

**Project Title: WISEM Oral History Project**

Produced by: Women in Science, Engineering and Mathematics (WISEM); Colorado School of Mines History Archive

Narrator: Deidre Taylor (Shea)

Interviewer: Carmela Raygoza-Heredia

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00:00:06

RAYGOZA-HEREDIA: Hello, everyone! I am Mel Reygoza-Heredia here with Deidre Taylor Shea, who is an alumni for the Colorado School of Mines. This is for the Women of Mines Oral History Project. Today is March 17 of the year 2023. Deidre is currently located in her home in California, and I am currently located at the WISEM House on the Colorado School of Mines campus in [Golden] Colorado.

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RAYGOZA-HEREDIA: Deidre Taylor graduated from the Colorado School of Mines with a Bachelor's of Science in Petroleum Engineering in 1989. She spent over 27 years working in the oil and gas industry, and has extensive assets management and major capital project experience, both domestically and internationally. Deidre is a registered professional engineer, and enjoys mentoring and training new and less experienced engineers. After retiring from Chevron in 2015 she became a community outreach volunteer, responsible for organizing, scheduling, and presenting Society of Petroleum Engineers "Energy for Me" sessions in local Denver area schools. This is an important effort to educate students about energy and petroleum engineering and act as an advocate for the oil and gas industry.

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TAYLOR: Thank you, Mel, for that wonderful introduction, and I'm very pleased to be here to talk about my experience at the Colorado School of Mines. The Woman's Oral History Project caught my eye. I'm not a traditional student, and so I thought my story might be, might be good to add to the Archive.

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TAYLOR: I struggled a little bit getting out of high school, and it took a couple of years off before I decided I needed to get back into school. I enrolled at the Red Rocks Community College in Golden, Colorado, and I did that just to get my core classes under way. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. But it was a good avenue. It was economic, so it's less expensive than a major university, and I got my core classes out of the way, and on my journey at Red Rocks I took a geology course, and the geologist that taught that had worked in the oil industry and he'd worked all over the world, and it was very interesting and exciting. At that point I decided I should try to pursue a career in the energy industry.

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TAYLOR: The Colorado School of Mines was located right there in Golden, Colorado, and that's when I decided to pursue a petroleum engineering degree. I wanted to be financially independent, and I wanted to see the world. So, I was able to transfer many of my classes to Colorado School of Mines--the calculus, physics, chemistry--a lot of those core freshman sophomore classes transferred right over.

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TAYLOR: I remember when I got accepted at Colorado School of Mines, and it, it was an amazing thing to happen to me. I was so happy. I knew it was going to be hard. At that time, people told me, It's easy to get accepted into the Colorado School of Mines; it's very hard to stay in the Colorado School of Mines, so I knew my work was cut

out for me. I put myself through school. I was working 30-plus hours a week at a local restaurant and had to pay all my bills and my tuition, and still maintain that full, full load of engineering classes. So it was challenging.

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TAYLOR: What I really liked about the Colorado School of Mines was the integrity, the, it was very conservative. A lot of my friends were going to CSU [Colorado State University] and CU (University of Colorado-Boulder] and, and colleges in California, and a lot of partying and things going on on campus. I really didn't have any time but to study and to work, and it was a lot of discipline, but it was good. It was really good for me at that time of my life. That's what I needed, was the focus. It was very hard, but in the same, in that same vein, I always felt support, that people were there to help you, even if you were struggling, and I did struggle. It was not easy.

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TAYLOR: I did have some financial aid, and there were a couple of times my grades were, were getting down to the point where I could lose my financial aid, and I remember working with the Financial Aid people, and they were wonderful, absolutely wonderful. So I did struggle, and I made it through. Back in the late eighties one of my favorite places to go on campus in between classes was a place called the I Club [Mines Integral Club], and I bet that's not even there anymore. But it was, not the main cafeteria, but a place to go get a cup of tea and a pancake in between classes.

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TAYLOR: Because I was a non-traditional student, I had a lot of friends that were non-traditional students, meaning these people had already been out in the world working, or delayed their time to go to college like I did. I had a very good group of friends that, we helped each other. We had some roughnecks from the oil field that said, My gosh! I've been working in the oil field. I'm going to come back and get my engineering degree; and those people were so helpful to me to explain what really happens out there while you're drilling a well and producing a well. So it was a very valuable friendships, camaraderie.

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TAYLOR: I also made friends with a lot of other people--the traditional students, and the international aspect was incredible to a lot of students from around the world. So it was a very good experience in that way. That is just a cultural melting pot of people, languages, and experiences.

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TAYLOR: I really enjoyed that the School was very result-oriented. And one of the best things they ever taught me, what I hated at the time, was how to solve open-ended problems. And I can remember one particular case, Dr. Crafton [Professor James Crafton, Petroleum Engineering Department] gave us all this big assignment, right as Spring Break was approaching, and it, it was a doozy, and all of us were very frustrated because we had to work really hard to work on a problem that was open ended. So, I can remember us all running down the hall, cursing, after we got that assignment just at the start of spring break.

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TAYLOR: The, ah, one great thing was E-Days [Engineer Days at Colorado School of Mines], so that was a time to blow off steam. The fireworks, the parties, we had the Oil Field Olympics. It was really one time a year on campus where you just could let go, let your hair down. And those were amazing times. E-Days were some of my favorite times that, that break. And again, just a lot of fun.

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TAYLOR: It, then graduation. Oh, my gosh! When I finally made it, and I was so relieved! It was just one of the best things that ever happened to me, and so relieved that I would finally be able to get out and not have homework

every night [laughs]. But it was a, a great experience to walk across that stage and pick up my degree and realize all the hard work had finally paid off, although because again my GPA [Grade Point Average] was not the best, I struggled to find a job.

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TAYLOR: In 1989 the oil industry was just coming back so it was hard to find a job. I cold-called. I sent out over 100 resumes and cover letters. The major oil companies really only hired the top tier, so I was out of the running for those. And, I ended up out here in Southern California, working for an independent oil company called Tidelands Oil Production Company. They were a prime contractor for the City of Long Beach, and they operated all of the offshore oil properties in Long Beach. Wilmington Field at that time was the third largest field in North America and, even though it was old, there was a lot of oil production. So my first job was with a small company, but boy, it was fantastic. We were 5 minutes from the Field, and when I got there I just, I learned so much, so quickly, and the people I work with were absolutely wonderful. From the field hand out in the field, the operator, all the way up to the vice president of the company, and all my fellow engineers, technicians. It was just an amazing experience, and I loved it.

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TAYLOR: I learned so much. So, I do have friends that did get the job at the major oil companies, and they were all sitting in classes for that first one or two years, and learning things in class where I was actually hands-on out in the field, and I think that was a big advantage for me.

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TAYLOR: After that I met my husband, who is a Miner [Colorado School of Mines graduate] too, in Southern California. We got married, and he wanted to go to graduate school in Wisconsin. Eh, that was really tough. I had to leave the job I loved and support him in his pursuing the Master's degree. That was really hard, 'cause I couldn't really work in the oil industry in Wisconsin. But, he got out of there in 18 months, and even before he graduated he had a colleague from Long Beach, who was now in Alaska, call him and offer him a job in Alaska.

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TAYLOR: So that's where we went. He went to work for ARCO [Atlantic Richfield Oil Corporation] and I worked for BP [British Petroleum]. And it, that was a pinnacle in my career, working Prudhoe Bay for BP. The, the work we did up on the North Slope was amazing--cutting edge technology, working with all that gas they were producing. It, it was just an amazing experience. I don't think I've worked with better people in the industry, and not only that, they were so smart and so capable, and in the same vein so humble, they were so easy to work with. I just, that was just such a great experience. And we did that for 6 years: he worked for ARCO, I worked for BP. And then BP bought ARCO, and my husband came over to work for BP. We're finally with the same company.

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TAYLOR: So, we had an opportunity to go overseas and we went to work in the United Arab Emirates and Abu Dhabi for BP. We were seconded into the National Oil Company there, ADMA OPCO [Abu Dhabi Marine Areas Operating Company], which is all the offshore properties, and that was just an amazing experience. Again, the culture, the production, the oil field--really good experience.

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TAYLOR: As a woman, I saw more blatant discrimination over there than anywhere in the world, and it was not directed at me at all. No, it was directed to all of the Pakistanis, the Indians, the Egyptians--the Arabs are just so discriminatory, and it was a really interesting work environment. Um, so, I mean, that was super hard to come from that experience of Prudhoe Bay, the top notch people getting things done, to such a hierarchy, and, and the blatant discrimination. It was very hard, it very stressful for me. But in the same vein I learned a lot. I learned how

to support these excellent engineers I was working with. I was the only woman going offshore, and I could only go for the day [laughs]. I never had to worry about the last helicopter leaving, because I knew it would not leave unless I was on it. So, again, I just, just amazing people, and I find in these situations it doesn't matter where you're from, what color your skin is, what gender you are. You roll up your sleeves, and you want to get the job done, and everything falls into place. So that has been my experience.

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TAYLOR: After Abu Dhabi, we came back to Houston, and my husband's father was ill and my dad wasn't doing well health-wise. So, we decided to come back to the States, and at that time we both ended up leaving BP. Things in the oil business were amazing, and job offers were everywhere, phone calls every day, so we took that opportunity to make a change and I went to work for Chevron. Oh, my gosh! That's the company I probably would have loved to work for right out of school. It's a great company. I had a wonderful opportunity there, and a wonderful experience there as well.

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TAYLOR: Working in Houston for 3 years, and after that I got a job rotating to Angola, Africa. So they have an operation in Cabinda, and we operate two offshore blocks there for the National Oil Company in Angola. The job there was my dream job. It was training the nationals how to operate their oil business there, and I was hired as the petroleum engineer mentor, and it was so fun. I got to work with all of these young Angolan engineers, teaching them how to run their business. And, boy that was, it was a business. There was all kinds of things going on, so many interesting things going on.

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TAYLOR: That was wonderful. And after that, I did that for 3 years, I thought, well, I was thinking about retiring, and I did not renew my Angola visa, and when Chevron had a job come up in Bangkok, Thailand, I said, oh, my gosh! I said, Well. I said, If I get a job in Bangkok, Thailand I'll work another few years, and I did get the job, and my husband was ready. He, he said, I'll go. We went to Thailand, and that was probably one of my favorite postings of all time. And, we were there 2 years. It was wonderful. The people were wonderful, again, the work was wonderful. The atmosphere, the support. And again, my job was to accelerate the learning for these young and upcoming national engineers, and they, it was just wonderful.

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TAYLOR: And after that I did retire, and I just, I just pinch myself every morning that I had this amazing career, and learned so much, and met so many wonderful people from everywhere.

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TAYLOR: When I got back to Colorado, where we initially retired, I became active in SPE [Society of Petroleum Engineers] with this Energy for Me program, because I really think it's important to educate our friends, our neighbors, our family about the energy business. There is a lot of people out there that say we can't use fossil fuels, and I believe there's all forms of energy, all forms of energy, there's room for all forms of energy. There's a need for all forms of energy, and people need to be educated about what energy does and how important it is. So I am definitely an industry advocate. I work with my husband on that a lot, just, just educating friends, neighbors through SPE, through other community gatherings, and that's been very rewarding as well.

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TAYLOR: Ah, I just, I would say the people, the experiences, seeing the world, but the opportunity to travel when we were overseas was amazing. And I think that one of the best things for me was the work ethic, a big part that I learned at Colorado School of Mines—because there was no way you were getting out of there if you weren't working your butt off—the open-ended problem solving, your attitude and your enthusiasm and your ability to

work with all different kinds of people. Everybody brings something to the table, everybody, and you learn from everybody. I learned from everybody, and that was key to my success. I believe my attitude and my enthusiasm, my work ethic at, at--the Colorado School of Mines also had this EPICS [Engineering Practices Introductory Course Sequence] course curriculum that was very important. It taught you how to act, professional dress, professional present [presentations], some very basic core, um, talents that you need to succeed, and that, I thought that was very important. I was very grateful for that at the time. Oh, again at the time. Oh, no oral presentations. But no, you get, you got good at it and you stand out. I think Colorado School of Mines students really stand out because of that education. Ah, I think, I think that's good.

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RAYGOZA-HEREDIA: Okay, perfect. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

00:18:00

TAYLOR: Yes. I was a big fan of Steven Covey, and the 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, and one thing I always had on my desk: My mantra, something I would refer to quite often, was a quote, and that quote is to be a light, not a judge; to be a model, not a critic; be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

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RAYGOZA-HEREDIA: Perfect. Well, thank you, Deidre. This concludes the session with Deidre Taylor Shea for the Women of Mine's Oral History Project.

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[End recording]

#### **END OF TRANSCRIPTION**

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