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Berkeley, California

Paul Janoff:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2008

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Interview #1: May 20, 2008
[Audio File 1]

01-00:00:05

Meeker: Okay, today is the May 30, 2008. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Paul Janoff for the Oakland Army Base Oral History Project, and let's begin. The way that we always start these interviews is ask the interviewee—that's you—to state your name and the date and place and birth.

01-00:00:48

Janoff: Okay. My name is Paul Janoff, and I was born October 25, 1956, in Forest Hills, New York.

01-00:00:58

Meeker: And maybe you can just briefly tell me a little bit about the town you came from and maybe your upbringing, your education—that kind of background, general background questions.

01-00:01:11

Janoff: I grew up on Long Island in a suburb of New York City called Lynbrook. Lynbrook is an inversion of the word Brooklyn, where many people came in the 1950s after World War II and built houses as part of the Baby Boom, and had kids. And I was part of the Baby Boom, being born in 1956. I went to school in New York City and worked in New York City. I went to Saint Johns University undergraduate and worked in Manhattan for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. So I grew up outside the City, although New York City was very much a part of my life for the first twenty-one years or twenty-two years of my life. My parents were both born in the United States and their parents were born in Russia. I then went to—I graduated from Saint Johns with a degree in criminal justice in 1978 and my—I had a quest to go away and live in a place that was as far culturally as it could be from New York, so I chose the University of Richmond, and I went there for law school in 1981.

01-00:02:28

Meeker: That's in Virginia, yes?

01-00:02:29

Janoff: Virginia, in the center of the state. And graduated, again, in 1981, and with a juris doctorate.

01-00:02:42

Meeker: And what sort of law were you interested in practicing?

01-00:02:46

Janoff: I was interested in practicing public service. I wasn't sure. Criminal law and public service. But I knew that I wanted to work for the government. Several of my family members had worked for the government and found it a particularly noble and distinguished calling. I knew that I was going to go into the military, which I did do. I had no interest at all in the private sector. I

knew that it would be—financially it would be maybe a little bit cumbersome but I really felt the need, almost a calling, to go into public service. Starting with the Navy— I had started to do public service internships when I was in law school and prosecutor—two prosecutors offices. One was the Department of Justice. And then I joined the Navy in my last year of law school. It was a very natural progression. My dad had been in the Navy. But here we are, almost thirty years later—at least thirty years later—and I'm still doing public service law and that's where I'll stay.

01-00:03:46
Meeker:

Okay. Tell me about what family members had done public service, government work.

01-00:03:53
Janoff:

I had two uncles. My uncle Mike Smolik—that's S-M-O-L-I-K—was a foreign service officer, a very distinguished one who had traveled the world. Worked in Africa and Vietnam and Spain, and when I was young, he would encourage me, even from the age of six or seven, to think about a career in the government. Maybe not a sophisticated way, but he was pointing the way. And then I had another uncle who worked—my uncle Al Meyer. They are both now deceased—who worked for the Department of the Army in contracts. And he was the bachelor in the family. He never married. My mother said he was the only sane one in the family. But he also told me the advantages and balanced lifestyle that I would have working for the government. And I took their advice to heart. In fact, my Uncle Mike's son, Robert Smolik—S-M-O-L-I-K—is a very famous diplomat in the State Department. If you were to run him on Google, you would see his many, many accomplishments. And several of my relatives have gone into public service.

01-00:05:04
Meeker:

When your uncle said opportunity to have a balanced life and so forth, what did that—how was that communicated to you? What did that mean?

01-00:05:13
Janoff:

That meant that I would have time for my many interests outside of the law. Even—that meant that I would be able to play music, which I do, have time for sports, have time for family, have time for other travel, other pursuits. I'm not sure I articulated it or thought about it that way at fifteen, but certainly at twenty-one and twenty-two I did. And what he said— Now, he's been dead for ten years, but it resonates even more profoundly, even more deeply. And when I do recruiting, which I do, I tell people, prospective law students, prospective attorneys, about those very advantages.

01-00:06:07
Meeker:

Your decision to enter into the Navy, how did that happen and what did you hope to accomplish in that context?

01-00:06:18

Janoff:

Well, my dad had served in World War II and he was very, very patriotic to the day he died, and he didn't force me to go into the Navy, but he sure let me know that he would like to see me in the Navy. But again, he left that decision—he gave me a lot of freedom. And I knew that if I joined the Navy, I would have meaningful trial experience, which is what I wanted. I wanted to be able to litigate without having to spend six years as sort of an intern doing research for senior partners who probably--this was in the late seventies or early eighties, probably on the malicious or the angry side. You know, that's how law firms ran in those days. And I knew that in the Navy, I would be able to practice. I would be able to litigate cases, be responsible for very complex cases right out of the gate. The second part was that the opportunity to travel was unparalleled. This was 1981 and any government or even law firm—I mean, I was able—and I did travel. And then I've always been extremely athletic, and I had again the occasion to, you know, play all kinds of sports in the Navy. And there's a certain camaraderie that you have. And again, all those things came true. They were realistic goals that occurred. It's a long time ago, but they occurred.

01-00:07:44

Meeker:

I'm wondering in the context of your law school education: Was there a portion of that that would have instructed you in the ways in which law was practiced differently in the context of the military versus civilian life?

01-00:08:02

Janoff:

Only to the extent that I had several professors that had been in the military and I knew people in the military. So not palpably, no. There was really nothing—I knew what public service was, and I knew that if I went in the Navy, that I would have no problem finding employment after I left the Navy. But I would say as to the day-to-day practice of law, no, I didn't know. That was a mystery that was out there.

01-00:08:27

Meeker:

Well, how was the mystery unveiled to you? For a lay audience or for a civilian audience, maybe help describe through the core—you know, as an example of your learning how law was practiced in the Navy different from civilian life.

01-00:08:44

Janoff:

In the military, one of the prime considerations is that justice moves very, very quickly, and therefore, cases that—people commit crimes and they're going to trial two to three months later, sometimes four months later. The military's very concerned that senior officers do not try to influence the process. So there's a lot of insulation to keep generals, admirals, colonels, out of the process so that military justice can unfold the way it should unfold. So there's a lot of protection. I also found that because the military is a global—the Navy is a global organization, that if you had a specialty, you could be called—you could be in Philadelphia and trying a case in Japan if that was

your specialty. The travel was a big part of what we did. In the civilian practice, if you are a labor lawyer, you'll probably stay a labor lawyer. In the military, you might be a labor lawyer one day, you might be a legal assistance attorney another day, then a year later you're a claims attorney. And maybe today you're in Philadelphia and then next year you're in Scotland. And there's a lot more dealing with international law in the military. At the time that I was in the military, it was still the cold war and President Reagan was the commander in chief and he was building the Navy up. So there was all kinds of money for both training and travel. So that's how it unfolded is that I learned these various—you go to different jobs and different places, that you had a lot of responsibility early on. There is teaching, but basically they hand you—they put you in the driver's seat and say, "Drive." You learn.

01-00:10:56

Meeker:

Well, maybe you can tell me a little bit—provide some examples of, for instance, this early responsibility that you were given.

01-00:11:02

Janoff:

Within seven months of my arrival at my first duty station, I was trying complicated felony drug cases and violent assault cases. And during the seven months I was a legal assistance attorney, I was drafting wills and powers of attorneys and helping people with divorces and learning— It was in Philadelphia. Liaisoning with civil attorneys and government agencies. At the time, I was all of twenty-five years old and twenty-six, and here I was, you know, again trying very, very complicated felony cases that were—a lot was at stake.

01-00:11:45

Meeker:

When you say trying, were you—?

01-00:11:48

Janoff:

I was defending.

01-00:11:49

Meeker:

You were defending, okay.

01-00:11:50

Janoff:

I was defending, yes.

01-00:11:52

Meeker:

You also mentioned an influence of international law on the practice of law in the military. Can you provide any examples of how that happened?

01-00:12:05

Janoff:

Absolutely. After approximately two years in Philadelphia at the Naval ship yard, which is now closed, they transferred me to Iceland where I became, for all Americans, the trial observer when Americans violated the law in Iceland. And that didn't matter whether you were military, whether you were a contractor, whether you were state department or a tourist. If there was a trial, I was detailed. And I had to learn the Icelandic law. And that was on the more

formal, learning the law. But then there was liasoning with judges and police officers and government offices that, again, at an early age. I was twenty-seven. And, you know, working with the embassy, working with contractors. And, you know, people were very apprehensive about going to court in a foreign country and I would try to settle them down. Or I would, say, inform them as to what was going to transpire. So yes, that was one-third of my job when I was in Iceland.

01-00:13:15

Meeker:

Did you learn the language there?

01-00:13:16

Janoff:

No, I didn't, and the reason was I was only there twelve months and there is no use for it outside of Iceland. Even the Icelanders would discourage me speaking Icelandic. Had I been there for two years, I might have. But strangely enough, there were very, very few resources to learn language. There was no formal language school on base. At the time, I was single, so my assignment was only twelve months. And so literally, you arrive on the island and then you're leaving.

01-00:13:43

Meeker:

Um-hmm. All right. Do you have any memories of how Icelandic law was different from US domestic law?

01-00:13:53

Janoff:

Icelandic law is very, very strict on substance abuse. Much stricter than we are. And also they have no violence there. So any kind of violence, they—the penalties are extremely severe. Now, with the Americans, they didn't really have to put people in jail. For the violent offenses, they asked that they be kicked off the island and prosecuted. But for DUI— One drink and you get behind the wheel, you would be DUI, whereas the United States, that is probably not true. The standard was .05 blood alcohol content. So they detest violence. They don't see that as a way of solving anything. They're very peaceful people. Verbally they'll do battle with you but they detest violence and did not understand that part of our culture.

01-00:14:50

Meeker:

Interesting. So what happened after your year in Iceland?

01-00:14:56

Janoff:

Well, after a year in Iceland, the Navy gave me a chance to stay. I could have gotten out or they allowed me to sign up for approximately four more years. At the time, again, I wanted more adventure. I wanted to see more of the world, so I signed up for a four more year tour and knew that that would be the end. So I went to Florida at recruit training command where I was the attorney for what we would call boot camp. Spent three years in Florida and then my last assignment was in the Bay Area at Naval Air Station Alameda, which was the key—which is the open door to the Oakland Army Base. Because at the Naval Air Station Alameda, now Alameda Point, I became the

labor lawyer and handled civilian litigation. Discrimination complaints, grievances, discipline—employee discipline. And the Oakland Army Base in 1989, after I was discharged from the Navy—released to the Reserves, was looking for a person with the exact—and I mean the exact—a one-to-one correlation—of my skills in the job that was open.

01-00:16:15

Meeker:

Well, maybe you can tell me a little bit more about this labor law that you were practicing at the Alameda Naval Air Station.

01-00:16:22

Janoff:

When an employee was basically not selected for a position—and it didn't matter the ethnic group. You could—just—we'll say a green person. People who were not selected for a position because it was so competitive would say, "You did not select me because I was green." And then I would defend the agency before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The same thing would hold true if someone were disciplined. They would say, "The punishment is too severe," and then I would simply go before the {Merit System?} Protection Board and say, "Okay, this is why we removed this person. This is why we suspended this person." And I would settle cases. And then dealing—I had to deal with the unions, as well. Negotiations, bargaining, unfair labor practices would come through me. I was the management representative. So I was really learning lab—civilian personnel law.

01-00:17:22

Meeker:

So you weren't, at this point, dealing with any military personnel? You were, in essence, defending the military and—?

01-00:17:32

Janoff:

Well, I was still the military law—I was still in the military and advising the captain on other issues, but no, I wasn't trying cases anymore. And at that point, in early 1988, I knew I was getting out, so I was doing everything I could to prepare for the transition. So certainly my role as an advocate with the military was diminishing rapidly.

01-00:17:54

Meeker:

I'm interested in the questions around discrimination in the workforce and wondering if you can tell me a little more about how those worked out. You said that if someone didn't get a job, for instance, they would always say that, well, you know, "It happened because I was discriminated against, and therefore there needs to some sort of remediation." You said it didn't matter what racial group, but I'm wondering if you can sort of enumerate the various racial groups involved and if there was any difference in the ways in which the various groups responded to that.

01-00:17:34

Janoff:

Well, the number one ethnic group that files equal employment complaints are white people, white males. So what I would say is that the system works fairly. I think that in the federal system, that the—because it is all a free

system, where you don't have to pay anything to get into the system, unlike private sector where you would have to hire an attorney to go to court, the administrative process is free, so I'm afraid it encourages complaints. That didn't bother me because I viewed it—again, this is twenty years ago—as solid experience. You know, I actually wanted the complaints to come my way. A bit of a selfish viewpoint. A bit self-centered. I wanted the artillery on my résumé. I wanted to be ready because I was getting out in January of '89.

01-00:19:33

Meeker:

Did you find that there was a certain percentage of the complaints that were justified or was there a rational explanation in most cases?

01-00:19:45

Janoff:

I would say—no. I would say out of ten cases, maybe one was somewhat justified. Maybe. People had access to the system. I think most of the people who filed were simply angry—and frustrated with poor management. They were simply bitter that they were not selected and this acrimony manifested itself in these complaints. And the EEOC finds discrimination in less than 10 percent of the cases.

01-00:20:23

Meeker:

And so that was typical? You were pretty much in line with that?

01-00:20:28

Janoff:

Yes. I would say absolutely.

01-00:20:29

Meeker:

In those one out of ten cases, what recourse was given to the complainant?

01-00:20:38

Janoff:

Most of the time, they simply got the job. They were placed in the job, and if there was already an incumbent, we just made a new job. It was very simple. The court orders you, "Put them in that job," you do. There's not much room for maneuvering.

01-00:20:53

Meeker:

So with the notion that it was mostly white men who were complaining, is that—I mean, is that a result of the fact that by the 1980s, a great deal of the civilian leadership would have been African Americans or Latinos? I guess I'm wondering how that would work. Were they responding to what were perceived to be affirmative action policies? I'm just kind of curious.

01-00:21:22

Janoff:

You know, I really don't know the answer to that. I think it's a superb question but I don't know. I just know that complaints were increasing, but I really don't have an answer for that. I wish I could, but it's a very good question. I don't know.

01-00:21:43

Meeker:

Were there affirmative action policies that you had to adjudicate in some way?

01-00:21:49

Janoff:

Oh, absolutely. We had consent decrees at the Alameda Naval Air Station, and that was that there was a dearth, a paucity of Hispanic employees on the base, and I believe in 1978, the federal district court had ordered us to do everything we could to hire more Hispanic people at the Naval Air Station. Yes, absolutely. We recruited at black colleges. We were trying. But again, I think that—my own perception was that people looked at the military with a lot—a lot of suspicion. Remember, Reagan was the commander in chief and I think that Hispanics just simply did not want to come work for the government. There was a basic distrust which exists today, of the government. So yes, I was working all the time with consent decrees, with active recruitment, retention programs to keep minorities, mentoring programs. Schools that we adopt—one school that we adopted when I was at the Oakland Army Base in the bowels of Oakland called the Ralph Bunche School. All the time, that was always on their mind.

01-00:22:52

Meeker:

Interesting. So I guess what role did an attorney have in fulfilling these consent decrees?

01-00:23:00

Janoff:

Well, when we hired someone, I would always make sure that we did everything we could to recruit in a Hispanic area. You know, did we, you know, send out notices to the newspapers, did we go to schools, did we send out announcements in Spanish? There were all kinds of things that we needed to do. I didn't always review every hire but that was our job. I think we had to get up to something like 18 percent Hispanic hiring. We never did. We had a good reason, I think, for not hiring people. People didn't trust the government. So we never got to that number. Never. Not even close.

01-00:23:42

Meeker:

So there was just a lack of interest in working for the public sector?

01-00:23:47

Janoff:

Precisely. Precisely. For the military, I would say. For the military.

01-00:23:51

Meeker:

Did it matter what kind of jobs or was this an 18 percent across the board kind of—?

01-00:23:54

Janoff:

It was an 18 percent across the board.

01-00:24:00

Meeker:

Most of the managers that you were working with, people in charge of the hiring, were they—was it a multiracial group or were they—?

01-00:24:07

Janoff:

No, it was white males. Overwhelming—90 percent white males. This is in the eighties. Yes.

01-00:24:19
Meeker: Was there any ethnic group, I assume, other than whites who were adequately or overrepresented?

01-00:24:27
Janoff: No.

01-00:24:28
Meeker: No?

01-00:24:29
Janoff: No.

01-00:24:31
Meeker: The consent decree was about Hispanics?

01-00:24:36
Janoff: Yes.

01-00:24:38
Meeker: What about the position of African Americans or Asians on the base?

01-00:24:42
Janoff: There were many African Americans—many black people on the base, but they were primarily relegated to lower graded positions. I can't remember one black supervisor. I can't. There may have been, but I can't remember any. But they were mostly what you would say worker bees. That's how I remember it.

01-00:25:03
Meeker: And Asian Americans?

01-00:25:04
Janoff: Lots of Filipinos, but again, in lower level— It was so predominantly white male at the Naval Air Station that I sort of see this monolithic block of white managers. That's how I remember it.

01-00:25:19
Meeker: Filipinos, they were considered Asian?

01-00:25:23
Janoff: Yes.

01-00:25:39
Meeker: I'm very interested in how the federal government determines, you know, who's black, and who's Asian, and who's Latino. I mean, Latino's not a racial category. It's primarily an ethnic language category. Filipinos can be sometimes placed in Latino category, sometimes placed in Asian, sometimes neither. These are imprecise categories that the government often will work with as if they were precise categories. Were you ever confronted with these difficulties of definition?

01-00:26:08

Janoff:

In the 1980s, there was very, very little guidance as to who was who. It was pretty much a do it yourself selection process. In other words, if you said you were a white, not Hispanic, that's the box you checked. So you had, as I recall, five or six boxes. White, white-Hispanic, Pacific Islander, African American?

01-00:26:36

Meeker:

American Indian.

01-00:26:37

Janoff:

American Indian. I think those were it, as I recall. But there was—this was a work in progress. And under President Reagan, I would say the rights of minorities was not on the short list of the executive branch. You know, I think it was a system that favored white people and perpetuated a culture of white managers—white male managers, especially in the military. I cannot speak to other agencies. But that's what I saw. I saw it from the day I arrived in the military in 1980 and I saw it the day I left on January 31, 1989.

01-00:27:19

Meeker:

So you were basically in the military for most of—or the Navy, rather—for most of the 1980s?

01-00:27:26

Janoff:

I was in the military for the entire 1980s—

01-00:27:27

Meeker:

Okay, for the entire 1980s.

01-00:27:28

Janoff:

—other than a few months, yes.

01-00:27:30

Meeker:

And that was a period of time in which there was no hot war? I mean, no Gulf War, no Vietnam War. But it was also a period of various military excursions. I'm wondering if the work that you did changed during those periods of military excursion. You know, like I guess there was Grenada and things in Central America and so forth.

01-00:27:55

Janoff:

Well, my work didn't change, but what did change was— And I saw an enormous crescendo, a buildup of forces, both under President Reagan and under President Bush. That's what I saw. Granted, I was in the Reserves for a short while. We were aiming for a 600-ship Navy, money was not an object. Facilities were getting bigger. There was just more people. It was a robust military to counter— I am not a geopolitician but I understood that President Reagan was outspending the Soviet Union and saying, "You cannot compete with us. Manpowerwise, Star Wars wise, you know, we will—we will bury you if you try to run up the score against us. You can't."

01-00:28:46
Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:28:48
Janoff: So it was an enormous buildup.

01-00:28:50
Meeker: Did they meet their goals as far as creating the—as you said, robust military?

01-00:28:56
Janoff: Yes, they did. Absolutely.

01-00:28:59
Meeker: I wonder then, you know, from maybe not within the military, but certainly as a civilian employee working for the military, how did that change after 1992?

01-00:29:13
Janoff: Well, after 1992, there—

01-00:29:15
Meeker: Or 1989 for that matter.

01-00:29:16
Janoff: Oh, we can start at 1989. At that point, the base realignment and closures started kicking in and under President Bush and they were closing bases left and right. They really were. I don't know the numbers, but so many bases. The obvious ones first and then the hardest choices later. Then the mother of all BRACS arrives in June of 1995 and they close more bases than in the three previous— At the same time, President Clinton is shrinking the government and balancing the budget. So we were getting small.

01-00:29:54
Meeker: Well, from the perspective of someone involved in the military, then, what was the rationale for closing the bases? I guess this is a two part question. What was the sort of overall rationale that was presented and then, two, what would make one base a more obvious target and another base a less obvious target?

01-00:30:16
Janoff: Well, the obvious reason was the Cold War was over. That—and the infrastructure that we had was a projection of our force to fight communism. You know, so we didn't need that anymore. The Soviet Union and Russia was becoming our ally. And then the second part of your question is—can you restate it again?

01-00:30:43
Meeker: Well, you had mentioned that there were some bases that were obvious targets for closures and other bases that were less obvious. What made a base an obvious target for closure?

01-00:30:54

Janoff:

Well, if there were no operational forces. If they were more an administrative base. Like let's take Treasure Island. Not particularly an operational base, there are just a few ships there. Presidio of San Francisco. They were very few.

01-00:31:11

Meeker:

What does an operational base mean versus administrative?

01-00:31:14

Janoff:

That you have units there that are ready to fight. That are training to fight. And then again, I think that—especially in the Bay Area, but we'll talk about this later, is that many of the bases were closed as a result of the Board of Supervisors, I believe in 1988, voting against home porting the Missouri Battle Group. And so my view was that the base realignment and closure, the Secretary—various secretaries of each service shut down military operations in the Bay Area in revenge. I think that's no mystery. That's not an urban legend. I believe that is true.

01-00:31:57

Meeker:

Can you tell me a little bit more about this? I know that there's undoubtedly a paper record of it, but from your memory. How did this unfold?

01-00:32:07

Janoff:

As I recall, as early as 1978, the Department of the Navy wanted to place the Missouri, which was a refurbished battleship from World War II, and its battle group, which I think was about twelve ships, but I could be wrong, at Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard. And the idea was that it would revitalize the economy there, there would be an environmental cleanup and you would have literally thousands of sailors and their family in San Francisco for a long period. I think the Board of Supervisors voted something like 11 to one against allowing the Missouri to be home ported. I think the secretaries of the various services heard this and said, "Okay. Well, if you don't want us, we'll pull out of there and we're going to put every installation, which they did, on the Base Realignment and Closure Act.

01-00:33:01

Meeker:

Every installation? Just in San Francisco or the entire Bay Area?

01-00:33:04

Janoff:

Whole Bay Area. The entire Bay Area. I think only one committee put on—that was the environment. But they closed everything. Everything. Every single base, including Monterey. I think that was done in reaction. I can't prove this but, you know

01-00:33:24

Meeker:

It doesn't look like a coincidence?

01-00:33:28
Janoff: No, it's on every base. No area in the United States was hit as hard as the Bay Area. None. By far. There's no place—even Charleston. Charleston still has part of the Naval Shipyard there.

01-00:33:39
Meeker: Um-hmm. It's interesting. I don't imagine that that Board of Supervisors vote was binding at all. I mean, it probably didn't have any authority when it came to the federal government.

01-00:33:49
Janoff: No, it did. It was completely binding.

01-00:33:52
Meeker: It was?

01-00:33:53
Janoff: It was, yes. Absolutely.

01-00:33:53
Meeker: Okay.

01-00:33:54
Janoff: Because I believe they owned the Navy—Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard.

01-00:33:58
Meeker: The federal government doesn't own it?

01-00:34:59
Janoff: No. It was a private shipyard. It was either owned by the city and they would need enormous cooperation from the city to facilitate this. You know— So it was—

01-00:34:11
Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:34:11
Janoff: Yes, it was binding.

01-00:34:13
Meeker: Where did the Missouri go?

01-00:34:14
Janoff: They scrapped it.

01-00:34:16
Meeker: They scrapped it.

01-00:34:16
Janoff: I think it's a museum in Hawaii. But I'm not sure where it is. But it's not operational. But—yes.

01-00:34:22
Meeker: Okay. All right. I'm going to change—

01-00:34:23
Janoff: I don't—I don't really know but it's not—it's not sailing.

01-00:34:26
Meeker: All right.

01-00:34:27
Janoff: Yes. It's not underway.

01-00:34:30
Meeker: Okay. So it's 1989 and you're released to the Reserves.

01-00:34:44
Janoff: That's correct.

01-00:34:46
Meeker: You said at the same time this position opened up at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:34:50
Janoff: That is correct.

01-00:34:51
Meeker: What was the position and can you just describe the process by which you applied for it?

01-00:34:56
Janoff: Sure. It was a labor counselor, GS-13, which would be a senior civilian position. Primary duties—or only duties would be defending the government in civilian personnel litigation. A friend of mine sent me the announcement. This was long before the internet. I sent back a résumé and received a call almost immediately. They wanted to set up an interview. I interviewed by telephone. They were interviewing everyone by telephone. And a month later I got a job offer. I found out there was never any doubt that they were going to hire me. They really liked me résumé. They liked me. I began work there on the fifteenth of October. Actually began October 20, 1989. I was supposed to start the eighteenth, but the earthquake occurred in 1989.

01-00:36:05
Meeker: Oh, wow.

01-00:36:07
Janoff: In the meanwhile, I took the California bar. That's why it didn't start right away. The announcement, I think, came out in like May. It came out in May and I had been studying for the bar and just doing some part-time work at a law firm. Nothing to mention here. It's inconsequential as to our discussion today.

01-00:36:30
Meeker: Who would have interviewed you for this position?

01-00:36:34
Janoff: It was the chief lawyer. His name was Richard {Wright?} and the other woman who works as—she's still there. She's counsel for the Port of Oakland. Is Marsha C. Peterson. P-E-T-E-R-S-O-N. They interviewed me August 2, 1989.

01-00:36:55
Meeker: Okay. So she transitioned from the army base to the port at some point?

01-00:37:00
Janoff: Yes, she did.

01-00:37:01
Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:37:01
Janoff: I don't know—I lost track with—of her long ago.

01-00:37:07
Meeker: Well, I might try to track her down.

01-00:37:10
Janoff: She's still there. She's at the Board.

01-00:37:11
Meeker: Okay.

01-00:37:11
Janoff: Yes. She was one of the first black attorneys, civilian attorneys, that worked for the Army.

01-00:37:22
Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:37:24
Janoff: She's a pioneer.

01-00:37:25
Meeker: Well, definitely should try to interview her. Well, tell me a little bit about experiencing the earthquake and how that impacted your career there. I mean, to the extent that it did.

01-00:37:42
Janoff: Well, all that it did really was that it delayed my start date. I began I think it was the eighteenth, which was Wednesday, and the earthquake occurred on the seventeenth and I got a call, I think on Wednesday, that said, "Non-essential personnel—"And lawyers are never essential personnel—"to report on Friday." And I came in and other than a little bit of traffic on maritime, it

was very—it was almost a non-issue. We just went back to work. And it makes for a great story, though.

01-00:38:17

Meeker: The base didn't sustain any damage?

01-00:38:19

Janoff: No, none whatsoever.

01-00:38:20

Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:38:20

Janoff: Some bookshelves fell.

01-00:38:21

Meeker: Okay.

01-00:38:23

Janoff: Oh, and the pier. They had to rebuild the pier, Pier Seven. They did. They rebuilt the pier. But I had nothing to do with that.

01-00:38:32

Meeker: Okay. So what was your workload like when you arrived? What sort of cases were you handling?

01-00:38:38

Janoff: My workload was overwhelming. I was handling many discrimination cases. They were piling—coming in at a rate of about one every three weeks. The reason for that is we had a very—we had an enormous workforce of 800 to 1,000 people in Oakland. We had various out posts; Seattle, Hawaii, Southern California. Complaints came from there, as well. Complaints came from there, as well. I remember going to Alaska. They were part of the Oakland Army Base's command. They were subcommands. And I was responsible for providing legal assistance, training, and defending the cases. So many—most of the cases were nonselections. Everyone in the federal government wants a higher grade. And when you don't get the higher grade again, there's a lot of bitterness— People are angry and they file complaints.

01-00:39:32

Meeker: Describe to me what the higher grade is because I'm not quite sure what that means.

01-00:39:37

Janoff: Well, the government has four pay systems, but I'm going to use the most common, which is the government GS, or general schedule. And within it are fifteen grades, one through fifteen. Within the grades are ten steps, and everyone wants to move from—let's see. I was hired as a GS-13, \$41,000. Well, my goal is to become a GS-14, where I might be hired at \$50,000. Or I would be working and suddenly wake up one day and say, "Oh, the work I'm

doing merits an increase in grade." Because the key is not so much the money you earn now, though that helps. It's all about retirement and how your retirement is affected. Your thrift savings plan contribution and how your retirement— Now, I'm not an expert in this, but I know that that is what peop—the reason and rationale people cite over and over again for wanting a higher grade. So I had many cases—they all sort of run together now, but they were cases of non-selections, employee discipline, of bargaining with the unions. But I rolled up my sleeves and I became—I was a full-time labor lawyer.

01-00:41:07

Meeker: So in these cases—and you said that you got one every three days, is that right?

01-00:41:12

Janoff: No, three weeks. I would say three to four weeks.

01-00:41:14

Meeker: One every three weeks. Okay.

01-00:41:15

Janoff: One would come in. Yes, absolutely.

01-00:41:18

Meeker: What percentage of these hinged on the question of discrimination on race?

01-00:41:25

Janoff: All of them.

01-00:41:27

Meeker: All of them. What about gender? Were any of them—?

01-00:41:29

Janoff: Secondary. I don't have percentages, but most were—most everybody, whether they were white or black, cited their race.

01-00:41:36

Meeker: And again here, were most of the complainants white men?

01-00:41:41

Janoff: About 50/50, I would say, because the—I would say that the work force was probably 50 percent black at the Oakland Army Base. Though these are approximations and it was a long time ago.

01-00:41:54

Meeker: Okay. But it sounds like the workforce was demographically quite different than it was on Alameda?

01-00:42:05

Janoff: Yes. And I attribute that to being really in the heart of Oakland—the heart of West Oakland. Yes, absolutely.

01-00:42:11

Meeker: So you attribute that to the proximity?

01-00:42:13

Janoff: 100 percent. Yes.

01-00:42:19

Meeker: On these questions of discrimination, did you find also that the port of—rather the Oakland Army Base, it was about 10 percent legitimate or maybe different?

01-00:42:30

Janoff: I would say about 10 percent legitimate. Very consistent percentages, yes.

01-00:42:36

Meeker: When there was an individual who made their case for having been discriminated against on the basis of race— I mean, the solution of course was to hire that person. But there's also another solution or another issue involved in that, and that is the individual or the unit or whatever who is apparently guilty of inappropriately judging someone on something other than their quality. How did the Army base deal with sort of hiring managers who may have a track record of being discriminatory?

01-00:43:15

Janoff: Well, when people apply for a job, whether they had had any complaints against them. I don't think it's a fair question to ask or it's something we would want to know. What often happens is that after a judge finds discrimination, the judge gives you—the agency a grace period. And I'm going to say—let's say—let's make up a number—sixty days to settle the case and say, "And if you settle the case and give the complainant the remedy that he or she is seeking, I will not issue a final decision. There will be no discrimination found." So we would settle the case. And this is done throughout the federal government. No admission of liability, so nobody's guilty. The person obtains relief. There is no finding of discrimination. So that's often what you do. You read the tea leaves and say, you know, "If she files—she's told us what she's doing to do. She's given us a chance to fix this without a formal finding." So many—you would not find, for the most part, a record, because a manager could, in good faith, say, "I have no discrimination against me,"—

01-00:44:26

Meeker: Yes.

01-00:44:26

Janoff: —because of that grace period that the judge allots.

01-00:44:30

Meeker: Okay. So what happens after you've been working there for a period of time? I mean, do you notice that certain managers have a tendency to have complaints against them and how do you respond to those?

01-00:44:43

Janoff:

Yes, we did. You address that with formal counseling, with training, and sometimes even with discipline. You know who the managers are. More often than not, the bad managers were the ones who were—not necessarily had a discriminatory animus, as we would say in the trade, but they were simply bad managers. They were vindictive, vengeful. They were culturally insensitive. They were bombastic, full of themselves. And this is not—this was a small percentage. But rarely did I find a discriminatory motive. I just found that they were mean. They were just mean-spirited, angry people.

01-00:45:31

Meeker:

Interesting. One second. I'll skip on that. Oh, yes. The way in which people described the Oakland Army Base in the end, I'm just—to get you to confirm it. Of, you know, these 800 to 1,000 people who are working there, I understand the very vast majority of them were civilians. There weren't a lot of enlisted military people.

01-00:46:06

Janoff:

When I was there, there was almost none. It was less than 1 percent of the workforce was military. Less than 1 percent.

01-00:46:12

Meeker:

I mean, that's fascinating to me, especially in the context of our current military campaigns and a great deal of publicity. And I think the context is a little different and what people are talking about is a little different, but I guess it's sort of increasing public awareness of the role of civilian contractors in military work. I mean, this really sort of highlights, I guess, a longer history of a fairly high percentage of civilian employees doing military work. Do you have any comment on that?

01-00:46:52

Janoff:

My only comment is that it's for economic reasons. You know, to move a military member around and pay a military member is so costly and then that person leaves after three years. You want institutional knowledge. Now, as far as contractors go, sometimes we think that the private sector is more efficient than, you know, government bureaucrats. That's just the reason. I don't have a comment on that one way or another. That's just the rationale that I hear. It's never really interested me. I just have to deal with my work. But I know what you're saying.

01-00:47:34

Meeker:

I mean, the reason I just bring it up is it's surprising to me and, you know, I don't know that I'm a particular representative of any group or anyone, but it's surprising to me that you have an Army base, and you know, let's say 99 percent of the people who work there on a daily basis are not members of the military.

01-00:47:58

Janoff:

Yes. And, in fact, you'll find that more often than not in the military. Well, the Department of Defense is the largest employer of civilians. They have more civilians than military.

01-00:48:11

Meeker:

Um-hmm, okay.

01-00:48:12

Janoff:

I'm not sure what the percentages are, but there are more civilians that work for the military. If you take the Corps of Engineers, I worked for the Corps for ten years after the Oakland Army Base. The Corps of Engineers is less than three—it's the Army Corps of Engineers. Less than 3 percent military. So it's—on the inside, you realize that's a very common thing. If you're looking from the outside, you would say, "How strange. An Army base with 1 percent military." Now, in the sixties and the fifties, it was thousands of military. Thousands. Up to 20—I think 30,000 it topped out at, military running around the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:48:43

Meeker:

Well, you were there during the ramp up to the Gulf War and the Gulf War itself?

01-00:48:47

Janoff:

Yes, I was.

01-00:48:49

Meeker:

Did that change the percentage at all for the base?

01-00:48:52

Janoff:

No. We hired more civilians and contractor people, but no. And we were working all the time. The lights were blazing, you know, loading those ships, but those were civilian ships. So it was just more civilians.

01-00:49:07

Meeker:

Well, how did the work change? Why did it become a 24-hour operation? What was going through that base during the Gulf War that didn't before or after?

01-00:49:22

Janoff:

Well, you have to remember that we had 400,000 military on the ground in Saudi Arabia. Now, there is what we call a tooth to tail ratio, which says that for every person doing the fighting, five people have to support that person. Concomitant with that support are supplies, and that's where the Oakland Army Base came in, with military traffic management command. So with 400,000 troops on the ground, and in January of 1991, no one was thinking that the war would be over in four weeks. We thought that with the National Guard, the Iraqi National Guard, it would be a long fight. So we had to send all kinds of equipment over there for a long—with a view towards a long

twilight struggle maybe. So there was only one military port on the West Coast and we were it.

01-00:50:19

Meeker: Oh, really?

01-00:50:20

Janoff: And I would really—that's where you want to talk to the people that—like the Grant Davis's and the Grant Davis's and the Mary Myers, people like that who were on the ground doing the loading. I was still doing my labor counselor work, but I have just observed it. You saw the warehouses, which now they're dismantling. The lights on there all the time. And then there was almost a mysterious surreptitious aspect to where we were meeting in locked hermetically sealed rooms talking about plans. There was this room, I remember, where we would talk about D-Day, or C-Day, and days from C-Day and trains with cargo that we couldn't name. I mean, I'm—it's been so long. But I remember there was an aspect to it that was almost like Mission Impossible or like CIA. It was very spooky. You know, but there I was in the nerve center. Sometimes I would attend these briefings. But it was—again, no one thought the war was going to be over in four—I think less than four weeks.

01-00:51:24

Meeker: Well, what were some of these mysterious items that were being shipped through the base?

01-00:51:29

Janoff: I'm sure they were chemical weapon antidotes and suits but I don't know. We would call them line items, so we didn't know what they were. But I'm only guessing.

01-00:51:46

Meeker: Okay. Because there weren't any weapons or ammunition being shipped through there, from what I understand?

01-00:51:52

Janoff: No, none. It all went through Concord.

01-00:51:55

Meeker: Okay, no weapons?

01-00:51:55

Janoff: None, zero. No weapons.

01-00:51:57

Meeker: So these would have been, you know, like you say, maybe sort of medicines or something along those lines.

01-00:52:01
Janoff: Yes. Antidotes to chemical biological warfare. But I don't know. But again, they would—we would just say line items so that you would never—you would never know.

01-00:52:09
Meeker: I know that I'll eventually interview some of these people or additional interviews with other people who were in a better position to observe what was going through, but what were some of the main things that were being shipped as far as you knew?

01-00:52:25
Janoff: I remember the trainloads of tanks. The Bradley fighting tank and then jeeps— I just remember all these tanks rolling on tanks. And the ships were called ROROs. Rolled on, roll off. You know, another train full of tanks. And just the piers, like a beehive. It's a cliché, but a beehive of activity. You know, it was like this is what it means to go to war. I was there.

01-00:53:00
Meeker: These were military ships and not civilian ships being used, correct?

01-00:53:05
Janoff: No, these were civilian ships.

01-00:53:06
Meeker: Oh, okay.

01-00:53:06
Janoff: These were civilian ships.

01-00:53:07
Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:53:08
Janoff: Yes.

01-00:53:12
Meeker: And the actual ports being used, I'm guessing were nearby civilian ports not the actual port land of the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:53:22
Janoff: No, we used the port. Pier Seven. That was our port.

01-00:53:25
Meeker: Oh, okay. All right.

01-00:53:26
Janoff: Yes. Oh, no, that's our port. It was the largest deepwater military port on the West Coast. The only one with the capacity to load all kinds of ships.

01-00:53:36
Meeker: I'm going to change the tape here.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 05-30-2008.wav

02-00:00:00

Meeker: Go ahead. You mentioned you wanted to pick up on the deep water port question.

02-00:00:21

Janoff: Yes. I have no doubt that had 9/11 occurred in 1994, a year before the BRAC Commission, that the Oakland Army Base would be with us today. You simply do not give away—you do not shut down a port of such value, such magnitude, such capacity and capability. But again, that didn't happen and even without Al Qaeda, even without 9/11, the vote to close the Oakland Army Base was five to three, because when you're talking about strategic power project, you need a port. You need a port that had those cranes, that had the rail, that had a kind of hidden facilities away from the public where people could—the military could do things without the public knowing or watching. Not that we were hiding anything, but you don't want a lot of circumspection and scrutiny of what you're doing in these kind of operations. So it was a very hard fought battle. Keep the Oakland Army Base open. Again, the final vote in June of 1995 was five to three. Most are eight to nothing. And again, you would want that base when you're fighting an enemy like Al Qaeda.

02-00:01:42

Meeker: Well, the question of BRAC, right, the realignment and closure is something that we'll be interviewing more about in the coming months. And I personally haven't done much interviewing on it. So unfortunately I don't think I'm prepared to ask a lot of questions about it.

02-00:01:59

Janoff: Okay, that's fine.

02-00:02:01

Meeker: But I am interested in hearing your perspective on, you know, why it happened, how it happened in the way that it did, and how it was that a base—such a unique base—you know, the only deepwater military port on the West Coast was ever really seriously considered and then how it was that it was ultimately closed. You know, who some of the main people were involved and the various sides of the debate and so forth.

02-00:02:32

Janoff: Well, what happened with the Oakland Army Base was unique in the history of base realignment and closure, which had begun in 1988. And I say unique because it was the only base that the Commission placed on the list after the Secretary of the Army or any service had said, "No, we're going to keep the base open." If you go back to February 28, 1995, when the list came out for BRAC 1995, the Oakland Army Base wasn't on it. However, our sister base at Bayonne, New Jersey, was on the list. The Commissioners asked why—I

think it was Secretary Cohn, William Cohn, why Bayonne and not Oakland. And I don't think that they ever got a serious answer. Then the Department of Defense—the BRAC Commission found in their view that the base was underutilized. Now, I don't know what that means. That there were not enough ships, not enough cargo. I never really understood that term, and therefore, they placed—on May 12, 1995, they sent out a revised list and the Oakland Army Base was then on the list. We held hearings. One was at Treasure Island. We submitted a rebuttal. And then on June 28th, I believe, 1995, the Base Realignment Closure Committee voted five to three to close the Oakland Army Base because it was underutilized. That was the word. But again, that was a very nebulous term. My perspective is that it's a bogus specious reason, because you don't close a port because it's underutilized. You keep a port for its potential. There wasn't a war. But again, the animus from the decision to not allow the Missouri was still part—was still weighing over everything.

02-00:04:51

Meeker: Interesting.

02-00:04:53

Janoff: But yes. You want to keep what we would call a 'hot port'.

02-00:04:57

Meeker: So those who were advocating for it to remain open—you said we. I'm wondering if you can tell me some of the players in this. Were these mostly civilians at the base? Were these military leaders on the West Coast?

02-00:05:13

Janoff: The two prime movers—one is deceased, one is Captain Scott Ensminger. That's E-N-S-M-I-N-G-E-R. He was a Navy captain. He was sort of the point man to make the formal rebuttal to the Base Realignment and Commission, which he did—and Closure Commission, which he did. It was absolutely brilliant, stunning, in its thoroughness, in its comprehension of strategic power and projection. He did that in June, I believe, of 1995. And the other was—I think he's still with the organization. It was a guy named Ruben Bagen—B-A-G-E-N—who had a lot to do with the manpower and he was chief of resource management. But he was also very involved. Again, I was literally a spectator. I was not involved in any way in this. It's just what I saw and my perceptions might even be incorrect.

02-00:06:13

Meeker: Okay. One of the questions that a lot of—I guess it's an open question that a lot of people bring up, is that—you know, how was it that this base was closed given, one, its strategic importance, and then also given the fact that it was in the backyard of the Chair of the House Armed Services Committee.

02-00:06:36

Janoff: Well, ironically, Dellums—Congressman Dellums was 100 percent for closing the base. His exact words were, "Close all the bases." I think he felt that in many aspects, the base was holding African Americans back because

they were—they remained laborers. They were not getting technically savvy. I think he wanted them to move to more white collar jobs. He never said that. That was my perception, but he did say, "Close all the bases and let people go out and get jobs." So he had no interest in keeping the base open. We never saw him in the fight to keep the base open. I never saw him the whole time that I worked there, which was almost eight years. I, again, thoroughly disagree with the decision to close. I would have not kept my job had they kept it open—apologize for that syntax. But even if they had kept the base open, my job would have moved.

02-00:07:56

Meeker:

[audio break due to background noise] So you were mentioning the role that Dellums played or didn't in this.

02-00:08:13

Janoff:

He had no role. He advocated closing the base and allowing people to move on with their lives. I think he felt that— When he saw people who had worked there since high school and in this isolated base, people who didn't have fundamental life skills other than doing that very specialized job at the Oakland Army Base, and he saw the Oakland Army Base as really holding people back. And in some ways, I agree with that. Now, in terms of geopolitical strategy and the capability and capacity of the base—to this day—and it would have had no effect on my job. My job would have gone to Virginia. I know that. But to close that base was a grave, grave error because today moving cargo would be so much easier to the Gulf right now. We're fighting two wars now. You need a base like the Oakland Army Base.

02-00:09:07

Meeker:

I wonder about this notion that you say that Dellums likely had about it holding back the black community, and particularly in Oakland and the areas surrounding the base. And I'm wondering if you can maybe just talk a little more about that given the fact that you were, you know, doing labor law at the base and that you were sympathetic with this point of view and I guess how did your work lead you to that point of sympathy?

02-00:09:39

Janoff:

Well, in many cases, I knew everybody on the base, and more often than not, people that worked there had worked there for many, many years and did not have what I would call fundamental life skills, whether that was being able to write—to write effectively, to even dress professionally. They were—and they not equipped if the base were to close. And I think that what Congressman Dellums was, you know, sometimes when you cannot go backwards, you have to go forward. You have to acquire these life skills. And if all you're going to do is be a forklift operator for the next forty years, there's not a whole lot of need for forklift operators. Base is going to close. But one way or the other, it's going to close. Let's move on. Let's get some technical skills here. Let's get some education. And that's what—I think that's where he was going. Of course, he didn't say this. It's just my perception. But I did meet so many

people, white and black, all races that could barely write an e-mail, that didn't know how to use computers. I would say, again, didn't know how to dress professionally. We were an isolated base. Didn't interact with the world. We simply just came to the Oakland Army Base.

And then there was also a real sense of entitlement at the Oakland Army Base. I think the workforce there felt that they took their breaks, which is fine. They had alternative workdays. They took long lunches. There was, I think, an abuse of the discretion given to federal employees. I think there was a real sense of entitlement. Some people didn't work very hard there. And, you know, it's not like that in the private sector. I think for moral reasons—and I want to be eminently clear on this point—there was a sense of entitlement and it was almost like a welfare state. Not all—everybody, but there was a bit of a welfare state. You know, that people didn't work that hard and got a lot of benefits for it. But again, I want to be clear. That's all races.

02-00:11:47
Meeker:

Yes. So that's an interesting point and I think that it's worth exploring a little bit more, especially in the context of, you know, the work that you did as a labor lawyer. I assume that maybe managers brought to your attention underperforming employees or something along those lines, and I'm wondering to the extent that it was dealt with at all, how was this sort of sense of entitlement or underperformance dealt with? Or did you make an effort? Was there like a legal remedy to this? Was there a labor remedy? I mean, how would you deal with something like this?

02-00:12:35
Janoff:

Well, first of all, if someone committed an offense, we had to hold that person accountable. But if it was a question of someone who was underperforming because of an inability to read, or to write, or to use the computers, we would always recommend mentoring, training, schools—which the Army has so many of—performance improvement plans. There were a number of tools. Now, the problem was that many of the managers were equally hitched to that gravy train and did not want to monitor the—to mentor that employee. They were more interested in getting home in their carpool at three o'clock. It looked like the Indianapolis 500 at 3:30, people just pouring out of there, you know. So again, I think that that mentality pervaded the whole base. That's me speaking, but I think it was true. I think that more often than not, people didn't work that hard there.

02-00:13:38
Meeker:

But I guess what I'm asking— Is there anything that you felt like or anything that you tried to do in the context of your job to reinvigorate the base with a work ethic or encourage managers to better mentor their employees or something along those lines?

02-00:13:54

Janoff:

Yes. I used to train managers in hotel rooms to provide schooling and, you know, how to counsel people along with human resources people. I did that training. But most of it fell along deaf ears, especially after Base Realignment Closure. The only thing people care about then is finding a job. You know, remember, the Base Realignment Closure happens in '95. I'm there another three years. So that went out the window. Then we were really trying to get a lifeboat for three years.

02-00:14:22

Meeker:

Well, can you describe those three years? The work that you did and how you—and how you managed to, I guess, sort of keep your sanity in the process.

02-00:14:31

Janoff:

Well, the workload changes. Where your work becomes finding a job and taking care of your future. I will give the Oakland Army Base a lot of credit. They advocated this. They told us—the Chief of Staff, a man named Colonel {Teryon?}, he got everybody together, and I'll never forget him saying this. I know it's a cliché. "Denial is not a river in Egypt. You know, this base is going to close. So get your résumé together; start looking." So that becomes your primary focus. And then from there—then you still have work. I mean, people were still filing complaints of discrimination and, you know. But you just don't—you do what you have to do and no more, because you know that come—I think it was '99, the games are going to close. So people—at first, they have the classic deer in the headlights. They pretend that it's not happening. They literally pretend that it's not happening. Whistling by the cemetery. And that's destructive. You're literally cooperating in your own destruction. You have to get ready for this transition. And then the Army—the Department of Defense starts coming in with speakers and telling you how to do a résumé and they open up a job center where you can use— We had 286 computers back then and yes, we didn't— This was a long time ago.

And then we moved from there to suddenly people are leaving. There's less people around. You see people checking out. They had something called the "Priority Placement List," which is where you sign up and you get a job at another agency. And then there's less—again, less people. And then they offer counseling. They have counseling services, whether it's the chaplain or the employee assistance program. But it's all geared to—you know, this train's pulled out of the station. We are closing. You need to find a job or retire. Many people retire because it was an elderly workforce. But it's both a very scary time and an exhilarating time, because you know you're going to be doing something else. And the Department of the Army's track record is a very good one. They place almost every one. No one's put out on the street unless you want to be put out on the street. But they will find you a job. They found me a job.

02-00:16:57

Meeker: Okay. Well, tell me about that.

02-00:16:59

Janoff: Well, in 1996, late October, I received a call from the Judge Advocate General's office in Washington, DC, because I worked for the—that's the Army lawyers. And they said that there was a job waiting for me at Fort Carson, Colorado as a labor counselor and a contracts attorney. I had some contracts experience. And all I had to do was say yes. I decided not to accept the offer because I wanted to find a job in the Bay Area, which I ultimately did. I have very, very marketable skills as a labor counselor, and I knew that it would—I was getting many hits, interviews, coming close to offers, getting offers out of town. So I was not worried at all. I really wasn't. I knew that something would come up, and it did. But it was just a delight to get this call out of the blue saying, "That job is yours. Move out. You have to be there in thirty days." But Fort Carson, Colorado, is a great place to live. Very, very good standard of living.

02-00:17:53

Meeker: Where is Fort Carson?

02-00:17:53

Janoff: Outside of Denver, near—I don't know where—I don't know. I've never been there, but I heard it would have been the perfect job. The base would never close. I didn't even apply for the job. They just called me and said, "It's yours."

02-00:18:08

Meeker: Interesting.

02-00:18:08

Janoff: Yes, it was great.

02-00:18:09

Meeker: Well, what was the position that you ended up with?

02-00:18:12

Janoff: I ended up as a labor counselor with the United States Army Corps of Engineers in the San Francisco District. I reported on May 27, 1997 in downtown San Francisco at 333 Market Street. And I stayed there for ten years. To the day—literally to the day. So I had no problem finding a job. I had many offers and it was just choosing among several offers.

02-00:18:40

Meeker: Did being one of the labor lawyers at the Oakland Army Base— What role did you play in helping shrink the workforce?

02-00:18:53

Janoff: Well, I was advising human resources on how to run what we call a reduction in force, making sure that we complied with the letter and both the spirit of the

law. That we had never done one at the Oakland Army Base to the best of my knowledge, and because it was new, we—and these were managers, too, that would be looking for work. We all had to sort of focus on this aspect of—and then also we were setting up a new command in Newport News and I was—I remember this very vividly. Justifying positions there for the lawyers. I was helping to write the job descriptions for the new command in Newport News closed—is closing. But most of that time, Martin, to be honest, is a blur because I was interviewing and I don't have a very good recollection. And on a personal note, my dad had passed away and my mom was health—they're both deceased now. I had some personal issues that I had to take care of, and so again, that's kind of a blurry nebulous time in my life.

02-00:20:06
Meeker:

So the '96 to '99 period was—or '95?

02-00:20:10
Janoff:

'96 to '97.

02-00:20:11
Meeker:

'96.

02-00:20:11
Janoff:

Because I left—I left on— My last day was May 15, 1997.

02-00:20:15
Meeker:

Oh, okay.

02-00:20:17
Janoff:

So Thursday. I remember it very, very well. I remember driving away from the base for the last time.

02-00:20:23
Meeker:

You know, we've just got a few more minutes and one of the things that— We've got these sort of various themes that we're working with and, you know, one of them is sort of the core functions of the base, and that's really talking to the transportation engineers and everything.

02-00:20:41
Janoff:

Right. I really can't help you with that.

02-00:20:42
Meeker:

And then another notion is the idea of a city within a city. But actually, I mean, the social life on the base, the cultural life on the base. And I think those are questions that are mostly directed towards, you know, World War II and the Korean War and the Vietnam era when there were a number of service people on the base and they were living there.

02-00:21:08
Janoff:

Yes.

02-00:21:10

Meeker:

And, you know, getting their food there and entertainment and everything like that. And it seems to me like by the time that you're on the base in 1989—at the end of 1989, that it's really kind of more like an office park than an Army base.

02-00:21:28

Janoff:

I would agree completely. I really couldn't tell you about any kind of life or culture. They were already moving people out of housing and it was just a place where people went to work. That's how I remember it. But one thing you might want to look at is Humanities Week, which was unique to the Oakland Army base. I would strongly urge you to talk to each employee about their memory of Humanities Week, which was like—and then became Humanities Day. The last one was in August of '97 and we would erect booths and serve ethnic food and invite other agencies and have presentations by all kinds of ethnic groups to celebrate diversity. I think the Oakland Army Base was way, way ahead of that. I remember that you would take time off to build the booths and you'd go cooking and then there would be dances and bands. You know, it was all with a view towards celebrating who we were as a community and where we were from. I just have great memories of Humanities Week.

02-00:22:30

Meeker:

Well, where did this come from, if this was quite apart from what was happening at other military installations? I'm wondering where the impetus for something like this would have come from?

02-00:22:43

Janoff:

Well, remember, you're in Oakland and Oakland is near Berkeley and it's near San Francisco and I think that it has sort of a left—I don't want to label people as liberal or leftist, but let's use the word more progressive view. It absorbed the culture. San Francisco celebrates diversity and that rubbed off into Oakland. And it came—originally, as I recall—I wasn't there—from the EEO office. And your point of contact there is a lady named Annie Crayton—C-R-A-Y-T-O-N. And she was the head of the EEO office when it closed and she was involved in Humanities Week. But that was a very integral part of our lives. I think it was every August. So that's really the only, like I saying, the cultural style, living. That's really all I remember, because we didn't do anything. One thing that I would characterize about the base is it's extremely isolated. Very isolated geographically and culturally.

02-00:23:50

Meeker:

How did that work out in reality? Can you provide an example or an anecdote that helps communicate that?

02-00:22:59

Janoff:

Well, I think that people rarely ventured off the base at all. I think they came to the base at seven o'clock. They left at 3:30. I think we had almost no interaction with the city, with the Port of Oakland, with the Pacific Maritime

Association, with—even, let's say, the legal office, my own. No outreach to other federal attorneys. I remember the attorneys just had nothing to do with other federal agencies. My bosses. They just came to work and they left. That's how I remember it. We just were so insular. We didn't reach out in any way to other people, other agencies. State, federal, whatever.

02-00:024:50

Meeker: Why do you suppose that was?

02-00:24:57

Janoff: I think people were very, very happy with their lives as they were. No one ever thought the base would close. They made really good money there. Didn't have to work that hard. Why extend beyond. Why do more than you really needed to do. That was my sense.

02-00:25:13

Meeker: Did the base also feel isolated from the West Oakland community?

02-00:25:18

Janoff: Yes.

02-00:25:19

Meeker: Or did it feel a part of it?

02-00:25:19

Janoff: No. It was nonexistent. We adopted a school, but I don't remember much about it. It was called the Ralph Bunche school. But what I do remember was that it was just a very, very small percentage of the work with that school. I think white people were afraid of West Oakland, didn't venture out. I think the black people were also scared. But it was very, very little community outreach. Almost none.

02-00:25:48

Meeker: I assume that you had some friends who were African American who worked there?

02-00:25:53

Janoff: Many.

02-00:25:53

Meeker: Where did they live? It sounds like they didn't live in West Oakland, they lived maybe in a different— Like North Oakland or—?

02-00:25:58

Janoff: They lived in Vallejo, Fairfield, Central Oakland. Ms. Crayton lived in Central Oakland. Alameda.

02-00:26:08

Meeker: Central Oakland like Lake Merritt, area?

02-00:26:10

Janoff: Lake Merritt. Ms. Crayton lived right off of Lake Merritt, yes. So no, I didn't know anybody that lived in West Oakland.

02-00:26:14

Meeker: Okay, that's interesting. And just one more thing, sort of about recruiting. You had mentioned some of the recruiting plans when you were in Alameda. Were there any specific places you remember recruiting from when you were at the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:26:35

Janoff: I remember there was a black law students association. I can't remember it. But that was an avenue the Oakland Army Base used to find black lawyers, but with no success. No success whatsoever. There were very, very few black civilian lawyers working for the Army. Almost none.

02-00:27:01

Meeker: So, for instance, when you—when there was participation with the Ralph Bunch School—I don't know if that was a high school or not.

02-00:27:09

Janoff: Elementary school, I think, but I don't remember. I don't remember.

02-00:27:11

Meeker: Okay, all right. So you don't recall any partnership with like a high school or a merit college, or something like that?

02-00:27:17

Janoff: Oh, nothing.

02-00:27:19

Meeker: Trying to get—nothing like that.

02-00:27:19

Janoff: Nothing. Nothing at all. No, nothing.

02-00:27:24

Meeker: All right. Well, I think that we're at about an hour and a half and I should probably let you go, but I want to give you an opportunity to say any last thing, or if you think that there's something else that I should be following up on before I turn off the camera.

02-00:27:40

Janoff: Let me first comment on a personal level. I spent my thirties at the Oakland Army Base. I arrived there when I was thirty-two, I left when I was forty. I think that I am who I am because of the tremendous experience that I had at the Oakland Army Base. So I was a supervisor and full-time attorney. I had many collateral duties. I met terrific people. I gained a reputation as an advocate during my time and I had a lot of fun. I think that I look back on those years with nothing but joy. I think, as corporately, that I still to this day feel that we cheated our country and the world in many ways by, I'm not

overstating this, by closing that base. The fight in the war against terror, I think what the Oakland Army Base, in retrospect, failed itself because it did not market itself impressively. It did not do the work it needed to do to become important to the private sector. So in many ways we sow the seeds in our own destruction. But again, I am proud of my service there and what it did for this country and I can't say it hard enough. I can't say it with more emphasis, that it made me who I am professionally.

02-00:29:14

Meeker:

Well, I just want to follow-up on one thing that you said, and you mentioned something about competing with the private sector. I mean, how was it that the base did compete and how was it that they failed to compete?

02-00:29:28

Janoff:

Well, in terms of shipping cargo both the private sector and the Oakland Army Base ships cargo and our rates to ship cargo were much higher than private industry. We did not focus on that as an organization. We focused on oftentimes on minutia and folklore and things that had nothing to do with keeping the base alive. We worried about the ridiculous sometimes. We worked on things that had no bearing on our future, you know.

02-00:30:34

Meeker:

For example?

02-00:30:34

Janoff:

One of the primary concerns that one of the commanders had, and I am not joking, is he spent a lot of time fighting a battle—and this is in 1993—on the vendors on Maritime Street, the hotdog vendors. That they needed to be paying a tax or some money—they were unfairly competing with the Exchange. Now, that had absolutely nothing to do with whether we would—Another crusade he had was that he was very upset that there were—California Highway was inspecting trucks on maritime and they needed to cease—that was fundamentally unsafe. What he based that on I don't know. But we in the legal office spent an inordinate amount of time. And there was a lot of that. A lot of, again, minutia and folklore. I don't think we grasped the fact that we needed to reinvent ourselves, reorganize ourselves, and compete. And we went right down the drain in 1995.

02-00:31:34

Meeker:

Do you think it's possible for a military installation, albeit one staffed 99 percent by civilians, to almost act as a private entity and reinvent itself and market itself?

02-00:31:50

Janoff:

No.

02-00:31:50

Meeker:

I mean, it seems like that's anathema to the institution.

02-00:31:54

Janoff:

I think it's almost impossible. I just don't think people had the motivation to do that. I don't think they realized until the vote of the BRAC Commission that we were in as deep waters—in the proverbial big muddy, you know, as we were. People didn't realize that the water was rising. Yes.

[End of Interview]