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Interview with Doris Peterson

RCA Heritage Program

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

[0:00:09] Doris Peterson: Doris Peterson. I worked for Television and Radio Victrola in 1952. My first assignment, I worked in a typing pool on 5-7; building 5 in the accounts / payable department. Mr. Patton was the section manager and it was a big open floor and it was just full of people paying and receiving bills. After a while, Mr. Patton's secretary Terry moved up and I took her job. When I worked for Mr. Patton, his office was a corner office right next to the bridge. We had no air conditioning, so the whole room was windows. Every morning his office would be covered with grit from the bridge and I would go in and dust the office and the bookcases and get ready for the day. Then I did secretarial work for him.

[0:01:29] Male Speaker: Good. From there, where did you go?

[0:01:34] Doris Peterson: I stayed with Mr. Patton for a long time. Then we moved to Cherry Hill. We moved out of Camden, that department, and we moved to Cherry Hill. Then in Cherry Hill I went to work for the budgets and pricing department and when I left pregnant in 1978...no, I'm sorry. When I left in 1960, pregnant, I left from the budgets and pricing department. Many years later I went to an RCA group that were just getting together and someone called me and said: "Why don't you come?" It was an old group of mine. I said yes. I would like to come in and see everyone. At that party Mark D'Andrea said to me: "Are you thinking about coming back to work?" I said, "Well, maybe". He said, "You know, if you come back and you stay for three years, you get all your seniority back from the first time you worked." Which was eight years, '52 to '60. So in 1978 I went down to Camden, took all my testing, was called and I went into the broadcast division. I worked there for several years. Then I went to work for Jack Santoro in systems engineering. From there he moved on somewhere and I went to work for Jack Shannon.

[0:03:33] Male Speaker: Wow.

[0:03:39] Doris Peterson: After that Mr. Shannon retired, Al Weinerich came down from the New York office, Dr. Weinerich, I worked for him for a couple of years. When he left, G.E. came in. Then I worked for Mike Williams. Oh, I'm sorry I left one boss out: Gary Bierman, I worked for Gary Bierman. and I worked for Mike Williams. They were both G.E. people. So that was the track that I took through RCA.

[0:04:19] Male Speaker: Alright. So, how were these supervisors?

[0:04:24] Doris Peterson: Fine. Everyone treated me really, really good. They did. I liked all of them.

[0:04:32] Male Speaker: Did you feel that they valued your work?

[0:04:36] Doris Peterson: Absolutely. Absolutely.

[0:04:38] Male Speaker: How did you feel that? Why?

[0:04:40] Doris Peterson: Why? Because I always got good raises. So I figured they did appreciate my work, yes.

[0:04:54] Male Speaker: What about your co-workers? What were they like?

[0:04:58] Doris Peterson: I loved them. All of them. We were in each other's weddings; the girls that I met even in the typing pool were in. And some of them, we still get together and are good friends today. Yes, I had a lot of good friends.

[0:05:17] Male Speaker: So it sounds like that wasn't just a workplace then. What was it to you?

[0:05:28] Doris Peterson: Well, RCA was a very, very good company to work for. The benefits, the bosses that I had, the friendships that I made were always very important to me. When I left high-school at 17 I went straight to RCA. And in that typing pool already I had made some very good friends. One girl, Lois Larsen, I was her maid of honor and she was my maid of honor. We're still friends today. We got paid with a check every Friday and we would call a taxi-cab, and we would go down to the bank. We would have lunch together; we would run in and out of the little shops. We would all meet at a certain place, get a cab again and go back to the plant. And those friendships, just through all of the different steps that I took in my secretarial career, I made very good friends. Even up to the very last, to the end. Yes, very important.

[0:06:47] Male Speaker: We've heard the term a lot of times the RCA family. What does that mean to you?

[0:06:54] Doris Peterson: When I first went to RCA and we got our little newsletter, RCA Family, we went to the family store, which was really great. You just accepted immediately, this is a family. Everyone cares for everyone; everyone's doing a good job for the benefit of the company, and you just got taken right in with the words RCA family. Very comfortable with that from the very start.

[0:07:32] Male Speaker: So it sounds like it went far beyond the workplace.

[0:07:35] Doris Peterson: Absolutely, it did. The wonderful Christmas parties back in those early days, we used to go over to a big hotel over in Philadelphia, and RCA would give us these wonderful Christmas parties. It was just a great company in every way. And for a young girl out of high school, this was like: "Really? This is really neat."

[0:08:07] Male Speaker: Your husband, Pete, worked at RCA also...

[0:08:10] Doris Peterson: Yes, he started in '52. Pete and I graduated from high-school together, and we both went to RCA. He went as a draftsman, and I went into the typing pool, went in to be a secretary, and he stayed for 42 years with RCA. When he retired.

[0:08:33] Male Speaker: I remember Pete as a gentle giant...

[0:08:37] Doris Peterson: He was, he was a wonderful man, he was.

[0:08:42] Male Speaker: What was he like at RCA?

[0:08:48] Doris Peterson: His work...because so much of his work was in 8- building, which was top secret and he would go down to NSA a lot and all. He never talked about his work or what he did or anything. His last job though he was the leader of a group, that when we sold government equipment, they would make up the books. And in the books would be all the drawings and all the pieces that the government was buying. That was his last job. And that's the only job that I ever really knew. But that was all secret stuff too.

[0:09:41] Male Speaker: How do you think RCA was perceived in industry /customers?

[0:09:51] Doris Peterson: Well, I think top notch. I had heard a story; I don't know how far back this goes. RCA, I was told never made a microwave oven, a microwave. And one time there was some kind of a tally being taken, just with people. If you were to buy this and this and this, what company, what brand would you buy? And all these people put a microwave. And what from the articles that I remember RCA never made a microwave. So, people's perception of RCA putting out a really great product, no matter what it was, they would buy it. As I would.

[0:10:45] Male Speaker: You mentioned you worked in broadcast for a little while...

[0:10:46] Doris Peterson: Yes, I did.

[0:10:46] Male Speaker: ...what was that like? What do you recall from broadcasting work?

[0:10:54] Doris Peterson: Well, it's funny what you remember about things. That was when I came back to work in 1978, I went into broadcast. And we did...we sold products all over the world. Studio equipment. And one of the

jobs that I did was to type up invoices to be sent to these companies. And it was in foreign languages. I remember that. You could not take your eyes off the paper that you're copying because it was in foreign languages. That I remember.

[0:11:42] Male Speaker: I think for a little while you also worked in the space programs?

[0:11:45] Doris Peterson: Yes. I did...

[0:11:46] Male Speaker: Can you tell us about that?

[0:11:48] Doris Peterson: Oh, that was exciting. That was like something that you really could relate to. It was in the early days and in the news and it was exciting. And the day that they did the shot, and I don't remember the name and I shoot Challenger maybe, when the school teacher, when it exploded and they all died. I can remember going into our conference room to watch that shot. We were really into...and we did have an astronaut come, Sam Holt one time had an astronaut come to speak to us. And with all our little questions that we had. That was exciting. Because it was very relevant to the news and you could really feel a part of that. Because I know we did all of the communications with NASA. And we did such a great job and had such great engineers. It was exciting.

[0:12:47] Male Speaker: Who were some of the engineers that you remember?

[0:13:06] Doris Peterson: Ed Nossen, I really...Canavan. I don't remember his first name. That's embarrassing...

[0:13:14] Male Speaker: Did you ever deal with Ed?

[0:13:16] Doris Peterson: Not really. I reported to Jack Santoro, Ed Nossen and reported to Jack, and he had a secretary. So, I just knew him. I knew him socially also because John Allen, the principal engineer, he used to have two big parties every year. He had a summer swim party at his home and he had a big Christmas party. And certainly we all socialized together. I didn't really ever work for Ed, but I know he was brilliant.

[0:13:56] Male Speaker: How did you know he was brilliant?

[0:13:58] Doris Peterson: Because, constantly Jack Santoro would call the group into the conference room to give Ed a check for something that he'd just gotten patented, that he had just invented. So I knew he was a very smart man.

[0:14:18] Male Speaker: That's pretty remarkable. So, talk about the environment of the workplace. Did you have what you needed; did you feel that the environment was a place where you wanted to work?

[0:14:40] Doris Peterson: Yes. I never had any complaints about...the buildings were old. Until we moved to Cherry Hill, boy, that was such a blessing. Everything brand new and the ladies rooms...but even when I worked in old Camden, everything was there that we needed. Never complained, none of the girls that I knew, we never complained about anything. We had everything we needed to do our jobs. But Cherry Hill was a treat.

[0:15:14] Male Speaker: What was the best thing about working for RCA?

[0:15:19] Doris Peterson: The best thing? Everything. Everything. From the time I first went there I just thought I was blessed to be in this place, with these people. Everybody was happy. I didn't know anybody grumpy. Everybody was happy to be there. We all worked hard and if we needed to stay and work overtime on anything, we did what we needed to do. Everything.

[0:15:52] Male Speaker: What was the worst thing about working for RCA?

[0:15:53] Doris Peterson: G.E. buying us and just spoiling everything. It was a Friday night...you know there's just certain parts of your life that you never forget. It was a Friday night and I had gone to the market to do our food shopping. And I met an RCA person which I don't recall anymore who that was. And he came up to me and he said: "What do you think about the news?" I said "what news?" He said "G.E. buying RCA". I said "No. Where did you hear that?" "Yes, it's all over the news, it's all over the news" I couldn't believe it. It changed so many lives.

[0:16:41] Male Speaker: How did it change?

[0:16:43] Doris Peterson: Oh my goodness, so many of the people that I worked with, like middle management, they were all let go. It was just horrible. Men in their 50's, it was just awful. And the fact that I believe they froze our pensions. So that your pension, whatever it was at that time, could not continue to grow. And then they started a new pension. I think that, it was handled that way. And then sick days changed. RCA was just so wonderful with everything that they gave us. All of our vacation and sick days and everything. G.E. changed everything. I was not happy when they came in. Although the two bosses that I had, Mike Williams and Gary Bierman, were very, very nice to work for, and very nice to me. I understand that not all the G.E. people that came into Camden were so nice. I was lucky.

[0:18:03] Male Speaker: Did you feel that there was still a family atmosphere?

[0:18:08] Doris Peterson: When they let so many of the people that I knew in life, middle management and secretaries, secretaries were let go, these G.E.

people came in, it changed. It changed.

[0:18:29] Male Speaker: We've heard that a lot. There's also been an inference that RCA changed the face of South Jersey. Do you have any opinion on that?

[0:18:44] Doris Peterson: I don't know that I can comment on that except that they employed so many people, kept us all working, making good salaries.

[0:18:55] Male Speaker: In your neighborhood, were there others that worked from RCA?

[0:19:01] Doris Peterson: No, not many. Not many.

[0:19:09] Male Speaker: So, as far as your journey in life, how would you sum up your journey at RCA? Just a job, or what?

[0:19:23] Doris Peterson: No. Something that I always held dear to my heart, they were very good to my husband and to me and the friendships that I still have today from working in RCA; they were a big part of my life. They were. I hold Nipper dear to my heart.

[0:19:52] Male Speaker: Did you have anything else that you wanted to share with us as far as recollection, stories, incidents or anything like that while you were at RCA?

[0:20:04] Doris Peterson: I think I pretty much covered everything.

[0:20:11] Male Speaker: Good. Alright. Well, thank you...

[0:20:16] Doris Peterson: Well, thank you for asking me Jim, really, thank you for asking me. I love sitting and just talking about RCA and the fun that we had. The 25 year award dinners that we had, even though it took me a while, I had 28 years with the company, so it took me a while. But I used to hostess at the 25 year awards dinners. And, the fact that they made a big deal out of the working people was great, was great.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]