is out of Helena, Montana. It's a project office. At that time, it reported directly to the regional director. I'll elongate on that in a minute. But I went as a project support clerk, which my supervisor at that time, Steve Clark, who is now out at Grand Coulee [Dam], project manager, consolidated the administrative officer and the secretary into my position, which was project support clerk. And he was one of the up-and-coming, cutting-the-fat-from-the-government sort of

managers, because I found, after I got in that job, I could do it in thirty-two hours a week, because after about two years I was getting bored, and he said, "Well, if you want to go to school, I'll let you work part time."

I was just flabbergasted, because here was this chance, you know, that I could go to college and get farther than a project support clerk. Because at that time, I had had—let's see, that was '85. I'd had ten years in, and thought, "I'm probably going to stay with the government." I enjoyed it, you know, working there, working for the government.

So I went to Carroll College in Helena, Montana. I worked thirty-two hours a week. I got my degree in five years. Year round, I went to school, and got my degree in public administration, which is a cross between business management and political science. I think having all those poli sci classes really helped me understand, I guess, what is happening now to Reclamation. You know, we're going through the downsizing, changing effort, you know. Our mission, what we were created for in 1902, has been accomplished. Now what do we do? And the poli sci classes have really helped me understand, you know, and kind of, I guess, accept it, because I know a lot of the engineers that I work with, it's really hard for them to accept, you know, and more and more of them are being replaced by, like, environmentalist, natural resource types, you know, with the mission changing in that.

So anyway, I was there at Canyon Ferry seven years, and I applied for an administrative officer position, which is what I wanted to be when I started

college. That was what I wanted to be when I grew up, so I got that job and came back to Billings. I didn't want to come back to Billings, because I moved away to get out of Billings, but it's what I wanted to be, and I guess it was essentially a new position here.

### **Establishment of the Montana Area Office**

This office was created in '89, our area office, Montana Area Office. It had not been here before. So compared to the other area offices in the Region, we're the baby, and being across from the Regional Office has not been easy. We took control—I mentioned before that Canyon Ferry reported directly to the R-D [regional director]. Well, at that time, Canyon Ferry [Dam] now reports to this office, and so does Yellowtail [Dam], in the state of Montana. So we've become another layer, which has really been hard, a hard burden to bear. Working at Canyon Ferry all those years, and reporting right to the R-D, now there's another layer of fat in there, you know, and then they're getting farther away from the action. O&M [operations and maintenance] used to be the baby of Reclamation, and it's not that way anymore, and that's one of our changes, one of our growing pains we're going through.

Prompt me. (laughter)

Storey: Commissioner [C. Dale] Duvall said that O&M was the reason that he reorganized in 1988. That was his explanation for the '88 reorganization.

Fischer: Yeah.

Storey: Let's go back to the steno pool.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: When you first started with Reclamation. So the Regional Office was the only office here in Billings at that time?

Fischer: Of Reclamation. Yes, it was.

Storey: How many people were in the steno pool?

#### **Working in the Steno Pool**

Fischer: There were, let's see, the supervisor was a GS-7, and there were a couple of GS-4s, a 3 and a 2, I think. So there was four, five, six. Let's see, two, three, four, five. And the GS-7, I will be honest with you, really didn't do a lot of work, and she retired from that position. You know, I've seen a lot of the old-school employees that, you know, did it by the bell. You started at the bell, you took your fifteen minutes break, you came back, and a lot of them did sit. (laughter) I noticed a lot of it, and it was just very—eight hours, that's it. You know, I have always worked hard, I feel. Working in a steno pool is not the easiest job. It's a sweatshop. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

Storey: Tell me about it.

Fischer: With that? It benefitted me in that it made me learn about all areas of Reclamation, at least in the Regional Office. You know, what we were doing, projects we were doing, what kind of work we were doing. You know, irrigation, environmental impact

statements, building, researching gasification plants at the time. And I got to type enough of that where some of it does click in, you know, and the same thing, you do the same work over and over.

So I was exposed to almost everything that a Regional Office did. We typed everything. I remember, this was, like I say, when mag cards were big. We typed specifications for contracts, and they were long and laborious, and on mag cards that printed thirty-two characters per second. Very, very slow. We typed drill logs for people.

Storey: For when they did cores and things?

Fischer: Core samples, on that orange osselet [phonetic], with electric typewriters. It was that orange draft osselet, where, if you made a mistake, you had to peel it off with a razor blade, the letter. And I don't know if you've ever—

Storey: I don't know this.

Fischer: I don't know if you've ever typed a drill log, but it's very technical work. The verbiage, it doesn't read like a narrative. It's all very technical. You know, sediments, what we ran into at this level, how much of it was muddy, stuff like that. Water seepage, like that. And it was done on the old orange osselet. I don't know why it was done that way. You know, at a GS-2, you just take the work that you're given and you perform it.

Storey: Describe this orange osselet for me.

Fischer: Oh, okay. In the days of mimeographs, I guess that's

about the nearest thing that I can relate it to, it's a plastic waxy paper. The form was a drill log form. You know, it had columns on it that you filled in, and little narrow columns that look like layers of dirt, with numbers on it. At each level of elevation, I guess, I guess that's how they did it, you typed in what you found, or the driller would write in, in a log, what he found, and bring it back to us.

Well, the form went on top of that plastic waxy paper, so that when you typed against it, the plastic was deposited on the other side of the form. Now, I don't know, I never researched into why those were done on that, but I'm sure they're stored away somewhere. I know it has to be done in a different way now, because that was just so laborious. That's one of the areas that they could have improved on. I mean, word processors were a long way from mag card twos, were a long way from electric typewriters. You know, the non-correcting ones.

More?

Storey: Yes, please. Were you the only typist in the Regional Office, or were you doing overflow work from the secretaries in the various branches and divisions, or whatever they were?

### **Division of Secretarial Work**

Fischer: Okay, how it was done then was, there was one division secretary for each division, and I think one branch secretary for each branch. And then we did get overflow and we got longer documents, you know, that would take a long time. Specifications took a long time. Repetitive letters, letters that they

sent off to irrigation districts. You know, 140 districts, the same letter. You just change the name and address. Mag cards were good for that, because you could merge the letter with the address list and get those out. We also answered phones for the division secretaries that were out. They would come and get someone from the pool to go and sit at their desk, and answer the phone, and kind of do the work there, when the secretary was on vacation, or gone for a day, or something like that. So we got a lot of exposure that way, too.

#### **Fortunate to Sit in the Regional Director's Office**

I was fortunate enough, also, that I got to sit in the R-D's office. They trained me to do that for the Regional Director's Office. You know, instead of having all of us, training all of us to do it. At that time, it was much more formal, I guess, than it is now. And, of course, you didn't have the, let's see, the mag cards, or the word processors like we do now. And it was just very—the R-D, I don't think he still answers his own phone, but at that time, you know, the secretary answered it, you screened the call. It was much more formal than it is now.

So they trained me to do that, and that was kind of exciting, because a lot went on up there. It was so early in my career. I was nineteen, twenty. I didn't grasp the impact, the political impact, that I do now. You know, having been here for so many years, observing what I observe now and why people make the moves that they do now. I don't know if Reclamation was as politically motivated from the R-D level when I was there, earlier in my career, as it is now, as I see it now.

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Storey: Who was the regional director then?

Fischer: Bob McPhail. He's with WAPA [Western Area Power Administration] now, or he has retired from WAPA.

Storey: What was he like?

Fischer: He was just a very nice, easygoing guy. I don't remember congressionals coming in as much. Maybe I just wasn't exposed to them as much, being in a steno pool, but we seem to get a lot more congressional actions now. A lot more special-interest groups are getting attention. They make a complaint or a flare-up, and you just drop everything now. And I don't know if it was like that back then. I don't remember the kind of work, the kind of issues that were dealt with, I guess, is what I mean.

Storey: Did you do anything besides just answer the phone when you were in the Regional Director's Office?

Fischer: Some typing. Logged in letters from, you know, all—the Regional Office would do letters for R-D signature, and log those in, and when they were signed, log them out and where they went, and what time they were logged out. Planned his travel, maybe.

Storey: Made the arrangements?

Fischer: Yeah, yeah, airplane arrangements. At that time, we had a Bureau plane. We didn't have a travel clerk. We did later, and I filled in for that position, too, and got to learn it. You know, scheduling the Bureau plane and making travel for the whole Region. But it

was at that time when we had the plane, and the R-D needed to travel. You know, you schedule it, you arrange everything, the motels, and everything like that.

Storey: Were you trained to screen people out who could and couldn't get to the regional director, for instance? Remember anything about that?

Fischer: The culture was such that it wasn't an open-door policy. People just didn't—you know, the regular employee on the street just didn't walk in and want to chat with the R-D. It was mostly division heads. If there were branch heads, it was with the division head. It seemed like a very hierarchical thing, if you know what I mean. It didn't screen out people from getting in, but the way they came in, it wasn't as open door and as free as it is now. Do you see what I mean?

Storey: I understand, yes.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: Do you remember any of the division heads?

Fischer: At that time?

Storey: Yes.

Fischer: Oh, Lord. I know Dan Lauver was in programs. He was the head of programs. I worked for him the year that I was down there. Oh, man. Jim Rawlings was in water and land. Let's see. Phil Gibbs. He has since retired and passed away. He was the head, 700, planning, head of planning then. That was

before WAPA took our power function away, and so we had a regular 600 full-blown Power Division, where everything that WAPA kind of does now with power marketing and that kind of stuff, that was done over there, and I don't remember that division head's name.

A lot of them—Jim Verzuh, he was construction chief for a long time. I'm grasping now. (laughter)

Storey: That's okay.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: Let's go back to the steno pool.

Fischer: Oh, okay.

Storey: When you say "steno pool," to me that implies more than just typing. What else did you do?

#### **The Steno Pool**

Fischer: Typed. That really was about it.

Storey: You didn't really go in and take shorthand, or anything like that?

Fischer: No, I was past that stage. I know my supervisor still took shorthand at some meetings that they had, because I remember her taking shorthand notes. And it wasn't I couldn't, because that's, you know, what I—on my civil service test, so I had a shorthand. But no, I didn't take any here. I did on my own, when I had to take messages, but not of letters or meetings or anything like that.

Storey: How did work come to you in the steno pool?

Fischer: Anyone brought it in. Usually the secretaries brought it in, to my supervisor. Now, I'm kind of—from the steno pool and the word processing section, that's two different—you know, I'll talk about the steno pool now. But it came in through my supervisor and she kind of doled it out, you know, distributed it. Broke it up if there was a big project, for two of us to take care of.

Sometimes the authors would bring it in themselves. Whoever wrote it would come in and work with one of us to give instructions. You know, "Here's how I want it done exactly," and that was okay, because then we didn't have to guess about how they wanted it done. So I got to build up a good rapport with a lot of authors. A lot of them are still around. It's interesting. I've been here nineteen years, and there are still a few over there. It's getting fewer and fewer, but I still know quite a few of them.

Storey: What form did it come to you in, did work come to you in?

#### **How the Work Came In**

Fischer: Usually handwritten, or cut and pasted from other hard-copy work that we may or may not have done before, on a mag card. You know, they wouldn't tell us. We might have done a whole document, and they cut it up and put it in different locations, intermingled with handwritten data, and then for us to just type over again. But it was mostly handwritten.

Storey: No tapes to transcribe, for instance?

Fischer: No.

Storey: And you had environmental documents, I gather?

Fischer: Environmental Impact Statements.

Storey: Letters, for instance?

Fischer: Yes. The drill logs.

Storey: Reports?

Fischer: Reports.

Storey: Of various kinds.

Fischer: Those ten-carbon purchase orders, and trading forms, with all the carbon packets behind them. A lot of them. And, of course, the letters. Those were in the days where you had like seven tissues behind it, you know, all different colors behind one letter. With the mag cards, it wasn't too bad, because you could get everything in perfect copy and then just run it, and it would be perfect and there wouldn't be any errors, like if you were typing freehand, with all those copies.

Storey: But as I recall mag cards, you just basically had a typewriter in front of you.

Fischer: It had a memory, and it recorded on cards.

Storey: And it recorded on magnetic cards?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: But you couldn't see what you had typed?

Fischer: Oh, yeah.

Storey: Am I remembering correctly?

Fischer: You could. I think the mag card ones now may have had something where—a very small screen, where you typed. You could type into the mag card. You could turn off the print and type in and not see. It's been a long time. But we always just kept it on, so we could see what we typed, because as you saw it and you knew you made a mistake, you could backspace over it and continue on, so that what you recorded at the very end was a perfect copy, more or less. You know, then we proofed it. We proofread everything, you know, either back and forth. That's how I learned to proofread, was back and forth with another person. That's how we did a lot of our proofreading. Or, you know, original to draft. You know, side-by-side proofreading.

Storey: I had forgotten we could see. We had mag cards in our office, also.

Fischer: Yeah, you can. We got the big sound covers, because they were loud when they printed, because they were an impact printer, if you will, and it printed across, so it was pretty loud when it got going.

Storey: How long were you in the steno pool?

Fischer: Let's see, I was there from '75 until '80 and left, let's see, '80 to '81, Programs.

Storey: What was the name of your supervisor in the steno pool?

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Fischer: Tillie Engi. Matilda Engi. E-N-G-I.

Storey: What was she like as a supervisor?

Fischer: Wonderful. She really was. She was very amiable, never lost her temper, helped instill a work ethic in me that I already had, but kind of polished it up a little. It was essentially my first job out of high school, you know, and she was wonderful.

Storey: Is she still around?

Fischer: Yes, she is still living.

Storey: Here in Billings?

Fischer: Yes. As a matter of fact, another of the girls that was in the steno pool right before I was is up in my office also, and she saw her recently, and so she told me that she had seen her.

Storey: Did you stay at GS-2 for the five years that you were in the steno pool?

Fischer: No. I got—let's see, I was a 2 and then a 3, and then a 4 there, and went to Programs as a 5. I was hired under, actually, a temporary authority, which they don't have anymore, that you could be converted at the end of x amount of time, automatically. They don't have that authority anymore. But I worked part time. I worked thirty-two hours a week for about nine months, until they converted me, you know, to full time, and then I guess at the end of the year, I guess I turned a 3. You know, I don't remember and I haven't gone back to really study that. But I went from a 2 to a 4 in that position.

Storey: How long did it take you to get your 4, do you suppose?

Fischer: I would have to look. I could go back, and I have all the documents. Maybe a year.

Storey: Did the nature of the work change at all while you were in the steno pool?

### **Changes in the Nature of the Work**

Fischer: I think we started out training the first year on regular electric typewriters. Like the mag cards, there were only two mag cards in there, and two electric typewriters. Well, I think it's just kind of, you came in, and the steno pool was a training ground. A lot of the offices took their secretaries from the steno pool, so the turnover was tremendous. So it wasn't long when you got in there before you advanced to a mag card, I guess, is the way to put it. And I think that's about when I got my 3, because there was a certain level of authority. And the 4 level would fill in when our supervisor was gone, kind of make the decisions, distribute the work, return the work to the authors, you know, and take complaints, handle that. So, yeah, there was some increase in responsibility.

Storey: Was there any change in the equipment that you recall?

Fischer: No, not while I was at that position.

Storey: So you left about '80, and you were still using mag cards at that time?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: And then where did you go?

Fischer: To the Programs Division.

Storey: As?

Fischer: Secretary. Division secretary.

Storey: The division secretary.

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Was it normal for somebody to go directly from the typing pool to being a division secretary?

Fischer: It wasn't unheard of, but I had a lot of experience. I was detailed into the Programs Division for two weeks when their secretary was on vacation. I don't know. I didn't pay much attention.

Storey: And did you say that was Mr. Verzuh?

Fischer: No. Lauver. Dan Lauver was in programs. Verzuh was head of design and construction.

Storey: And so he selected you for that position?

Fischer: Dan? Uh-huh.

Storey: Did it mean a promotion for you?

Fischer: Oh, yes. From a 4 to a 5.

Storey: How did the work change because you moved into the division secretary?

**Responsibilities Changed Becoming a Division Secretary**

Fischer: The work changed in one way. I was just doing programs work, and that was okay. They didn't have as many letters. It was mostly big budget documents. I did a lot of calculating, adding up. That was when they were done by hand. We didn't have the spreadsheets to automatically total. You did those big sixteen-inch budget documents, you know, on the long-carriage typewriter.

I did a lot more research, little studies for Dan. You know, I would research information on appropriations. The states, the congressional districts in the states in the Region, how much money they'd put in for different projects that we had going on, and did little research jobs for him, I guess, that I wouldn't have done as a—I guess I'm going to call it a regular secretary, because I don't think the secretary before me did a lot of that.

Dan was another up-and-coming. He was one of the newer engineers that secretaries could be used for more than just typing letters. I attribute a lot of my opportunities to him, also, because he has always given me challenging work, and not really guided my footsteps, but he's been influential in my career.

Storey: What other kinds of things did you do as division secretary?

Fischer: Typed the travel vouchers for when people traveled. Ran copies. I guess put budget notebooks together.

Storey: Did you have to do anything with timekeeping?

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Fischer: Oh, yes. I did the time. I forgot about that.  
(laughter) Yeah, I did time and the time sheets.

Storey: How was that done in those days?

Fischer: On those—is it a two-carb? It's one. What do you call that kind of backing of paper that automatically writes on the paper below it?

Storey: The carbon. It's got a built-in carbon?

Fischer: Yeah, the carbon backing. Yeah. It's just the original, and then just one underneath it, and it was handwritten. They would give me their time, what they spent on doing things, and I would fill out the time sheets, you know, so they were all standard and done correctly. I'm sure there was another form in there where they would tell me how many hours they spent on what day, and what cost authority, usually, is what it was. What to charge it to.

Storey: Those were the great big eighteen-digit numbers?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: They still had that system then?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: So the people in your division, how many people were there?

Fischer: That was before programs and finance consolidated, and I suppose there were seven or eight, is all.

Storey: Who gave you time?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Were there more people in your division?

Fischer: No. That was the extent of the Programs Division.

Storey: There weren't other branches or anything?

Fischer: No, no. It was just one division. All budget analyst, budget tech, of varying grades, and Dan, and myself.

Storey: So you filled out the time sheets. What did you then do with them?

Fischer: Took them to either data processing or personnel, and I think it was data processing. Yeah, because it was all hand-done.

Storey: And then they processed them on further?

Fischer: Yeah. And it might have been personnel. Personnel might have been a step in there before it went to data processing, because I know they must have gone to data processing last so they could key—that was when they still had the punch clerks, the data punch clerks, where they punched them in on those little cards that had the holes in them, you know. I can't remember the name of them. Punch cards, I guess.

Storey: [unclear] punch cards.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: I think they were. As Mr. Lauver's secretary, were you guarding the gates, as it were, or how did people get in to see him?

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Fischer: He was very much an open-door manager. Anyone could go in to see him. I don't know what else to say about it. He would entertain anyone and everyone. He didn't make me screen people. You know, if he was busy and someone came in, of course I'd have to get a time for them to come back later, but, no, he was very much open door.

Storey: What did the Programs Division do?

### **Programs Division Activities**

Fischer: It did all the budgets for all the programs that we had going at that time—Canyon Ferry and Yellowtail, and, I think, Garrison [Project].<sup>1</sup> We were doing Garrison at that time. Whatever other projects we had going on. Figure out how much was needed for salaries, then your materials and supplies, contracts, and any special what they call now, they call them "racks items," [unclear] but any, let's see, extraordinary operation and maintenance expenditures. You know, if you to replace a vehicle or had to replace a piece of equipment, do a major upgrade, you know, on one of the powerplant turbines or something like that. It was essentially, they would go meet, I think, with the project manager, and say, "Okay, what are you going to need?"

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 15, 1994.

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 15, 1994.

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1. The Garrison Project was a plan to divert water from Lake Sakakawea, formed by Garrison Dam on the Missouri River, to irrigate about one million acres east-central North Dakota, and supply municipal and industrial water to several communities. The project was scaled back as a result of the Carter's administrations attempt to cut spending on questionable water projects, better known as Carter's "hit list."

- Fischer: The budget analysts met with the project managers one at a time, and found out what they were going to be needing in the budget year that they were doing the budget for. Like I said, it's two years. We always do it two years ahead. So '94, like, they'd be asking for '96. And they'd be asking, "How many F-T-Es [Full-Time Employees] do you plan to have? What kind of work are you going to do? What did you spend last year on materials and supplies? How much do you want to up that? What are your special projects that you're going to need done, that were done last year?" and like that. They would ascertain all those needs, bring them back, do all the forms, whatever was needed to send them up the pike to Washington. Or I guess they went to Denver and then to Washington, for them to either, you know, go through and bless it, or say, "Get rid of it," and then they would send it back down to the Region. The Region went back out to the project managers and talked to—"Well, they took this much away. Where do you want to take it from?" Stuff like that. That's what the budget analysts did.
- Storey: Did they budget the sort of basic things, like the salaries and the building maintenance and rentals and all that kind of stuff also?
- Fischer: Yeah. They usually used historical records, like, "What did you spend last year? How much do you think it will go up?" Salaries always went up. Materials and supplies, there was an inflation factor. Rent, utilities and communication. As prices go up, they would automatically up that. Yeah, your basic cost of doing business. You know, that would go in first and then all of your extras.

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Storey: So the Program Division did the budgeting for the entire Region?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Both ordinary and extraordinary expenses?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: And how long were you there?

Fischer: I was there a little over a year.

Storey: So you didn't have a chance to see it change from year to year very much.

Fischer: The amounts?

Storey: Yes.

Fischer: I didn't really pay attention to the amounts, to tell you the truth. What I paid attention to, what was interesting to me, was the extraordinary items. That was kind of fascinating, because it made me aware of what they were doing, what Reclamation was doing out there. We have powerplants, we have irrigation projects. Those kind of things. That was interesting to me.

Storey: If I'm recalling correctly, the transmission system was transferred to Western Area Power Administration in '77, or maybe '78. So that would have happened while you were still in the steno pool.

Fischer: '78.

Storey: So you wouldn't have seen any effects of that, I guess, in the program office?

Fischer: Not really. In programs? Nuh-uh.

Storey: Why did you decide to leave the Program Division?

Fischer: For a raise. I got a 6, up at the Clerk's Office, and that's why.

Storey: At what Clerk's Office?

#### **Working at the Federal District Court's Clerks Office**

Fischer: The federal—Judge Battin. He was a federal judge. He was, he has since retired. In the Federal Building, federal district judge, and his clerk's office. I was a deputy clerk in that office.

Storey: When was that?

Fischer: It was in August of '81. I think that's about when it was.

Storey: So it was in the same building?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: What did you do in the Clerk's Office as a deputy clerk?

Fischer: As a deputy clerk, what we did, for federal trials, we polled jurors. We're the ones that sit up there in front of the judge when a trial is going on, and log in the exhibits, and give the witnesses the oath of, you know, "Do you solemnly swear?" We logged in this

judge's decisions on issues. The attorneys would file their respective briefs, and then all the briefs would go to the judge, and he'd make a decision and log it—excuse me, and docket it. And then it would come in. The big legal document that the judge's law clerks wrote up, you know, typed up, and we would log in what it said, and send them to the attorneys of record. And we also did criminal cases, which, most of them, from Deer Lodge, most of the criminals would send criminal complaints to us.

Storey: From Deer Lodge, Montana?

Fischer: Yeah. Yeah, from the prison. Oh, the prison in Deer Lodge. I'm sorry. Okay. Yeah, from the prison in Deer Lodge. They could do that free of charge. To file a case, there was a filing fee for a civil, you know, a regular civil case, but the criminal cases were usually, especially the ones from the prisoners, already, they were *pro se*, is what they were called. You know, free, and they were representing themselves. They didn't need an attorney.

Storey: How do spell this judge's name?

Fischer: B-A-T-T-I-N.

Storey: And his first name?

Fischer: Jim.

Storey: Jim Battin.

Fischer: Yeah. James Battin. And he just retired about, I guess four or five years ago.

Storey: You mentioned that he covered civil and criminal cases. Can you break down the civil any further?

### **Federal Court Cases**

Fischer: Civil were mainly—let's see. The way the legal system is, you have your county courts, your state courts, then it goes up to federal, and the jurisdiction of each is different. What went to federal court was a lot of anyone suing the government, the government suing anybody. Anything happening on a reservation would come to the federal courts. Class-action suits would come to the federal courts. Let's see. Tort claims, high tort claims, there was a certain amount, I think, when they got fed up to the federal level. You know, very dry tort claim actions that were very boring to sit in on the trials, sit in the trials on.

Storey: Were there any cases involving water or water rights that you remember?

Fischer: I do not remember. I didn't really pay any attention. I'm trying to think if Reclamation was ever—I don't know. Usually, if the attorney general brought a case, if someone brought a case against the government, the attorney general or the field solicitor, who is Reclamation's lawyers, lawyer pool, if you will, took care of it, as far as, you know, the attorney general represented the United States. It wasn't just Reclamation appearing, if there were any water rights suits. Water rights. I don't remember. I guess I just didn't pay attention. It seems to me, if I would have seen Reclamation, it would have rang a bell, but maybe not.

Storey: How long were you a deputy clerk in Judge Battin's

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court?

Fischer: About a year and a half, twenty months.

Storey: And then what did you do?

**"I Wanted to Come Back to Reclamation"**

Fischer: I wanted to come back to Reclamation. Working up in the Clerk's Office, the Judicial Branch really made me see where the fat of the budget is. I saw a lot of money wasted. They didn't work forty-hour weeks. It was an internal conflict with my work ethic, you know, bottom line. And so I had a chance to come back. There was a position open in Reclamation, in the Word Processing Section now, and I applied for it and got it. And I took a downgrade to come back.

Storey: A downgrade to?

Fischer: A 5.

Storey: And you came back to do what?

Fischer: I was the supervisor of the Word Processing Section, new improved. Now we had four C-P-Ts, and I had four employees.

Storey: C-P-T is?

Fischer: The C-P-Ts were word processors, dedicated word processors. It's kind of like a Wang, I-B-M. It's just a C-P-T.

Storey: Oh, that's a brand name?

Fischer: Yes, it is.

Storey: I see.

Fischer: Yeah. And it was a dedicated word processor. You couldn't do anything else with it. You couldn't do spreadsheets, addition, subtraction. It was an advance from the mag cards in that it now recorded on floppy disks, instead of mag cards. They could hold more. You could print them to a faster printer. It was a screen instead of your—you remember how the mag card twos were the impact printer? You know, you could see it, like a typewriter. But C-P-Ts had a screen. It was the first word processor, I guess, of its kind.

Storey: The mag card was on a platen, just like a typewriter, and you typed it, and then if you made an error, you backed up, and—ah, now it's beginning to come back to me. It was on paper.

Fischer: Yeah. You typed on paper. Yeah, and you could see it.

Storey: And that's where you could figure out whether or not you'd made an error, and needed to back up, and all that. Okay.

Fischer: What you're thinking of, I think that was before the mag twos, and it might have been the mag ones, and your basic memories, that you couldn't see what you typed.

Storey: How many people in the word processing pool?

Fischer: There were, let's see, five of us, counting myself. I

supervised four. Three or four, in and out, you know, kind of turnover, depending on if one of our people was—I'm trying to think. I think I had four, and we went down to three. I think that's what it was.

Storey: And what kind of work did you receive?

### **The Word Processing Division**

Fischer: Almost the same work as when I left. We weren't getting drill logs anymore, because since we had the C-P-Ts, we didn't do a lot of regular typing on typewriters. That was mostly left to, back to the division secretaries, I guess, now, and- the branch secretaries. Because we had the C-PTs, and they were expensive at the time, and it was the up-and-coming technology, and it was faster. We were doing specs, environmental impact statements, reports, repetitive letters. Same thing.

Storey: And how did work come in to you?

Fischer: The authors brought it in, and the secretaries. Yeah, same way.

Storey: And then you assigned it out?

Fischer: Uh-huh. I did.

Storey: What was the nature, what format did the work come in to you at that time?

Fischer: It was still some handwritten. Since we were the only ones with C-P-Ts, none of the other secretaries could key it in and bring us the floppy to revise, so still cut and pasted, you know, hard copy, and mixed,

I guess, mixed.

Storey: And how long did you stay as the head of the word processing pool?

Fischer: I was there, let's see, for about two years, before I went to Canyon Ferry.

Storey: And that two years would have been from?

Fischer: '82. Let's see, late '82, very late, to January of '85, I went to Canyon Ferry. So it was about two years.

Storey: And Canyon Ferry, you had to pick up and move?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: Why did you decide to do that?

### **Transferred to Canyon Ferry**

Fischer: I saw that position. I still had my sights set on administrative officer when I was the lead clerk typist in the Word Processing Section, and that position would round out my experience in the areas that I didn't get a lot of exposure to in word processing—procurement, personnel, property. You know, those other areas that you need a background in to be an administrative officer. I couldn't get any of that in the Region unless I was to be a secretary in each division. You know, go around to each division and be a secretary for a length of time, to give me exposure to a lot of that. And even then, it wouldn't be a technical experience. I would just be exposed and know what it was, but I wouldn't have actually performed any of it.

Storey: And what was the position at Canyon Ferry?

Fischer: Project Support Clerk.

Storey: What was the grade you went to?

Fischer: I went as a 6.

Storey: So that was once again a step up, or a grade up?

Fischer: Yes, it was.

Storey: What did the project support clerk—is that the right title?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Do?

### **Secretary to the Project Manager**

Fischer: Do. (laughter) I was secretary to the project manager. Like I said, it was Steve Clark at the time. At Canyon Ferry, it's a powerplant office. Most of the staff is down at the plant, and they're journeymen. They're trade and craft employees, electricians, mechanics, operators. We had a purchasing agent at the warehouse, and myself, and I think down at the plant there was a clerk, a secretary. A clerk typist is what is was called then. The public would come in, and I would greet the public, do letters, do all the filing, do the payroll, do letters for the project manager, do research for him, I guess.

Storey: Where were you housed? Where were your offices?

Fischer: It's twenty miles out of Helena, at the dam. Not in the dam. We were a mile up from the dam. Canyon Ferry—the dam is on a reservoir, and it's been called the "country club" of Reclamation, because it's very beautiful out there. You're right in a wilderness setting. You know, trees, the reservoir is right there.

But it was twenty miles out, and there are some campgrounds out there that, we own the land, of course, around the reservoir, but they were managed at that time by the state, the state of Montana. So we'd still get a lot of visitors from the public because the state game warden's house, if you will, was right across from ours, but ours was the first one they saw, so they would stop and I would direct them over there.

We had a lot of irrigation contracts, too, and I got to learn how to do those, those annual irrigation contracts with our irrigators. You know, toward the end before I left, I was handling those yearly. We had one natural resource specialist, and when they came due, I'd just get them out and get them all ready to go, you know, send out, and they would send their money back.

Storey: Did we have an office building there?

Fischer: Yes, we do. We still do.

Storey: How many people in the office building?

#### **Relatively Small Staff at Canyon Ferry**

Fischer: Before I went, there were five. I took two of their places, and he didn't fill another one. We had two

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natural resource specialists, if you will, before I got there, and Steve didn't fill one of those, and he didn't fill the A-O—administrative officer—and he didn't fill the project secretary. So there were three by the time I got there. Three people.

Storey: And then part of that office was the powerplant?

Fischer: Yeah. And there were about twenty people down there.

Storey: So we're talking a total of about twenty-three folks?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: You did the time for everybody?

Fischer: Yes. In the O&M system, POMS is what they put the—the timekeeping is totally different from the Regional Office, but not this office, because we do the same. POMS was entered directly into the Cyber. Yeah, the old-time Cyber. Directly from keyboard, P-C. I'm trying to think how we did it. The timekeeper at the plant inputted the time. I backed her up. We kind of alternated. So I learned how to do it. It wasn't one of my responsibilities. I learned how to do it. But it was entered directly into the Cyber, yeah.

Storey: So she connected to the Cyber in Denver?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: And put in the time that way?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Did you learn about procurement and everything the way you wanted to?

Fischer: I must have. I couldn't back up the purchasing agent in purchasing authority, because you have to be warranted, and you go through forty hours of training, you get a warrant, and then you go to maintenance training, and there's conflict of interest. It takes a lot to get a warrant authority, but I did mostly everything to get familiar with what you could do and what you couldn't do, as far as small purchases, how to take care of property, those kind of things. Again, Steve sent me—I went to a lot of that training. He would send me to it, to back up our purchasing agent, so I was exposed. I got enough exposure, and I shadowed her, the purchasing agent, when she did her procurement and property duties, enough to where it must have worked. (laughter)

Storey: And you were there, you said, about a year?

Fischer: No. I was at Canyon Ferry for seven.

Storey: But you were there a year or two, and then you found out that the job was too small for you. Isn't that right?

Fischer: Very. Yeah.

Storey: And then, I believe you mentioned that your supervisor there, Steve—

Fischer: Clark.

Storey: Clark. Is that with a K-E or just a K?

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Fischer: Just a K.

Storey: Said, "Well, why don't you go to school if you want to," did Reclamation pay for that?

Fischer: No, but he allowed me to work part time.

Storey: Thirty-two hours a week then.

### **Sought a Degree While Working Part Time**

Fischer: Yes, yes. And that was unheard of at the time. I knew of no one else doing it. I started in '87, and I knew of no one else in the Regional Office doing it, because I still—I had connections here. You know, I talked with them every day, here in the Region, at Canyon Ferry. And it was not being done anywhere else, so it was very—I don't know if it was precedent-setting or not, but I kind of became both envied and prodded on, them allowing me to do that. It was just, you know, forty hours and week, and all of a sudden, you're working thirty-two. Well, they must not need a full-time, you know, and all the stuff that goes along with that. But, no, I paid for my total education. He just let me work part time.

Storey: So you went to a thirty-two-hour week instead of a forty-hour week?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: Were you paid for forty hours, or for thirty-two hours?

Fischer: Thirty-two.

Storey: Why do you suppose you were able to do that? Was it because you were more efficient than the two people you'd replaced, or had the workload changed somehow, or been redistributed, or what?

Fischer: The people I replaced were an outgoing breed. They were tired when they left. They were of the old school, where everything was done on paper. You know, now we do it by phone. There was a big change in technology. You know, is it culture? It's work style, the way you get work done. When Steve came in, okay, to be project manager, he'd rather do it on the phone. He just took brief notes. We had daily reading files. You kept a copy of every letter you ever sent out, and they decreased significantly with him, so he was a lot of it.

Coming from the Region, going out there, I had enough contacts to where that was still an old enough office that they kept copies upon copies of old stuff and everything. I just weeded out a lot of stuff that that office didn't need anymore, because I knew that they had it over here in the Region. Do you see what I mean? The culture of the place was changing. The importance on O&M was slowly going down. It was a different work ethic, too. They were very structured before I got there. Very authoritarian, before Steve and I got there, I should say. I think he was there a couple years before I got there.

But to get back to your question, was I more efficient? There were a lot of things that they were filling up their hours with, you know. It was maybe a thirty-two-hour-a-week job all along, and they were just filling it to expand the time. That's what I've heard. You know, I just have to go by what people

say that were there when the old regime was there, and then when I came in.

Storey: So after a couple of years, you began to look at—I've forgotten the name of the college. I'm sorry.

Fischer: Carroll College.

Storey: At Carroll College in Helena.

Fischer: It's a private Catholic college. It was the only game in town if I wanted to get an education. I had applied for several jobs, administrative assistant jobs and a couple A-O jobs, and I didn't get any of them, because I lacked, well, I think experience, at that time. So I thought, "I'll go the education route," since I couldn't get the experience the other way.

Storey: Were you living in Helena?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: Commuting out daily?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: So there was no Reclamation housing involved?

### **Reclamation Housing at Canyon Ferry**

Fischer: There is a government camp. There was, and when I got there, there were still maybe five families, but they have since weeded that out, because there are fifteen houses out there, and they were built in the fifties and they're old. You know, government housing then, they weren't building the most fancy things that were

going to last forever. The upkeep started to be quite a bit.

So as people moved out, they just didn't let anyone else move in, and pretty soon, let's see, I think it was before I left, they just decided not to let people live there anymore. At a time, it was a thriving camp, and then they lifted the requirement that you had to live in camp, and so people started buying and building all along the road to Helena. You know, twenty miles, there's a lot of land, and people just started buying and building. So as far as camp, there was a camp, but I didn't want to live out there. Too remote.

Storey: So you lived in Helena.

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: And how did you work going to college? How did this work?

### **Lucky to Have Flex-Time and Alternative Work Schedules**

Fischer: Luckily, that was when flex-time and the alternative work schedules came out, so we could work as early as 6:30, and as late as 6:00, and so I structured it around my classes. I was lucky in that the last year was the only year I had to make two trips, two days a week, my last year of college. I was really fortunate. Up until then, I would come at 6:30, and then stay for as long as I could, and then leave, and go to my classes, or I would go to the classes in the morning and then come in and stay until 5:30, until I got my thirty-two hours.

Unfortunately, you know, one of those dumb regs, you have to either work thirty-two or forty, or less than thirty-two, when I could have conceivably worked between thirty-two and forty. You know, my time allowed that, but those crazy regs. But I worked within them. That's just kind of an aside, I guess.

Storey: How did you decide on the courses you were going to take?

Fischer: Again, Steve Clark. I do think the sun rises and sets on him. I wish I could have followed him, because he's been such a mentor for me. But he had just gotten his master's in public administration. One of the universities at Missoula, University of Montana, gave a night course, night degree program master's, public administration, there in Helena. Helena's the state capital, so there's a lot of government, a lot of state government. Not as much federal, but a lot of state.

So that's how he got his degree there. It took him two and a half years, at night, in public administration. I thought, "Well, since I'm going to work with the government probably the rest of my career, why not public administration?" It was available. Business didn't really, I don't know, turn me on, I guess, and politics, I didn't like politics until I started taking the classes. That was kind of a tongue-in-cheek thing, but it was very exciting. I'm glad I did.

Storey: How did all this work in terms of your time? Sounds like you were pretty much going to school, not quite full time, but close to full time, for five years, plus working thirty-two hours and week. What did your

week look like?

**"It Was Very Intense"**

Fischer: I took nine credits a semester, and the way I took my summer classes was, they had a lot of summer classes that were two-week mini classes, and what it was, was four hours a day for two weeks solid, and it was an easy way to get three credits. I mean, it was very intense, very intense. And then they had some classes that were like seven weeks long, an hour a day. You know, like first thing in the morning.

So the nine credits during, let's see, fall and then spring semester. My days were long. I averaged about four or five hours of sleep a night, and I spent most of the weekends in the library. You know, I was fortunate the library was open 'til midnight on week nights.

Carroll College, it's one of the top colleges as far as pre-med and pre-seminary, and its nursing program, also. It's received very high honors for the caliber of people that come out of it. We've had several merit scholars, and I'm trying to think, I don't want to say Rhodes scholars, but there are other scholars that come out of there. It's very intense, but the classes are small, twenty-five people. I didn't know what a teaching assistant was until I left there and heard that they do that at other colleges, where the classes are big. It was a very quality education.

I worked really hard. I graduated with a 3.6, and I got a couple little scholarships, which, to me, was just—I was beside myself, that I could accomplish so much. But I worked really hard at it, and I'm not a

dumb person, but I think what it did was it made me think broader, in wider scope. I was getting pretty narrow-minded, just working. It exposed me to a lot, and I think since I was so interested, that's why I did my best, and I really wanted to get as much out of it as I was putting into it. It's a very expensive college, and I wasn't, you know, if I was paying for it, I didn't want to miss classes, just because or for the fun of it. I got every dime's worth. (laughter)

Storey: When did you graduate?

Fischer: May of '92.

Storey: Two years ago.

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: And then you decided to pursue the administrative officer position.

Fischer: Well, I'll back up a little. In the fall—let's see, the winter of '91, the position I'm in came open, and I applied for it. If you remember, I told you, in '89, this office that I am in now, the Montana Area Office, became a project office, and all of a sudden Yellowtail and Canyon Ferry were supported by this project office. So I had developed a relationship with the old project manager here, and the people in this office, you know, who were there. It was still staffing up. It was a very young office. So I had a relationship with all of them, because now my contacts were in here instead of right directly to the Region.

### **Came to the Montana Area Office**

So when Steve left, then he went down to Loveland [Colorado], the project manager that hired me, Jim Wedeward, came to the Montana Area Office. Steve kind of—when the consolidation happened, he became, out of necessity, the budget guru. He knew how to work Lotus, and they kind of made him the head of Canyon Ferry and Yellowtail. He applied for the job Jim Wedeward got, but was not selected, and there were a lot of negative feelings about that, because everyone feels he should have had the job. But anyway, he became the budget guru. Well, when he left, it was dumped on me, because I knew how to run Lotus, and I had been—

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 15, 1994.  
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. NOVEMBER 15, 1994.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey, with Teresa Fischer, on November 15, 1994.

Fischer: Okay. So, like I said, Steve did the budgets for Canyon Ferry and Yellowtail, which are the two main programs of this office. So, by necessity, I did them alongside him, knowing Lotus. I knew how to do it, so when he left and went to Loveland, that got dumped on me at my Canyon Ferry position. So I was doing the budget for Canyon Ferry and Yellowtail, and sending it into here, and I would come in during my Christmas breaks a couple of years, when the rush was on to prepare the next year's budget, and spend my break in here, getting that ready and shoving it out, and then going back to Canyon Ferry after the Christmas break was over.

**"I Knew the Ins and Outs"**

So to get back, I developed that relationship doing that budget. I also did several other things for Jim Wedeward, the project manager here. Jim had not come from our Region. I had been here all my career, so I had a network, so he would come in and ask me to do projects and find out things from people. He was feeling his way around. It wasn't by any means that he was shy or afraid to do that, but I had just been around and kind of knew the ins and outs how to get things done.

So getting back to that original story. In December '91, this position came open, and I applied, and I knew full well, if I was offered it, it would have to be, as a stipulation, after I graduated, because I was one semester away, and I wasn't about to quit school. So I was really limited into where I could apply for jobs, until I had graduated. Up until that time that I had almost graduated, I've always been one, if you apply for a job, if you throw your hat in the ring, you should be willing to accept it if offered. I don't think it's fair to pull out. I know what's involved in selecting a position, the interview process, the selecting, the whole—everything that goes along with that. To be offered a job and turn it down, just to see how far you could get, that's against my conscience.

So when I applied, they made the decision in March, and that's when I found out, and they made me A-O at Canyon Ferry. They gave me my 7 there, in March, knowing that after I graduated in May, I would come here, which I did. I graduated on a Saturday, and the next Friday I reported to work here, I think. Yeah, that's what it was.

During from March to May, Jim would bring me in during my breaks when I could, or if I could take a day off from class, I'd fly up for the day and fly back to kind of get my feet wet here, so to speak, because this position had been vacant since August the preceding. There had not been an A-O in here. I don't know why. I don't why they didn't fill it sooner, why he took so long. So I was getting my feet wet, you know, still taking care of the Canyon Ferry duties and the rest of my school, and then, you know, learning about being an A-O in this office.

Storey: I'd like to go back a little bit.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: We went from C-P-Ts to Lotus all of a sudden. Somewhere in between, computers showed up.

Fischer: Yeah.

Storey: Where did computers first show up for you?

### **Arrival of Computers**

Fischer: For me. When I went to Canyon Ferry, we still had, I just still had an I-B-M Selectric, but it was not for very long, because Steve was really high-tech. We got some Datapoints, and they're very cumbersome. The reason we got Datapoints, because the POMS was done on a Datapoint, and it couldn't be done on any other computer, if you will, P-C. I didn't question the details of that. But he got a Datapoint up in the office, and he got one up there, and we shared it, he and I, because we were the only two that were interested in it, really. And that's how I learned about

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spreadsheets, and then that was the time where P-Cs were just becoming the norm. So we got P-Cs out there, and we each had one.

Storey: This was about when?

Fischer: Oh, Lord. It was before I started college, so it was probably '86. Probably '86.

Storey: Go ahead.

Fischer: So we each got a P-C, Steve and I and Pete, up in the office, and then I think we put one in the plant, one in the powerplant, and one in the warehouse. We weren't connected on a LAN [Local Area Network]. They were sole. They just sat by themselves. But it made doing the budget a lot easier, because how we did the budget before, or how Steve did it, was mostly hard-copy markup, by hand, and then that's when they still sent it into Billings.

Remember I said, when I worked for the Programs Division, how that process went. We just did that for maybe a year or two, before we got the P-Cs, and all of a sudden started doing them on a spreadsheet, so we could total the figures at the bottom automatically, you know, and make changes right there. Programs would call, we could make the change, see how it affected everything else, and then they could make that same change instantly, I guess, instead of waiting for this hard copy to go back and forth in the mail.

Storey: We're talking about a LAN, or a what do you call it? A modem or something here now, right?

Fischer: No, not yet. We weren't connected by modem yet.

Storey: Okay.

Fischer: What they would have is probably a floppy disk. When we did the budget initially, the floppy went with it. And so in Billings here, they could bring that up, pull it up, make the change, and we could make—via the telephone. You know, go down to this line, make that change, okay, and here's how it—and then they would have a fresh copy of it, and we would, too. So it wasn't—you didn't have to wait for that long sheet, that budget sheet, to get done again in the Billings Office. They had streamlined the way they prepared budgets, too, in the interim. They got rid of that form, because then it was full of boxes that you had to fit in the lines.

Storey: Well, by '85—I think that's when you went to Canyon Ferry—

Fischer: Yeah.

Storey: —you had made up your mind you wanted to be an administrative officer. Where did that come from?

#### **Desire to Become an Administrative Officer**

Fischer: Well, being in the Steno Section, my career in the steno pool and the Word Processing Section, I enjoyed a variety of tasks, doing so many things. I loved it. Reclamation has given me the opportunity. I've been detailed several places to do two-week jobs here, because I knew how to run the Lotus, I knew how to set up things.

I went to Austin for thirty days, because their secretary up and left and they had nobody. It was a five-person office, and they didn't have anyone to do payroll or mail or anything. You know, small purchasing, not a thing. But I like to do a variety. I like the service-oriented position, the support services area. I wasn't interested in natural resources or engineering, or those other aspects that Reclamation—those other disciplines that Reclamation had, so I focused on the admin side, because I enjoyed it. I feel it's a very vital part.

Unfortunately, there are so many regulations, it has expanded. There are too many admin people now per technical person. The ratio is not what it should be for an engineering organization. It's backwards, I think, and I think it's because of all the regulations. But admin, your support function is very vital to any organization.

Storey: Did you meet a particular admin officer that caused you to be interested?

Fischer: I made that decision when I was still in the Regional Office, and I guess I hadn't met any, so to speak, but it was an area where I could be responsible for several other things. The only options open, okay, were division secretary or a branch secretary, really, at that time, you know, at the time I was growing up in Reclamation, if you will. I didn't want to do that. The Admin Support Services Divisions in the Region, I didn't really want to be in procurement all alone. I didn't really want to be in property, in I-R-M, what was data processing. I didn't want to just do one of those things, you know, and become a career, make it a career. I wanted something that spanned all of

them. I like the diversity. I like going eighty different ways at once. I just like that.

Storey: This is now the Montana Area Office, is that correct?

Fischer: Yes.

Storey: What do you do as the administrative officer for the Montana Area Office?

#### **Area Office Administrative Officer's Duties**

Fischer: What do I do? I oversee the purchasing function, the property function, the budget analyst and payroll and timekeeping, and I have four employees, one in each of those disciplines, and I handle all the personnel issues and other projects that come in. Coordinating our customer service plans, now, that has come down the pike, the regional, the commissioner. I coordinated that, wrote that. Write papers for the area manager, as far as anything having to do with administration or personnel, or any of those functions that I oversee.

Storey: When you say you take care of personnel matters, tell me more about what that means.

Fischer: Okay. Our Servicing Personnel Office is the Regional Personnel Division, and that's who actually writes the vacancy notice, shoves it out on the street, rates the applications when they come back and sends us over the package to select from. When we need a position in here, I get together with—a new position, if it's a new position, I get together with the selecting official. "What do you want?" "I want a cross between a natural resource specialist and a

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biologist." "Do we have a P-D?" "No, but here's two. I have a lot of samples." And so they say, "Okay, take these paragraphs from this, this from this." So I write the P-D. I write the crediting plans, you know, with the selecting official. What are your most important duties, you know, your K-S-As [Knowledge, Skill, Ability].

I advise them on what kind of authorities we can use—temporary, permanent, stay-in-schools, part-time, you know, different—what are our options to fill a job. Let's see. Where we could get a diversified group of candidates, send applications to a tribal headquarters. On Yellowtail, Yellowtail's on an Indian reservation,<sup>2</sup> Yellowtail Dam. So to get the biggest diverse group of applicants, we'll put out applications to more places. You know, I kind of keep them aware of what we need to think of to diversify our work force.

I provide questions on benefits to the employees here. If there's something wrong with their payroll or their leave, the timekeeper will take care of that, but usually they'll come to me. I'm getting them better. I'm getting them trained better to go directly to the timekeeper. Questions on benefits, disciplinary actions, I'm involved in. Like, "We have this problem. What do we do about it, and what are the guidelines we have to follow?" You know, because every employee has rights in adverse actions like that. Let's see.

Storey: How many people in the Area Office?

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2. Yellowtail Dam and portions of the reservoir are on the Crow Indian Reservation.

Fischer: We fluctuate, because we bring on so many seasonals in the summertime for our recreation areas, that we probably fluctuate between maybe eighty-eight and ninety-seven, year 'round.

Storey: Does that include the projects?

Fischer: Yes. That's who I provide service for. Right here, in this office, there's probably thirty-two.

Storey: Here in Billings?

Fischer: Here in Billings.

Storey: So about one-third of the staff is in this office, and two-thirds is out in the field?

Fischer: Uh-huh.

Storey: At Yellowtail and at Canyon Ferry, for the most part?

Fischer: For the most part, yes.

Storey: What else should you be telling me about your administrative officer position?

### **Enjoying the Position**

Fischer: Should I be telling you? Other than I enjoy it? We're going to move to the new building. They're building a new federal building here in Billings. What they're doing is, GSA said, "We're not going to support any of these other little contracts in these privately owned buildings." So they built that new one, and sixteen of us are going to go in there, sixteen agencies. I'm

coordinating that whole thing. I mean, down to where are our partitions going to be, the space. Our computer specialist, I'm coordinating with her, the wiring.

There is so much that goes into moving, and people are funny. All they're worried about is, "How much space do I get?" and I'm worried about—the computer specialist and I are worried about, when we plug our computers into the LAN, is it going to go up and work? But that's really exciting.

I get exposed to a lot of the odd jobs that come in, that the natural resource specialists, and we have some engineers in here, also, shouldn't have to worry about. I mean, it's not that I make decisions based on what I think. I coordinate a lot of things that need to get done between several different people. Information needs to get taken from several different people. I am gainfully employed, I am very busy, I make a lot of decisions, but when you ask me how I spend my time, I can't put my finger on a position.

I keep a little notebook when people call me. You know, the facility managers will call me on advice, personnel advice. "How can we purchase this, property like this?" Receiving, stuff like that. What are ramifications. I mean, I'm constantly service-oriented. Most of my time is taken up by phone calls and instant demands. I don't really have long-term projects. I probably should have. I don't spend enough time on, maybe, the development of my people as I would like to.

I have a great crew. I'm a very hands-off manager, and none of them have disappointed me.

They're hard workers and I just stay away, and they know to keep me informed, and I keep them informed. It's a two-way street. I'm fortunate with the people I have. They make it a joy, because I have no personnel problems, which are your big problems. But mainly, people just ask me questions, and I just seem to come with the answers. I do all the legwork, research, to make this part of the office, the admin part, run smoother.

Storey: Has your grade risen since you came back to the Montana Area Office?

Fischer: Yes. It was a 7, 9, 11. I came in as a 7, and I got my 11 last March.

Storey: Good.

Fischer: Yeah.

Storey: You mentioned earlier that being across the street from the Regional Office was not always easy. Tell me what you meant by that.

### **Uneasy Relationship Between the Regions and the Area Office**

Fischer: When we were formed, a lot of those duties had to come over here, because we were all of a sudden given the authority, responsibility, accountability, for duties in the state of Montana, just like Mills, Wyoming, is responsible for the state of Wyoming. Loveland office. They're mostly where we have projects in Colorado, the whole state of Colorado.

But since Billings, the Regional Office, was doing a

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lot of that before we were created, up until 1989, it was really hard for those people to let go of those jobs. They'd give us the staff, but when people from the field called in, they still called to the Region, and rather than the Region just say, "That's been transferred to Joe over in the Montana Area Office. Here's his number. Take it to him," they'd still meddle in it. So when these things still come in to them, they'd cherry pick. "Oh, this is a fun project. We want to do this. Oh, we don't want to do this. We'll send it to the Area Office."

Storey: How's that being dealt with?

### **"We're Going Through a Growth Period"**

Fischer: How's it being dealt with? I think when the commissioner wrote his *Blueprint for Reform*,<sup>3</sup> he gave more authority and accountability to the area offices. We're going through a growth period now, and it's kind of painful, and we're going to have to say, you know, we're going to have to—I'm going to use the vernacular—get in their face more when they do that.

We have a new area manager now. She was reassigned here last May. That was quite a shock. She had come up through the administrative ranks from Washington budget, and then she was our liaison. You're familiar with the liaison program in

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3. Reclamation published Commissioner Daniel P. Beard's *Blueprint for Reform: The Commissioner's Plan for Reinventing Reclamation* in 1993 as one of the vehicles for his reorganization of Reclamation in 1993-1994. Another of the vehicles was the "Commissioner's CPORT team report—"Report of the Commissioner's Program and Organization Review Team" which Reclamation also published in 1993.

Washington, D.C.

Storey: In Washington, yes.

Fischer: And so she was done with her liaison tour and she came back here, and was put into the head of Planning, which, that's right after the *Blueprint* came out, and we were starting to look at reorganizing those kind of services. So she was reassigned over here. I have known her for several years. I don't think she started in the word processing, in the steno pool, but she was a branch secretary, I think, at the time, or maybe a tech, in another division that I did work for. But with being up there as liaison, she was close to [Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Daniel] Beard, and so with her she brings that relationship, such that she kind of knows what is important to Washington, and what is not important to Washington, which may be skewed in the R-D's eyes. Because both of them all of a sudden have different agendas, if you will.

Storey: We're talking about the commissioner versus the regional director?

Fischer: The Area Manager versus the R-D.

Storey: Versus the regional director. Okay.

Fischer: Yeah. Because my area manager now knows the agenda of the commissioner, which is fine. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. It's a really interesting process to watch, because now she has been reassigned over here by the R-D, and she's the second female project manager in Reclamation. It's wonderful, I think. I'm excited by that fact, I really

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am. But it's an interesting growth process.

So the manager we had before, being just broken off from the Regional Office, was still kind of wanting to placate them. He didn't want to just tell them to get out of our face, but he still wanted to maintain a relationship, because we did have to work together. But it's been painful in that we are right there, and they can walk over any time and ding us on something, which they probably wouldn't call Loveland or Mills or Texas, you know, Oklahoma City, to ding them on. It has been painful.

Storey: The name of your new area manager?

Fischer: Katherine Jabs.

Storey: J-A-B-B-S?

Fischer: J-A-B-S. She's from this area. She was raised out of Hardin, on the Crow Reservation.

Storey: Have you done anything with Neil Stessman?  
Worked with Neil Stessman?<sup>4</sup>

**Participated on a Team to Implement the *Blueprint for Reform***

Fischer: When the *Blueprint for Reform* came out, it came out in November of '93, and he put together a team of five to write the Regional Implementation Plan for

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4. Neil Stessman participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Neil J. Stessman, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994, to 1996, in Billings, Montana, edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2009.

the *Blueprint*, and I was on that team. I was shocked, but I'm thinking Dan Lauver had a lot to do with it. I was honored. It was grueling. It was a very agonizing period, because all of a sudden, we were faced with, we were going to decide how we were going to downsize, and that's a scary thought, because I've worked with some of these people forever, and to know my job also might be put in jeopardy, it was really hard. It was mostly focused on downsizing in F-T-Es, not as much changing our mission, because that's just going to come by the nature of our business.

You know, you read the *Blueprint*—I don't know if you've read it yet. It's pretty vague, but it does change our direction, that we're just not going to build dams anymore. We have to cultivate a new set of customers. But that implementation plan mostly dealt with streamlining and downsizing, and giving the power out to the area offices, which, the Regional Office, you know, has always been kind of the controlling force, and they're struggling, too. It's an interesting time. If I can sit back and observe it, as a student of political science, it's fascinating. It's hard to be in the middle of it, because it's hard not to get your emotions involved in it. But being across from the Region, that's what you asked of me.

Storey: But I love what we're talking about. Let's continue it.

Fischer: Let's see. Prompt me some more. I'm kind of digressing.

Storey: For instance, Don Glaser pointed out at a staff meeting recently, in the Program Analysis Office, that Denver's always been the "baddie" in Reclamation.

The regions always disliked Denver's involvement in their business. So this most recent reorganization was sort of a Godsend to them, because Denver all of a sudden has no power. But then we got through the reorganization, and the regions woke up and found out they didn't have as much power as they formally had, and the power was being transferred down to the area offices. Talk to me more about what this has meant in your relationship with the Region, and to the Commissioner's Office, if you see any of it.

### **Difficulties Within the Region**

Fischer: Let's see. Relationship to the Region. It's hitting them slowly but surely. I'll give you one example. The budget—I don't know how intimate you are with our budget structure, but our Region, even when Katherine came, she says, "No other regions go into the detail that our Region forces us to do." Okay, the detail. You know, line by line, justify every single thing.

So anyway, they thought, well, since more authority is being delegated out to them, we'll give them this grunt job of updating what we call P-F-3s, with '94 actuals, which they've always done before. That was kind of one of those background support functions that they got all the data together, created these reports and gave them to us, for us to use, you know, to benefit us, in creating our budgets.

Well, we just all of a sudden find out now, we're going to do it, and I don't think they seem to realize giving us all this work is okay, but what about the work we already have, and what about, we still have

the same amount of people, folks. That's the struggle. Everyone's platters are so full, with just new initiatives coming down the pike. There's nothing wrong with it, but I think we have a lot of people whose work ethic is such that, "I feel bad I'm not getting this other stuff done."

The managers are having a hard time deciding now, "Well, we know there's got to be stuff that we have to quit doing. We have to analyze the tasks, and are we doing it—is it Region-generated, or is it customer-generated, or is it Denver Office-generated, and what is the importance of it?" Like, Denver would come with this, "We need this information by the close of business Friday, for this report." So I know one person said, "Well, I'm just not going to send it in, and see how long it takes them to find out I haven't sent it in." (laughter) You know, that has become kind of one of those interesting ploys, and I think we're going to see the same thing with the Region. They're struggling with losing their power, is what they're doing. [Coughs] Hope I'm not running out.

Storey: If you are, we can refill.

Fischer: I'm losing my voice. I think they think it all might go away. As far as our need for them, I get the picture that every time we call and ask them for something, which—

Storey: The Region.

Fischer: The Regional Office. Which sometimes we just have to do. We don't work in a vacuum out here, and they're supposedly—we have experts over there. I

don't know if they need to control as much. They're technical experts, they're not controllers. "Here's your options," not "Here's what you must do," or "Here's what you can't do," like that. They're struggling dealing with it, and there's still a sense of them intentionally maybe holding information until the last minute, when it's too late, or just dumping those things on us. "Okay, you take the work. You know, you take it." And our platters are still getting fuller and fuller. I know that we're getting a lot more congressionals, and we're answering all of them. We're answering them. It's none of them that are answering them. That's coming out of here. I'm kind of getting off—get me back on track.

Storey: No, you're doing just fine.

Fischer: (laughter) The struggle. I think we're going to need some more F-T-Es, and I'm curious as to why there are still so many over there, that I know they're not filling now. When they're losing people, they're not backfilling.

Storey: That's in the Regional Office?

Fischer: The Regional Office. And I think they think, why are we backfilling? I don't know how high up the flagpole that has to get raised, but if you're going to give us all this work, we are going to need some people, because even though they say a lot of the work is generated—well, you know, procurement and personnel regulations are horrific. They generate a lot of work and a lot of people have to oversee them. As those start getting more flexible, start loosening, you know, getting rid of the old P-M, the Federal Personnel Manual, maybe—oh God, I lost my train of

thought. Maybe we won't have as much work to do as we actually feel we have now. But until those regulations are eased, we still feel a sense that we have to get some things done.

Storey: How do you think the personnel, the reduction, the loosening of—

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Storey: I think I had just asked you if the changes, the reduction in personnel rules, if you anticipated any problems out of those.

#### **Anticipated Problems with the Reduction in Personnel Rules**

Fischer: It's scaring the hell out of the managers, because they're going to be more liable now for decisions that they make. Getting rid of that F-P-M is not bad in itself. What's bad is now we have to refer to the C-F-Rs. I don't know if you've ever read a Code of Federal Regulations. It's very legalistic. The managers want a lawyer. They want lawyers now to interpret how they're supposed to read the law, and they're kind of scared.

We have one very astute manager in my office. He's very well versed in—I mean, he knows stocks and history, you know, dates of wars and stuff like that. Anyway, I think he's a wealth of knowledge. But he says he's really worried, because now we can be sued for making a personnel decision where, under our interpretations, the interpretations we fell back on in the past, we were covered. Our rear

ends were covered, if you will. What kind of regulations? You know, there are laws that deal with veterans and veterans' preference, and what else? I think, you know, the handicapped, now hiring the disabled. But it's the other—

Storey: A-D-A [Americans with Disabilities Act].

Fischer: Yeah, but it's the other things that aren't really laws, but became an agenda item of the government, you know, woven throughout this.

Storey: They became a system through which we dealt with personnel issues.

Fischer: Yes. Perfect. (laughter) You know what I mean. I have a hard time putting things into words. But knowing that they don't have those things to rely on in language that can be understood, they're kind of concerned. As a matter of fact, there's going to be, in February, a little two-hour workshop on liability of the federal manager. So it's coming. And if you read certain things, *The Government Executive*, I think, is one, and *The Federal Times*. They've mentioned in there, you know, on liability issues, and managers are started to perk up, and read that and say, "Now I have this to worry about?"

Storey: There are professional liability insurance policies that you can take for federal employees.

Fischer: Yes, there are.

Storey: You mentioned earlier that your courses in political science at Carroll College had given you a perspective on the reorganization that you might not

have had otherwise. Would you share that with me, please?

### **A Political Perspective on Reclamation's Reorganization**

Fischer: In political science, I was exposed to the federal government, why it was created, what it does, how it survives, how agencies survive, and how they never die. Government agencies don't die. They're created for a purpose, and long after their purpose is met, they still go on, doing either something else, they might downsize, they may be absorbed into other agencies.

The example that I remember specifically was the March of Dimes. They were for polio. Polio was conquered. What did they do? They changed to birth defects. They had to. And it was created by a federal—it was a bureaucratic agency. And so they had to change their direction.

Well, we're going through that now, and I can see that. You know, big dams are a thing of the past. And it's unfortunate. I need to read more and educate myself more on the West and the water issues of the West, because a few people I work with say that Colorado has sort of been going through what we are just starting to go through, as far as water rights. You know, enough water to go around, the water-spreading issue. I need to educate myself more.

But anyway, I can see why we need to change our direction, and the reason it's hard is because we're almost all engineers, and all we ever did was build dams, and make them hold water. I've been to the

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Technical Center at Denver and saw what they did. Now, what is all that going to do, now? The Corps of Engineers does the same thing, so there's a duplication of effort right there, as far as engineering expertise. You know, your technical, some of it just focuses on designing those beautiful dams that are functional as well.

So we have to change our mission. I have talked to several old-time engineers who I feel aren't the black and white engineers, about how did we get this way. What happened that Denver Center, Denver Federal Center is so—they continued working long after they should have stopped. There's a lot of perception of that, is that no one caught the fact that they're generating work to save the people down there. Now, that's just what I hear. Do you remember the last dam that we built, really?

Storey: Dolores.<sup>5</sup>

Fischer: And that was—

Storey: That was when I was at the Advisory Council, because I had to handle the compliance case. They must have started that about '78 or '79, somewhere in the late seventies.

Fischer: Okay, and then finished it. But do you know of any other plans in the making? I mean, of that magnitude. Was it a pumping plant, a pumping—

Storey: Pump back storage? No.

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5. The Dolores Project is in southwestern Colorado, and McPhee Dam is the project's principal structure constructed in 1984.

Fischer: Or a powerplant, also? Just a dam?

Storey: No, I don't think so.

Fischer: Okay, so it's not even hydrogeneration.

Storey: Animas-LaPlata is the last start, major start, but of course, its tied up in the courts over environmental issues.

Fischer: Yeah, the environmental issues are really–

Storey: The last authorizations were in the sixties, last authorizations for major projects.

Fischer: Yeah. So what have we been doing all that meantime? We created so many–this is what I hear now, and it kind of put a different perspective on it. During that time, building all the dams, we created a lot of enemies, you know, I think with special-interest groups, with environmental factions. Reclamation did. I heard that we were a very elitist organization. We were very uppity-up, if you will. We thought we were–and our engineers were just a very much, you know, looked down their nose at a lot of other agencies, and I wish I could remember what other agencies we were talking about when I talked to that gentleman about this.

### **Reclamation Must Cultivate Customers Who Were Former Enemies**

But we made a lot of enemies who now we have to cultivate as customers, Reclamation has. Our traditional customers, we're not supposed to pay much attention to them anymore. Irrigators, they are

supposed to be falling by the wayside, and we're supposed to be starting to turn over a lot of our projects, irrigation projects, to them, O&M. So we don't have to pay for them. Number one, get rid of F-T-Es, so we don't have to do the O&M on them. But we're told in the new mission to focus our attention on nontraditional customers, which I'm thinking we must have made enemies of traditionally, and now we have to cultivate and try and be their friend. We used to build dams, now we're environmentally-conscious? You know, it's hard, and I don't know where it ends, or when we'll finally achieve that.

Storey: Are you seeing any example of that going on in the agency?

Fischer: I see a lot more work in the natural resource area than used to be in the power area. It always used to be power O&M and that. Natural resource, that's where most of our people are overworked at. Now we're getting involved with tribes, negotiations with tribes on water rights and possibly maybe building water systems for them.

### **"We're Kind of in a Learning Process"**

Just a whole lot of new things that we haven't done before, so we're kind of in a learning process also, and a lot of them don't know which way to turn. You know, they're given this much guidance. Well, we've never dealt with tribes before, that whole Native American culture, the whole trust, Native American trust issue, and the self-governance issue. We're suddenly thrust into a lot of that, and we don't have any experience to fall back on. We have lots of

experience in building dams and managing powerplants. Not so much power marketing, because that's all been transferred to WAPA. But I think in the natural resource—all of our natural resource specialists, that's where we need people now. You know, more staff.

Storey: I asked you about working with Neil Stessman earlier, but I didn't get to the next question, which is, what's he like to work with? What's he like as a manager?

Fischer: Is this where we do the close-out thing?

Storey: In a little bit, yeah.

Fischer: Later? Okay.

Storey: If you don't feel comfortable about this, we'll move on to something else.

Fischer: Okay. Let's move on to something else.

Storey: What about Roger Patterson?<sup>6</sup> Did you work with Roger ever?

### **Working With Roger Patterson**

Fischer: Working with him, one on one, no. He knew who I was, because Steve asked him if I could work part

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6. Roger Patterson participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Roger K. Patterson, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1994 to 2000, in Sacramento, California, and Lincoln, Nebraska, edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2011.

time to go to school. I met him, talked with him, didn't work with him. My supervisor in Word Processing Section, we have since become really good friends. She's still across the street. She worked under Roger for a while, and thought really highly of him. I enjoy reading about him. He sent me a congratulations card when I graduated. He's just kind of been in that background like, he okayed me working part time, so he's kind of the ripple effect of allowing me to get where I am.

I'd love to work for him. He just sounds innovative. He sounds like he doesn't have a political agenda, like, you know, I hear a lot of the other R-Ds do. That's just hearsay. He must be in high favor with Dan Beard. I don't know. He's done wonders out—I know Mid-Pacific Region—he was put out there to solve a lot of—I guess they had a lot of problems, both personnel, I think it was mostly personnel problems that work just wasn't getting done because of the extent of those problems, and I'm hearing that he's really cleaned up out there and gotten it back on track. That's all hearsay. I enjoy reading about him. I think he's a very neat, neat person.

### **Office Social Life**

Storey: Tell me about the social life of the offices you've been in. You were in the Regional Office for a period of time at Canyon Ferry and now here. Is there a lot of social activity, parties after hours, parties during hours? You know, like Christmas parties, that kind of a thing. A lot of socializing, or is it pretty much, you live in a big urban area, and you work here and you go off and you do your socializing elsewhere? How does that work for the situations you have been

in?

Fischer: For the situations I've been in. Before I went to Helena, there was still the annual picnic put on by the B-R-E-A, Bureau of Reclamation Employees Association, which mainly all they did was coordinate it, collect the money, here's the menu, cook it, buy everything, and they had pretty good turnouts. They really did. And then the annual Christmas party in the R-D's office, where, I don't know, one afternoon, it would just be punch and cookies and everyone, you know, you'd go through the R-D's office and that was kind of the same afternoon. All the other divisions had their own little parties and pot lucks, and, you know, at Christmastime.

Canyon Ferry, it was a closer-knit group, because, you know, twenty-three of us, and being so remotely isolated, it was like we weren't even a federal agency there, because I know I got involved in Combined Federal Campaign. I was on the Steering Committee, and they were kind of amazed to find out there was a federal agency, out at the dam. They didn't know who ran the dam. So that was kind of interesting.

Anyway, being closer knit, we had the Christmas function and the summer picnics, and on the way back to town on Friday nights, there was a local tavern, being twenty miles out. So a lot of people would stop, a few of them. Of course, they were mostly trade and craft. That was their culture. I know they were a very narrow-minded group. I found myself, I mentioned that before, getting narrow-minded, working there, because their life was their job, their job was their life, and they came to the

dam. Very few of them, I think, had many other outside activities. They worked in the dam, they went home, and the next day they came to the dam.

But what made me realize how narrow-minded I was getting is when I started learning all these new philosophies, political science theories, and I'd bring them to work. Karl Marx really piqued my interest, and all of a sudden I was a Communist, and I was just spouting things that, "Oh, who are you? You don't come from us." You know, it was fun to get their goat once in a while, to make them see a little bit broader, because I could see how I was getting, too, and school had made me accept more.

But then coming back, I'm involved in the B-R-E-A, also. There's a Christmas function, a summer function, socializing. We'll have a couple pot lucks during the year, in this office, where spouses can come. You know, it's a noontime thing. But I don't know. Everyone in this office gets along very well. For a group this size, we don't really have any relationships that we know don't work. You know, like, "Oh, you don't want to put them together because they don't get along." We don't have any like that. I get along with everyone in the office. Some people I would rather not work with, but if I'm put on a team with them or thrown together with them, you get the job done. We all get along really well. I socialize with a few of them outside working hours.

Storey: Anything else you want to tell me, that you think ought to be put down about Reclamation?

**"Reclamation Has Given Me Opportunities"**

Fischer: Reclamation has allowed me, has given me opportunities to show what I'm capable of. I feel they've taken a lot of risks on me, sending me to details, letting me go. Because I know every time I would go on these two-week here, thirty-day here—I went to D.C. for ten days, people were wondering, "Doesn't she have a real job to do?" But I think it's because I could get my real job done, you know, and then go and then come back, and still do whatever. The job didn't stop, you know, the office didn't stop, when I could leave like that. I know some people weren't too pleased when I was gone, and they had to learn how to do something. (laughter) But I'm a really good—I write a really good cookbook, in my old job anyway. There is no cookbook for my job now. But I could walk someone through the steps of whatever needed to be done—receiving money, impressed fund, those little activities I had to do.

It's taken a chance on me, and I went to school because I wanted to be a better asset to Reclamation. What I hope now is that all this streamlining in the administrative area, I hope I haven't picked the wrong field. Because I know administrators—there's always going to be a need for support functions, and it was what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be a natural resource specialist. I didn't want to. That wasn't my interest at all. I like what I'm doing. I think I can go a little farther. I'm hoping I can spread out into Reclamation more. I'm kind of G-P [Great Plains] Region-localized. I'm a known entity in this Region. I've been here nineteen years. I hope my chances for mobility are better.

Storey: Tell me about some of your details.

Fischer: Oh, geez.

Storey: You said ten days in Washington.

### **Opportunity to Work in the Commissioner's Office**

Fischer: Yes. The commissioner's—not the commissioner's secretary, but the commissioners have a legislative aide, or they have like a go-between, between them and the Hill. It's usually an appointee.

Storey: Congressional Affairs.

Fischer: Yeah. It was the secretary to that position, and also one of the commissioner's—not his immediate secretary, but like a staff secretary, was on maternity leave, and so they needed details for like a four-month period, four-or five-month period, while she went on maternity leave, and I don't know if there were complications or not. So they just kind of had slots and put out the interest announcement, "Are you willing to?" and I said, "Well, here's my Christmas vacation. This is the only time I could go."

So I did, I went. It was the very last detail that they had. She came back the next week. But when I started going to school, I kind of really had to fit those into breaks, because I couldn't leave school. But what I did was I logged in mail, the commissioner's mail, and stuff that he signed, that came in for signature and went out for signature.

Storey: This was under Commissioner [Dennis B.]

Underwood?<sup>7</sup>

Fischer: Yeah. Dennis Underwood was there at that time.

Storey: What was he like?

Fischer: Very quiet. Very nice little guy. Commissioner Beard seems to have more energy.<sup>8</sup> He seems more active. I've seen Beard at a couple functions. When Buffalo Bill Dam was completed, the raising of it, they raised it twenty-five feet, they had an open house, a celebration. He was there, and came and spoke. Neil introduced me to him then, because Neil was there, and he asked me—one of our irons in the fire, the reservoir around Canyon Ferry has 260 prime lease cabin lease sites, prime recreation area, just gorgeous, right along the shoreline, trees. Well, those are the government's land, but those lessees have built \$200,000 houses, and they're paying a mere pittance to live there—you know, \$100 a year.

Storey: And no property taxes?

Fischer: No property taxes. And so that was one of the irons we had in the fire, and Commissioner Beard had

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7. Commissioner Underwood participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Dennis B. Underwood, *Oral History Interview*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1995 to 1998, in Los Angeles and Ontario, California, edited by Brit Allan Storey.

8. Commissioner Beard participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Daniel P. Beard, *Oral History Interview*, Expanded Second Edition, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, from 1993 to 1997, in Washington, D.C., edited by Brit Allan Storey, 2009.

just—something had just happened that reached his desk on that. He said, "Well, what do you think we should do with the cabin sites at Canyon Ferry?"

And I said, "I think they should be charged full property value out there, or else get rid of them and make them recreation sites." You know, because I see down the road, and our recreation areas are getting smaller and smaller, our prime, pristine recreation area. And if they're not going to pay, get rid of them. But that was my opinion, and he listened, and I don't know if he recalls it, but it didn't worry me to say that.

I told you I went to Austin for thirty days. A couple of the details were back from when I was at Canyon Ferry to here, when L-M, Lower Missouri, and Upper Missouri [regions] combined.<sup>9</sup> We took over, well, all their records and library materials, and all of that stuff, and all their contracts, their water-user contracts, that had to be put into a system so we could monitor due dates, you know, expiration dates and things like that. They needed someone to create something on Lotus and enter all that information, all those contracts, who they were with, when they expired, and stuff like that. So that was one of them. And then coming back here to do budget work.

Storey: While you were still at Canyon Ferry?

Fischer: Yeah. And then when I was—I'm trying to think. I

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9. The Upper and Lower Missouri River Regions were formed in 1946. The Upper Region was located in Billings, Montana, and the Lower Region in Denver Colorado. In 1985 the Upper and Lower Regions were consolidated to form the Missouri Basin Region in Billings.

have them all written down. But they've just allowed me the opportunity to do that.

Storey: Yeah. This is great. I appreciate it.

Fischer: Okay.

Storey: I want to ask you now if you're willing for people from inside Reclamation and outside Reclamation to listen to these tapes, and see any resulting transcripts from them.

Fischer: Yes, I am.

Storey: Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. NOVEMBER 15, 1994.  
END OF INTERVIEW.