

Dr. Radke Women's Oral History Collection

June Estrada - Life Experiences

By June Estrada

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Box 1 Folder 11

Oral Interview conducted by Ruth Calkins

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Brigham Young University- Idaho

RC: State your full name with your maiden name too.

JE: June Harriet Kessler Estrada.

RC: What are the names of your parents?

JE: Alice Bows Kessler and Arthur Estes Kessler.

RC: Okay and the date of your birth and the name of the place you were born.

JE: October the 5th 1920 and I think it was in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

RC: Alright and the number of siblings you had.

JE: I had one brother that lived. His name was Grant Kessler.

RC: Alright. Now we are going to get into kind of uh more experiences so what type of environment did you grow up in?

JE: Well mostly on a farm...let's see I was there from the time I was nine until I was about 16 on the farm. Then I went away to Cardston for one year to finish high school. Then I went to Utah to Brigham Young University. And you say religious, urban, or agrarian. Are you there? Well agrarian wouldn't that be uh sort of that you grew up on a farm?

RC: Yeah, that's it.

JE: Okay.

RC: Okay, Grandma now we're going to work on, what type of religious upbringing did you have?

JE: Oh, well we belonged to the Mormon Church and we went to Church every week, in Diamond City.

RC: Diamond City, where was that?

JE: Alberta, Canada.

RC: Was it, how far away was it from your home?

JE: About three miles.

RC: Oh so it was really close?

JE: Yes. I recall that when my father worked um, in a play, they they put on a play, and he was in it, and so was I. We would walk to rehearsal and it was in the winter time when it

was cold to take the horses and wagons. We didn't have a car, so we would walk there for rehearsals. So um I remember that.

RC: Well that's fun. What type of activities and hobbies did you have growing up?

JE: I didn't have any hobbies that I can think of. I liked to read and mother would go to the library and get library books. Sometimes she'd read them out loud to us. And uh activities whatever you do on a farm. Going to school and uh I had to walk. How far did walk to school? A mile and a half I think. Um well that was pretty much it. I didn't have any hobbies that I know of.

RC: Did you play any instruments?

JE: My mother had a, my mother had an organ, and I was wild to learn how to play the piano by the time I got one I wasn't wild any more. But, huh huh, I had my grandfather rented out an area that he had in the coolies, which is hills that go down towards a river. Different people with sheep and when the sheep had lambs some of them were too early in the spring when it was very cold and if the mother had twins she would adopt one of them. So my father would bring the other one home and they brought them to our house and there was one that I adopted as my own and I called him Wolleyball and I would not let the cut off his tail you know they docked the tails of the sheep. And brought him down to the house and hid him underneath the dining table. And then when he got a full grown sheep I sold him and bought a bunch of music lessons from a woman that lived in the area and I remember that this is the way out in the farm area where the nearest neighbor is a half mile away so any way, if you want to call that as an activity or a hobby, learning to play that organ.

RC: When did you first start learning how to cook?

JE: How to what?

RC: How to cook?

JE: I don't understand that word.

RC: To cook food.

JE: Cook.

RC: Yeah when did you start learning how to cook?

JE: Oh very young. I um, in my very early teens so um I could help my mother.

RC: Alright. Let's see. Do you remember when the Great Depression hit?

JE: Yes I do.

RC: Okay. Do you have any experiences or memories from that time period?

JE: Nothing that was really drastic. We lived on the farm and uh we had, we were warm, we had adequate clothing, we had plenty of food. My mother canned food and stuff like that. So I don't think that we really suffered for that, but we certainly didn't have very much money, because if you did raise a crop, ah you didn't get hardly anything when you sold it. So uh we were kind of poor but we were never destitute and we were never without the essentials of life like food and clothing. Though my father used to tease and said that if he wore his overalls out when the wind was blowing the rags would beat him to death flopping in the wind. Yeah, so, or if his mother got after him to when he had old clothes on you know that were kind of ragged 'well I'm just going to Diamond City and everybody knows me there.' And if we were going to Lethbridge 'well we're going to Lethbridge and nobody knows me there.' Anyway, we didn't have a lot but we had adequate.

RC: Did the church have a lot of activities for young adults to do?

JE: No. No they didn't. We uh, they had MIA, and they put on a play and my father was in it and so was I and we used to walk that uh three miles to the church to rehearse that play and uh they would have the play and then they would have a dance afterward and, and they'd stop at midnight and have something to eat and so forth. But that was not that was only a one time thing they didn't have that regularly. And if they had had it, it was too far away for us to get over there anyway. We didn't have transportation other than horses, horses and wagons, big heavy farm wagons. Not even a little buggy. You know. We didn't have that. Okay.

RC: In Canada what kind of education did you receive?

JE: A very good one. I went to rural schools there and the teachers did not give you your grade. At a certain hour on a certain day in the summertime after the season was closed, the school season, you had to go to the school at a certain hour on a certain day and the teacher opened the exam papers in your presence, actually they arrived in a sealed envelope, and you took that examination and then it went back to the Department of Education to be graded. Your teacher had nothing to do with your grades and that, that was your grade for the year. And fifty percent was passing and anything under that was failing. So it was a different kind of education than kids get nowadays. And let's see, I went to grade eleven in that school it was called the Rolling Hills School. And then when I finished that my mother were sick of her health moved to Utah and she placed me with a family, a man who had been the bishop in our ward at Diamond City and had moved to Cardston, Alberta. And I lived with them and went to high school there the last year of high school grade twelve and before that time when I was in grade seven the teacher put the grade seven and eighth kids together because there wouldn't be anymore than a half dozen of them. And gave them the two years work at the same time and my mother had been a school teacher and she knew what was going on and when they wanted to put me on into grade eight she said nuh uh she's already done that work so I

was put on into grade nine and then when I left Canada and came to Brigham Young University they gave me a whole freshmen year for my grade twelve in Canada and so that meant that I went into university as a Sophomore before I was really seventeen years old. I didn't even know what an education was all about.

RC: Wow. Okay so your last year in Canada at school your mom and your dad were down in Utah?

JE: Uh, I can't remember if my dad was there or not. He wasn't in Cardston where I was. Um, no I think he and my brother were still on the farm. And my mother was – went to Utah and then we went there to join her and father couldn't find employment. Now where did he go? I can't remember now anyway. I know he went back to Canada and his brother had something to do with a sugar factory and he worked in that sugar factory cleaning it up to close it up for the summer for the end of the summer and he was in this great big bin where they washed the sugar beets where the paddle comes around you know and stirs them up in the water and he slipped or no his brother, the routine was when they came into the factory they put their hand on – the their finger on the start and their thumb on the go or stop and he pushed the wrong button and it gave that paddle just one half of a jerk forward and it hit my father right in the middle of the back. And then he said get me out of here and they took him out and he was dead. So um, that was while we were in Canada.

RC: Oh okay, um when you started going to Brigham Young University what was your mind when you were going to school, were you there to get your education or were you there to with Mormon students, get married.

JE: Well, I didn't think about that. I was there to get an education; I was pretty young when I hit that. Remember, I said I went into university there as a sophomore and I was not yet seventeen. So I wasn't uh, see I had had grade seven and eight together so I skipped grade eight and then when I came from Canada to BYU they gave me my freshman year for my last year of high school there and my birthday was in October and I started school around September so I was pretty young I didn't even hardly know what an education was all about. And I had something to do with plants and I loved it so, so that I decided to major in botany and minor in commercial art. And it really was not a good choice. I should have majored in Biology and minored in Education and I would have been fit to be a teacher when I got out of University. But I really enjoyed my classes

RC: Uh-huh. So what typed of classes did you take when you were there other than the fine arts stuff and the botany?

JE: Well I took all the things that you had to take, sociology, and that sort of thing, geology and botany and biology. And I, somebody had sold me on the idea that you make A's in your major and B's in your minor and the rest of it didn't matter too much about, Which was a really stupid idea. And I remember my sociology teacher, which of course was neither my major or my minor, calling me into his office and saying 'now if you would just do this' it was a project that we were supposed to do 'you know I could give you a C

in the class' or something like that. Well I didn't do it, but when he gave us the final examination I made a hundred percent, so what else could he do. Anyway, I had very good memory I could remember everything. So um, it, they were interesting, um, interesting times at the University.

RC: What do you mean by interesting, like just interesting for you to live there or there was change going on there at the University?

JE: There was what?

RC: Do you mean that they were just interesting times for you at the University or that...

JE: Oh I enjoyed going to school. I was very, I uh loved my classes I really was very interested in them.

RC: While you were there did you make a lot of friends?

JE: No, not a great many, no. Let's see there was. It was so long ago. How can I remember? I don't know, I think I had a boyfriend. I think his name was Howard Stutts. He came from Canada. Anyway, it wasn't important.

RC: I guess not. What type of activities did they have there for the students?

JE: I don't remember any activities for the students. Um, I took a tap dancing class and um, I suppose they had dances, I don't know, I can't remember. But, uh I didn't have a boyfriend that I could go places with so. Anyway...

RC: I had a good question. The dress there at Brigham Young University did they have an honor, a Dress Code there by the time you went there?

JE: What was that?

RC: A Dress Code, like they had rules about what you could wear or not?

JE: Uh, I don't remember, but I didn't wear trousers at that time. Um, that's so long ago, geeewiz. No I don't think that I wore long pants at that time, hmm how come I can't remember that? Well I assume they had some kind of a dress code you wouldn't go there in shorts.

RC: No obviously not. It was a little cold there sometimes to go in shorts.

JE: Oh yes it was cold in the wintertime.

RC: Did you live with family while you were going to Brigham Young University?

JE: Well my mother took my brother to California because his health was not good. He had had rheumatic fever. So I was left to live with an apartment with some girls and then ah – did I live with another family? I can't remember. I think it as mostly an apartment with some other girls that were going to school and then there was six of us in the apartment. So I didn't live with my family the whole time that I was there because they weren't there the whole time. My father had gone back to Canada to sell the farm and because he was there for a while and had not found employment in Utah. He went into the sugar factory to; that his younger brother had some doings with to help clean up the place and that was where he was killed in an accident. So he was buried in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

RC: All right um, how old were you when you graduated?

JE: Graduated?

RC: Yeah.

JE: Oh my goodness I can't remember. Um, see I was given my first year, freshman year from my last year in Canada. So that and I had taken grade seven and eight together that had put me two years ahead. I can't remember, but I was very young.

RC: Oh, okay so...

JE: Um, let's see if I put seven and eights together that put me a year ahead and then the first year in university ah well I couldn't have been very old nineteen or eighteen. I don't know I was very young.

RC: So when you had graduated from school had World War II already started, at least in Europe?

JE: When I graduate from school had what?

RC: Had World War II already started?

JE: Um, I think so. I'm trying to remember. I was in California, and I had gone to a youth conference, and the thing where we stayed was clear out of our neighborhood. We stayed over night in the house of some members of the church and had gone to a dinner and dance the night before and it was on a Sunday morning when the family of the house had gone to their church and we went to the... are you there?

RC: Yeah I'm here.

JE: Uh, we were listening to the radio when they talked about...and uh

RC: I missed that grandma.

JE: We were in the house listening to the radio when the people who owned the house had gone their church and we were to go to our youth conference. When the radio came on and we were listening to it and they mentioned the attack on Pearl Harbor. When we went to our conference meeting one of the first things that they did was make an announcement to anybody who was there that was in the armed forces or anything of that sort were to report to their commanding officer or what not. And when they, when I heard that it was the Japs that had attacked us I remember my feeling was 'Oh well we'll flap them down, what you know those guys ha.' I didn't know what was ahead of us. Anyway that's where I was when it happened.

RC: So by the time that Pearl Harbor was hit by the Japanese were you living in California?

JE: No.

RC: No?

JE: No.

RC: you were just down in California?

JE: Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Yes I was because it was down San Diego ways where I was at then.

RC: So what were you doing in California? Did you move to California after you graduated from Brigham Young?

JE: My mother moved to California before I graduated from Brigham Young and took my brother there because he had had rheumatic fever and she thought that the warmer climate and the uh fresh fruits and vegetables would be beneficial to him. So when I got out from ah the school then I came out to California to be with her and my brother.

RC: Alright. What did you do there?

JE: What'd did I do?

RC: Yeah.

JE: Well I got a job at, you know after I graduated from school and I was painting pottery at Gladding McBean was one of the things that I did and then um because of the war there was certain, well I tried, let me think, get into Disney and because of the war they didn't let you change jobs and what not, but I did end up working for Warner Brothers Cartoon company and I worked there quite a long time, so with Bugs Bunny and what not. I was not an animator, the things that we did there was to trace the drawings onto celluloid sheets about the size of a piece of tracing paper and in black ink and sometimes a little colored ink then that was sent to the painters who turned it over and used a paint that was very similar to a poster paint and painted the things and before they were painted they

had to be checked against the drawing to make sure that every line was in the right place and so I had inking and painting but most of the time I was the checker. Checking out the drawings against the tracing to make sure they were correct before the painters took them cause it was a lot of problem to wash the paint off if it was wrong. So that was what I doing there at Warner Brothers.

RC: Did you have a fun time working there?

JE: Oh yeah. I didn't mind it. We, we got to see our cartoons and once a week we saw cartoons from other companies, so. It was pleasant work. I enjoyed it.

RC: Were there uh a lot of women working there than men because of the war?

JE: Uh the animators were mostly men and the in-betweeners...the animator would draw the extreme motions, the in-betweeners would take those two extremes and lay them down on a, on...anyway they would put them together and do the in-between actions so that it made a continuous movement. An example would be if somebody was throwing a ball if they had their hands up over their head the animator would draw that and then he'd draw where it was down after they'd thrown the ball and then the in-betweeners would put the in-between drawings and then they would be photographed and ran off before they were painted and checked before they were photographed to make sure that all the lines and everything were in the right place so I was a checker and an inker and a painter. There.

RC: Alright, um during the war did you uh, do any, uh not war activities but ah, do things for the soldiers?

JE: Do what with soldiers?

RC: Like go to any dances or buy any war bonds or something like that just to help the war effort?

JE: I don't remember that. I, I think that I had a certain amount taken out of my salary to buy a bond but I can't remember.

RC: Did you work there for the whole time that the war was going on?

JE: Oh, let me think. I guess so. I don't know, I can't remember.

RC: All right then. Um, had the war already ended when you met Grandpa?

JE: Yes. Because he left where he was at and came to California and he happened to be roommates with some Mormon boys and they said lets go to MIA and meet pretty girls and learn how to dance. So I met him at church and we went on one activity with some of the young people of the church and then he and I went to the museum down in Los Angeles and we were looking at some figures that had old fashioned clothes on them and I said to him my great-great grandparents were Pennsylvania Dutch and he looked at me

and said that “your great-great grandchildren are going to say that their great-great grandfather was Spanish,” and I said “You’re crazy.” And he grinned and said, “Wait and see.” So...

RC: So, Grandpa was not a member of the Church at that time?

JE: No, he was baptized I think somewhere near our first wedding anniversary. I think.

RC: So how long did you two date before you got married?

JE: How long what?

RC: How long did you date?

JE: I don’t know. I can’t remember. Not very long I suppose. Let’s see he made that statement you know.

RC: Yeah.

JE: Ah, he did, he never did ask “will you marry me?” he told me. Your great-grandchildren are going to say their great-grandparent was Spanish. And I said you’re crazy and he said wait and see. So, I think he went into the hospital for something or other – it was polio and he sent me a card and said whet we get when I got out of here we’re getting married. So, we got married.

RC: Where’d you get married?

JE: Where?

RC: Yeah.

JE: At A Little Church of the Flowers at Forrest Lawn in Glendale.

RC: Um, how old were you when you got married?

JE: Oh jeepers I can’t remember, hmmm. I can’t remember that. I wasn’t very old, but I wasn’t, well I was out of University. I had finished college, but then I said I had graduated pretty young because of being given my whole freshman years for my grade twelve in Canada. So, uh, I can’t remember how old I was but I was not terribly old.

RC: Alright, uh when you met Grandpa what was he doing in California?

JE: What?

RC: When you met Grandpa what was he doing in California?

- JE: He had come to California to study, I think, just a minute I'll ask him. Horacio what were you doing in California when I met you? ...Going to school.
- RC: How long after you and Grandpa got married did start having kids?
- JE: Oh quite a while I think. I can't remember. Horacio, how long after we were married did we have our first child? ...he says four years. He remembers it better than I did. Four years he says.
- RC: How many kids did you have?
- JE: Five.
- RC: And, how many girls to how many boys?
- JE: Four girls, one boy.
- RC: Um, let's get their names, their full names.
- JE: Manuela Meli, that's the oldest one, Alice Nererada, and Reed Clifford, and Karla Thalia, you got it?
- RC: Yeah.
- JE: And Cammie Irene. I think.
- RC: Alright...
- JE: Camilia Irene, really.
- RC: Alright did you guys talk about how many children you wanted before you started having them or did you just...
- JE: No. We just had them as they came along until we had five and decided that that was enough that we could not financially or physically handle anymore.
- RC: Um, when you guys started having kids did you guys make the decision that you would stay home from, that you would stay home to take care of the kids or had you already stopped working?
- JE: Uh, I don't recall certainly...let me ask Horacio. Horacio says I quit before I got pregnant. I don't remember.
- RC: Um, did you work at all after you had any of the kids or...?

JE: No, not until they were all in school. In the meantime I rode a motor cycle, my Honda 50 back to the University and got a teachers credential. And then when the kids were all in school I became a substitute teacher. Horacio would take me to the school where I was supposed to go because they would call me in the morning and drop me off there on his way to work and I would come home on a bus. I did not take on the full time job as a teacher other than as a substitute teacher.

RC: Um, the university that you went back to, to get you teaching credential, what was it?

JE: Oh, gosh...Horacio what was the name of the University I went back to, to get my teachers credential? Oh, Cal State Northbridge.

RC: Okay, did you enjoy doing the substitute teaching?

JE: Yes more or less. You know kids sometimes save up all of their dirty trick for a substitute teacher. But, um I had my ways of meeting that and controlling it and I uh got along okay. First of all I did not call roll from standing in the front of the room and looking at sheet of paper. I made seating chart with the, if the regular teacher had not made a seating chart I made one immediately, are you there?

RC: Yeah I'm here.

JE: And I went around from, and looked at each kid in the eye and asked them their name and put it down and checked them, you know and I remember one little girl said, "Well what for do you want my name?" I said, "This is the way I take roll. Do you want to be given credit for being here?" I went around and looked at each kid and the seating chart and checked to make sue that who was supposed to be there was there, 'cause sometimes they played tricks. Like they had a girl come once to the door with a note supposedly from a teacher asking for a certain girl in my class and as soon as the left I sent another girl to that teacher with a not saying did you ask for Mary Jo and they hadn't so then I sent a note to the whoever they are in the principle's office whoever's in charge and I saw her later and grinned at her and said, you didn't get away with it did you? Anyway I didn't have much trouble with them.

RC: All right now back to your kids. How much timing between your first child, how much time from the first child to the last child was there?

JE: Oh, gee I don't remember, I'd have to hunt up their birth dates and what not.

RC: That's all right you don't have to hunt them up. Um...

JE: They were relatively close together. Horacio, um how far apart were our kids, how long was it before we had five kids? He says about seven years; I think I don't...about a year and a half between them.

RC: Okay, that's, that's a good amount of time actually.

JE: What?

RC: That a pretty good amount of time between each of them.

JE: Yeah it gives you time to recover. If I had a record here of their birth dates I could tell you. But I don't see any here.

RC: That's all right. Within the church did you, um have you noticed a difference from the time that you were a teenager to now, in how women have been. Not treated in the church, but what their role in the church has been?

JE: With their what in the church?

RC: Has there been an evolution since you were a teenager till now of how women's roles in the church have changed?

JE: Well not that I know of. You know the priesthood is the priesthood and it always has been. The leadership was in the hands of the men and the women had the things that they did like Relief Society president and that sort of thing. But I haven't seen any difference, but I really hadn't thought of that.

RC: All right, uh. When you first got married to Grandpa was there um any ex, like did you experience, not full out discrimination, but kind of uh looks or whisperings because you had married a man that was not Mormon and was not English?

JE: Oh no. I don't think so.

RC: Ah is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to talk about?

JE: Oh well lets see. (Reading from a list of questions given her earlier.) Well you've got a list of my kids. Did you stay at home with the children or did you work? I stayed home with the children. When you started having children did you feel that you place was in the home or did you feel that that role was imposed upon you? No, I felt my place was in home with the kids and I enjoyed it – raising them. Have you noticed a change of the perception of women in the church from your childhood until now? Not that I know of. The elders have always been treated with respect and what not. And let's see you've got here what's the name of your husband?

RC: Yeah I guess I skipped that one.

JE: Um, I wonder if has anymore than Horacio. Horacio (asks her husband) Did you have any other names besides Horacio Estrada? Not officially. No his official name was Horacio. He says there's another one but he doesn't know it or tell it. At least I'm not aware of it.

- RC: Alright, um when you were bringing up mom and the rest of your children do you remember going to any activities with them like, not girl scouts or boy scouts, but like church activities and school activities?
- JE: Not specifically no. Of course I went to church activities with them because they couldn't get there unless we took them.
- RC: That's true.
- JE: So um, yep I'd have to think about that now. I – somebody else didn't always pick them up and take them no we took our own kids. But remember at one time I couldn't drive and I didn't have a car to drive so where I went I went on my motorcycle...
- RC: Yeah.
- JE: My Honda 50 with my high heels and my nylons and my skirt. Let's see...(Reading from list) What's the name of your husband? Was he older or younger than you? I think he's younger. And he trained to be an engineer. Was he from the same race? Yes. Culture? No. Religion? No, he was Catholic and from the Spanish-European culture.
- RC: Where exactly was Grandpa from?
- JE: Puerto Rico.
- RC: Alright. Hmm, oh, a good question how did your mom die – how and when – had you met – had great grandma already died by the time you met grandpa?
- JE: Yes she had ah she had died. He never got to meet her. I was practically holding her hand in the hospital in Ogden, Utah when she died.
- RC: So before she died she had moved back to Utah from California?
- JE: Did what?
- RC: After, ah before she died she had moved back to Utah from California?
- JE: Uhm she had gone to, oh I can't remember, she had gone to Ogden because she had relatives there a sister or something. I'd have to remember that because we didn't have a home in California and they had sold the house that she was renting, she had a house she rented and rented out to roomers and boarders, roomers mostly rather than have the trouble of cooking for the meals and stuff and when she became very ill and I put my job on hold and what not and packed up my belonging and I think I can't remember just where I think they were my brother put them in a garage they rented a space and put all the belongings in there and I went to Ogden and I was with her when she died and she was buried in Ogden and when I came back to California I was literally homeless. I didn't have an apartment or a house or anything. And I went with some people's home

and just about that time there was an older lady in who would not go and live with her daughter and they did not want her to live alone so they built a room onto her little tiny one, two room house and they rented it out to me so that this lady would not be there alone. And her name was Mrs. Peterson and I lived there with her and my brother would come and have dinner with me in the evening. And lets see cause I had kitchen privileges and then Horacio and I lived there after she died – are you there?

RC: Yeah I'm here.

JE: After she became ill and died we lived there for a short while but I think they sold the place it was in the middle of a little weed patch. And then we moved to an apartment and uh anyway I never really well I just didn't have a home when I came back to California. The Lord blessed me and that lady was in need of someone living with her and so then I had a home. So...

RC: That's good.

JE: Yeah.

RC: So when you were in the apartment or had you moved into a house?

JE: Oh well it must have been in the apartment. Because um either had her when I was there or I don't think that I had already had her. I can't remember. Anyway we didn't live in the apartment with a whole bunch of kids that's for sure. Then the lady, I'm trying to remember now, she had a house, a little house at the back of a weed patch that you stepped out of the back door right into the alley and the alley was a quarter of a block away from San Fernando road which is like being a little bit away from the freeway. And uh across the alley was a big block wall fence and on the other side was some kind of industrial thing and we lived there until we had four kids cause she had built on a room onto this little house and we lived there until we had four kids and then we bought a house of our own.

RC: Okay and the first house that little house where was it? What city?

JE: Oh, Glendale. I don't remember.

RC: Uh and when you moved into the house of your own where was that?

JE: When I what?

RC: When you guys moved into a house of your own where was that?

JE: Oh when bought the home? I don't know, Horacio? When did we buy the house and move into it. He doesn't remember either he says seventeen years ago. I don't know.

RC: Um where was it?

JE: Chatsworth.

RC: Okay is that where you guys stayed until you retired?

JE: 1959 he says – what did you say?

RC: Was that um the house you stayed in until you retired?

JE: Oh no. No. We um oh goodness no, until I retired or he retired?

RC: Till both of you retired.

JE: No.