

AL 95

Interviewee: Elise C. Jones

Interviewer: Connie Llewellyn

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L: This is Connie Llewellyn interviewing Elise Jones at her home in Gainesville, Florida on January 28, 1988 on the founding and early years of the Junior League of Gainesville, founded as the Junior Welfare League of Gainesville. Good afternoon, Mrs. Jones.

J: Good afternoon, Connie.

L: I would like to start by getting some biographical information from you. First, what is your full name?

J: Elise Cecil Jones. Cecil is C-E-C-I-L which was my father's middle name and in later years my mother added an "E" onto it to make it feminine but according to the records it is Cecil.

L: Elise Cecil Jones, that is very pretty.

J: Thank you.

L: Where were you born?

J: I was born in Starke which is just about thirty miles north of Gainesville.

L: And when were you born?

J: February 6, 1910.

L: How did you come to Gainesville?

J: Well, my father had several businesses and he, for some reason, decided he would open a business in Gainesville. He used to come over, of course, a lot and the family decided well, maybe they would like to live in Gainesville. My brother, I think he was in eighth grade. So they came over and he went to Gainesville. Well, he did not go to Gainesville High School, he went to Riverside Military Academy then he went to the University of Florida. So they liked Gainesville, my mother liked Gainesville so they decided to move here.

L: How old were you when they moved here?

J: I was a sophomore in college at the time.

L: So you really grew up in Starke.

- J: Yes, I did. I graduated from high school there.
- L: You were not in school in Gainesville, in college?
- J: No. I went to Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, right out of Atlanta.
- L: A lovely place.
- J: My mother went there and I had an aunt who went there for a year; my mother went for two years. She had a music scholarship. But I did not. I never had a scholarship of any kind.
- L: What did you study? I majored in math and psychology. It was interesting.
- L: I bet.
- J: They happened to be easy subjects for me so I am sure that is one reason I chose them.
- L: Because you were good at them, I am sure. What did you do when you finished at Agnes Scott?
- J: I cannot quite remember the sequence of events, but I did work in Montgomery, Alabama with what was called the Resettlement Administration.
- L: What was that?
- J: That was about the time of one of the depressions and the Resettlement Administration was established to help people have some work to do and they went into areas where they were being sure that people had homes and work. I happened to be in the administration and was in charge of the payroll office so I really did not have much to do with the actual working outside other than just in the administration. But it was interesting and I enjoyed Montgomery. I had college friends there which made it nice. And then, I think the office was moved, or at least the district office was moved to Jacksonville and I went there and stayed a while. Then I went down to Welaka on the St. Johns, I think it is St. Johns, and I was there for a short time too with the Resettlement Administration.
- L: Well, how did you come to Gainesville to live?
- J: Well, as I say, my parents moved over here.
- L: So eventually you moved to Gainesville.
- J: Yes.

- L: Were you still working with the Resettlement Administration at that time?
- J: Well, actually, I moved here with my family when I was a sophomore in college except I really was not here. Of course I really was not here in the summertime because we had a summer home on Kingsley Lake about seven miles from Starke and we used to spend our summers there so I was in Gainesville very little until after I graduated from college and really came back from Montgomery, Alabama. I have been here, sort of off and on. I went to Japan right after the Second World War, to Hawaii and Japan. I was with what they called the Special Services Division and I was in the recreation department and again I was in administration. We supervised what they called the service clubs. They were clubs set up for the enlisted men where they could go and play games and pool and have some entertainment in the evening.
- L: Well now, were you actually employed by the military? Were you in the military?
- J: Special Services was attached to the military but it was not a permanent part of the military and it never became a permanent part. I do not know what has happened in later years. But then, after the war and after the no need for that type of thing, as I understand it, it was just stocked, but it had had that kind of service.
- L: Well that sounds like a fascinating opportunity to go to the east like that--to Japan and Hawaii. How did you like it?
- J: Oh, I loved it. It was very different, of course, particularly in Japan. Of course I thought Hawaii was just beautiful and I enjoyed that. Life in Japan was just so completely different from life in the United States that it was quite fascinating.
- L: Was this after the Second World War, you said now, when you were in Japan? Did you see any of the destruction from the war?
- J: Yes. Of course that was not very pleasant knowing that we were responsible.
- L: Yes, I am sure that was difficult.
- J: But it is an interesting country.
- L: I would like to talk to you some more about that some other time, too. Sounds like a lot of interesting things there. In the 1930s, in the Depression--were you in Gainesville in the 1930s? You were, am I right?
- J: Well, yes. Part of the time I was here. I was in Jacksonville part of the time.

L: Throughout Florida, during the Depression, were there bread lines where you were?

J: Yes, I am sure there were.

L: I am just interested in knowing how much the Depression affected people's lives where you were living at that time.

J: Well, up close we did not have much money to operate on and certainly not to do a lot of traveling, a lot of buying. But everybody was in the same boat. It was not as though you were trying to keep up with somebody else or wishing that you could do what they were doing, at least I did not have that feeling. I did not seem to realize that I was deprived of many things. I seemed to have what I needed. Enough certainly to keep me busy and occupied, enough activity. The money was scarce but I seemed to managed to enjoy life.

L: I want to talk to you this afternoon about the forming of the Junior Welfare League in Gainesville and about the early years and your part in it.

J: Well, the organization, I think it became a part of the Women's Club in the beginning and then we met on Ann Carrie McCullum's porch and we organized what was called the Junior Welfare League. Then, before the charter was devised and signed, I left Gainesville and went to Hawaii and went to areas where I could not participate in this. So I think I am right on the dates. Someone signed my name to the charter for me and then, of course, when I came back, I came back as an active member. So I really was not in on the organization too much except just as a name on the list.

L: Just sort of. And Mrs. McCullum was your sponsor?

J: Yes.

L: How was she selected or did she select you all?

J: I think maybe she selected us. She had two nieces here, Kitty Kincaid Fiever and Louise Kincaid. We were all friends and it was just sort of a group that got together.

L: Were there age stipulations?

J: There must have been but I do not recall. I think you could not go in if you were over a certain age. There was a certain limit and I cannot remember whether it was thirty. Right in the beginning I think we served only seven years as active members. I am not sure what the situation is now, whether you go in and just go out at a certain age or what.

L: Were there certain things that you had to do during that seven year membership?

J: I think we had to work so many hours a year on the projects and so on. Of course people who worked during the daytime had a little difficulty working on the daytime projects so there were other duties we were given and some of the things that we could do either after five o'clock or in the evenings.

L: What sorts of things were those?

J: Well, I am just trying to think what I did do. Well, of course on Saturdays, I could work at what we used to call the Salvage Shop. I think now they call it the Thrift Shop. Then, of course, I could help collect things for the Salvage Shop. I seemed to manage to be able to make my time on my off hours.

L: Did many of the young women work during the day.

J: Well, I do not know that many of them did. Of course they had families. During the Depression, I do not know that help was quite as prolific as it was in earlier years. It was not quite as available. That is a little bit misty in my mind right now.

L: Well, I want to ask you about something that you mentioned a minute ago, the Salvage Shop. Was this one of your projects?

J: Yes.

L: Tell me a little bit about this.

J: We collected clothes and most anything we could that people were discarding that we thought other people could use and we made them available to the low income group at a very small cost. It was not only a way of making money for the League, but principally it was really to help people obtain things that they needed at a low cost.

L: I see. Where was it located?

J: At one time it was located--let me see, the Presbyterian Church was torn down, it was right across the street from the Presbyterian Church. It was something like Second or Third Street and it was on the south side of University Avenue. It was behind, I think, a clothing store right back in there but it has all been torn down now.

L: What was that first little shop like?

J: It had a space on the south side where you could come in and park. It was just

the sand; it was not paved. We had sort of a back door to the shop where you could go in and take your things. Then, of course, we had a front entrance for customers to come in from the street side. I believe there was one room where the customers came in then I think we had a room in the back where we took things and prepared them for putting them up for sale and tagging them and getting them in good order.

L: Who did this?

J: The members.

L: The members volunteered to do this?

J: Yes.

L: How did that work?

J: As I say, we had to spend so many hours working. I think we chose our projects as to what we would work on. Eventually we did hire a person to be in the shop and sort of be the salesperson, then she would have help from the League members. But it was a little difficult to program the League members for each hour during the day so we did have a hired helper.

L: What hours were the shop open? Was it open every day?

J: I do not quite remember. I do not recall. It seems to me at one time they were open only on Saturday. And then I am not sure whether they opened several days a week or whether they were open all the days of the week. I just do not recall. As I say, I was in and out of town so much of the time, I just do not recall.

L: Where did you get the salvage to put in the shop?

J: From friends, from our own homes, things that we were giving up, clothes that had gone sort of out of style or our children had out-grown. Some of us got fat!

L: Was this one of your earliest projects?

J: As I recall, yes. This "Events by the Year" says in 1935 that the League was formally organized. I guess one of the first projects was to serve hot lunches at the school. Up until that time, I do not think that they had any lunches or lunchrooms. I think we established that. Then, as I say, we established the Salvage Shop. We avidly sponsored the University of Florida Symphony Orchestra and also helped sponsor a dental clinic. I do not know whether we really started that or whether we just assisted in that. I do not quite recall. Then for raising money we had dances and silver teas.

- L: What is a silver tea?
- J: I do not know why we called it a silver tea unless it is because of the silver teapot. I do not know.
- L: I had seen that written and I was curious why it had that name.
- J: I do not know why it was called the silver tea.
- L: I think you did a lot of social kind of things to raise money.
- J: Yes, we did.
- L: The community must have responded generously or you would not have continued doing it. They must have been profitable.
- J: Well, apparently it was.
- L: I was interested in that. I saw where you gave New Year's Eve balls and the costume ball and then the silver tea as you said.
- J: I would say bridge parties.
- L: I read about one bridge cruise they called it where one of the prizes was a trip to New York.
- J: Is that right?
- L: I figured they must have made a lot of money to have somebody donate a prize like that.
- J: Well, I said that a costume in 1937, costume ball, tea dances and bridge parties to support kids free lunch program.
- L: I wanted to ask you more about that free lunch program, too. Where was that located?
- J: It was in the school. I think the school has been torn down now and I think it was called the Metcalf School.
- L: Over on the east side?
- J: Yes, over on the east side.
- L: I was wondering how your group found out or decided that was a need to be done.

J: Well, of course that was sort of during the Depression years and I am not sure just how that project--I do not know whether we discovered it or whether the school board asked us to investigate or the principal asked us to investigate. I do not recall. The daughter of the principal of the school was a member of the League.

L: Who was that.

J: Winifred Metcalf. She is Mrs. Tom Brand and she has moved from Gainesville. She does not live here now. She is off in California.

L: She was a member of the League in that period.

J: In fact, I think she was a charter member.

L: What can you tell me about how a lunchroom program operated? Were you ever involved in that?

J: No, I really was not because I was working.

L: That would be difficult.

J: So it would have been difficult for me.

L: Who do you remember who was involved in it?

J: Let us see.

L: That is a hard question. They had so many committee chairmen.

J: I just do not recall.

L: I was interested in knowing how they would decide, I do not know how many children they fed or how they decided who would be eligible.

J: I do not know whether they depended on the welfare department to determine the eligibility of the children or whether the League itself but I rather suspect the League itself did not determine but I am not sure of this.

L: I cannot help but wonder from where you are telling me the school is located, did it serve primarily black children?

J: No.

L: It did not. It served only white children?

- J: Yes, I guess it did serve only white children then. Because the west side of Gainesville is comparatively new. The west side of Gainesville is comparatively new. The city moved from east to west. You see the far east side of Gainesville was the Negro area but the northeast was one of the main residential areas. In fact, my family lived there for years and our old home is still there. And people have sort of gone back to the northeast now, buying up the homes.
- L: I think that is nice. I noticed in the newspaper, some of the columns mentioned that it was the Eastside School and I think I must have got that confused in my mind with the current Eastside school. You also mentioned the clinics, you said something about a dental clinic.
- J: Yes, and I know very little about the dental clinic because I was not able to participate in that and I just do not remember.
- L: Later on did the League establish a clinic for babies?
- J: I believe they did have a well-baby clinic, yes.
- L: And a prenatal clinic to go along with that to check for the pregnant mothers.
- J: Right.
- L: I was also interested in your term as president. I think you served as president of the League from 1939 to 1940.
- J: I guess maybe I did. I had forgotten about that.
- L: That was right about the time of the coming of the war and I was wondering, did the people in Gainesville, really think war was coming then, you know, when Poland was invaded, and England and France declared war. Think back to that period.
- J: I do not know that I thought too much about it except that at that time, as I recall, Camp Blanding was established or somewhere in that era and, of course, we had soldiers coming in there to be trained and not knowing where they were going or what was going to happen. On Saturday nights we organized dances and things like that for the soldiers to come in from Camp Blanding and take part.
- L: This was in the town now?
- J: Just in the town, I do not know that the League did that. I had forgotten now just how that came about.
- L: So there was some military activity that was building up.

- J: Yes, and then of course the University of Florida had an officer's candidate school at that time. That meant that there were a lot of military out on the campus also and they sort of participated in the town activities that we planned for them, soldiers.
- L: I was just wondering, if this community was becoming aware of the fact that war was near or about to happen, how that would affect the community and your daily life and maybe even the needs of the community?
- J: Well, I can only think maybe from my father's point of view, he had a Coca Cola plant in Starke, and of course Blanding was built about seven miles out of Starke and of course his Coca Cola business just mushroomed. I started working for him and we just had to do a lot to meet the needs. But of course, then when Camp Blanding closed down, then that need was over. But I went back and forth to Starke and worked quite a bit of the time during that era.
- L: Goodness, that is a long drive.
- J: Well, it was kind of long.
- L: How did you come to be the president of the League?
- J: Well, Ruth Atwood had been elected president and served during the summer until, I think, the end of September and then her husband was at the University of Florida on the faculty and I guess he accepted another position elsewhere so they moved in September and--I was just looking at some notes. I did not know whether I was vice president and took over but I noticed I was nominated for president to take her place so that was the reason for my being president when she left.
- L: So you served from September of 1939 through June 4th of 1940.
- J: Yes.
- L: What do you remember about your year? What stands out most in your mind?
- J: Well, it was a busy year. I was living at home with my parents and every time the phone rang, my mother just would not bother to answer it. If I were home, I answered the phone because it was usually something that involved the League. So it was almost a full-time job.
- L: I bet it was. Now that was the year that you had the first follies, was it not?
- J: Yes, I believe it was.

L: What was that all about?

J: Well, I remember the first night of the follies, the first night it was put on, it was at the old Gainesville High School which, as I say, has been torn down. I went out and stood by the hedge out near the front and was just as sick as I could be. It really got to me. But it went off well. I remember, I did sort of poke my head in every once in a while when I felt up to it, and one of the things I remember seeing was, Jeanette Shaw Harp who lives here in the villa, she and two other persons, and I do not remember whether they were boys or whether they were other members of the League, but after every scene, they were dressed as this little rag tags, and after every scene they would sort of slump across the stage in front of the curtain and go out. Well, of course it was hilarious just to watch them cross the stage. And that happened after every scene. They were cute.

L: Explain to me what a "follies" is.

J: Well, it was various types--some of it was dancing, some was singing. I think there may have been a few little skits incorporated into the program but in various scenes, various activities. It was not like a continuous play or anything like that. It was an evening of live entertainment then.

L: And you used that as a fundraiser.

J: Yes.

L: What did you do to make money off of it.

J: Well, of course we sold tickets. I will tell you, ordinarily, someone came in, and they usually sent a director, one person in, and they helped us organize the follies. So that was the main way it was put on.

L: And then your group supplied the talent?

J: We supplied the talent. We, of course, under the director's direction, we did the program, we got the talent, we got the place, obtained the place to have it. Of course, the main thing the director did was to determine what kind of little scene we will have here. And, of course, a lot of that depended on the talent we were able to draw.

L: Did you get talent exclusively from inside your group or did you ask the community too?

J: Oh, no, the community helped.

L: Did you get a very wide acceptance?

J: Yes, we really did.

L: I bet that was a lot of fun.

J: It was. It was lots and lots of fun.

L: So you mainly made money off the sales of tickets then?

J: Yes. And then of course we had programs where people advertised and we made money off of that. In fact, I thought I had one of the programs--maybe not.

L: I think there was one in that scrapbook. I guess that is where I saw it, yes.

J: I saw in looking at the minutes of your meetings that you all went to a meeting in Deland. You went and I believe Marjorie Hussy went. It was a meeting of the Junior Welfare Leagues of Florida. Yes, we did and we belonged to that organization. We went down for a Florida meeting. I think it was just the Florida clubs.

L: What was the purpose of that?

J: I really do not know why we organized except maybe to determine what each one was doing in the way of projects and just profiting from other people's experience mainly.

L: Was it a good meeting?

J: As I recall, it was, but I cannot tell you any of the details. I also saw where you were appointed to a position on the board of the Alachua County Health and Welfare Council in 1940. You all must have been working with them.

J: Yes, I think we were.

L: You were just mentioning the follies program. Is that what you have there?

J: Yes. Because I see that I wrote an open letter from the president. I was president at the time and I do not know whether this has any date on it or not. I do not see any date on this but I am sure this was the first follies.

L: What was the name of the review?

J: *Rollin' Rhythm*, 1940.

L: Okay.

J: *Rollin'*, and it was without the "g".

- L: I see. And you were showing me a newspaper clipping that you had.
- J: Yes.
- L: What is it?
- J: Well, under the picture itself, it says, "Junior Welfare League group," and it names the officers and directors and then I think it gives just the officers and directors of the Junior Welfare League are shown above. They are back row, left to right: Mrs. Sidney Robertson, social chairman; Mrs. D.K. Stanley, membership chairman; Mrs. Claude F. Lee, ways and means chairman, Mrs. Wilma Bishop, vice president; Mrs. John Maynas, treasurer; Mrs. F.A. Canova, service chairman; Mrs. E.H. Andrews, investigation chairman; Mrs. Elias Jones, corresponding secretary. Then front row, left to right: Miss Winifred Metcalf, publicity chairman; Miss Jeanette Shaw, newly elected president; Mrs. J. Max Dell, Jr., retiring president, Miss Patricia O'Neal, historian. Some of these I could not recognize until I saw the names and sort of counted back.
- L: I am sure the hair styles and fashions were very different.
- J: Now that I have looked at it several times, I recognize the people quite well, but not having seen it for some time, I was a little puzzled.
- L: I heard that the Welfare League wrote a cookbook, too.
- J: Right, they did.
- L: Tell me about that.
- J: Well, we solicited people all over town to submit their favorite recipes and we published a cook book. I do not know, I think maybe I have the cook book. Then I think that we, after it was given out, we had to publish it a second time.
- L: Well, that is good.
- J: Would you like me to see if I have it? It is right in the kitchen.
- L: I think the name of that first cook book was called *Culinary Crinkles*.
- J: It could have been. That sounds familiar.
- L: So that was one of two cook books that the League has published?
- J: Well, apparently the *Gator Cook Book*, I did not see any date in the book as to when it was published but I know of two and I do not know whether there have been any more or not or whether the last one was just revised.

- L: I see. The year that you were president, I noticed that the League, in addition to doing the projects that you have told me about, like the lunch room and the salvage shop, that you helped with other projects that were going on in town.
- J: Yes, we did. I do not recall but we did if someone else organized something or if a group of people, we may have been part of the group, organized some type of activity, of course we took part. I do not recall exactly.
- L: I remember reading that you worked for tuberculosis seals that you collected for that.
- J: Yes, I am sure that was one of them.
- L: And something called the Empty Stocking Fund. What was that?
- J: Well, at that time there were a lot of people in Gainesville who did not have enough money to celebrate Christmas. So we attempted to find toys and all kinds of things and fix up Christmas stockings that could be given to indigent families.
- L: Was this a project of the Welfare League or did go all around.
- J: I do not think it was a project of just the Welfare League, I think we participated. It was more of a community project and I cannot remember what other participated clubs but I do not think it was our project. Now, I could be wrong on that.
- L: I also saw where you worked with the Gainesville Civic Music Association.
- J: Yes, I think we helped them sell tickets in that way or sponsored them in some way.
- L: I was interested to find out that the Junior Welfare League also worked in public affairs in that period to try to get the petitions to get an election called for bond issues. Do you remember working on that?
- J: Yes, yes. We did go around and try to get signatures in order to get the bond issue. I think it was for schools, was that not what it was for?
- L: The first one was for schools, yes.
- J: I think one of our projects was to help get enough signatures so it would be voted upon.
- L: Later I think they did the same thing for the hospital bond issue.

J: Probably. Yes, I think we did.

L: Were you still an active member when they began to work in the hospital assistance program at Alachua County Hospital?

J: I do not believe I was. I remember the program.

L: What do you remember about it?

J: I just remember that it existed and that the members did go and work and did all kinds of things to help but I do not recall that I was a part of that program unless I just helped now and then. I think they took books around to the patients but I could be confused with another organization.

L: It sounds like the hospital auxiliary today. Maybe a forerunner. So then after you had served four years as an active member, what happened to you?

J: Well, you were inactive. I think you could still volunteer your service if you wanted to. The thing is, active people had to work so many hours so we could not interfere with their getting their time in. So if we did anything, it had to be over and above what they were going to do or could do and at times when they could not work.

L: About what size group was the League when you were a member? About how many women were in it?

J: I just do not recall.

L: Were they mostly people who had grown up in Gainesville or somebody like you who had moved there after you had become an adult?

J: Well, there certainly were a lot of native people in it. And then some who had moved here some time during the year. I remember Ella Mae Long Canova was one of the active members and she had lived in Starke, had been born in Starke. Her father was a judge, Judge Long, and I think they moved over here. He became a judge of the district and they moved over here. So there were quite a few of Starke people who moved to Gainesville for one reason or another.

L: Well, when the League started out, you were talking about forming on Aunt Carrie's porch and coming into being as a wing of the Women's Club, what was the purpose of the organization? What were the women trying to get together to do.

J: I think it had welfare as its objective and as I say, I left town at this town at this time.

- L: I understand that you were kind of in and out.
- J: So this is sort of remote in my memory. I do not think I actually participated in much of the activity that was going on at the time or the organizational efforts and objectives that were being devised at the time.
- L: Just from a general understanding of the feeling that you got about wanting to be a part of the club and being active in it for six or seven years, did you feel that you were able to do what you wanted to do as a member and did you feel that the club was achieving the purpose.
- J: Yes, I feel it was. As I said in the beginning, it was called the Junior Welfare League, so, of course, we were active in welfare activities in the community and yes, I felt that we helped. Of course there was so much to be done. I do not know how much we helped but at least we added something. At that time much was needed and of course we could not fulfill every need at all by any manner or means. But I think what we did was helpful.
- L: Did you think that it turned out to be a different organization from the one you envisioned at the beginning.
- J: I think it has always had, well now, I do not know that now, but I think certainly the time I was active and even a large time that I was inactive but still connected that our objective was the welfare of the community. I think now they have other objectives added to that.
- L: Do you continue to be a sustaining member of this club?
- J: I am a sustaining member, yes.
- L: Have you been pleased with the way the club has grown or changed from the beginning or were there some things you would like to have seen be different.
- J: Well, now I tell you, I really have not kept up that well with it because as I say, I have been in and out of Gainesville. I think they have certainly filled a need here whether or not their objectives have changed to the point that I would disagree, I am not real sure. I have not been that active to really keep up.
- L: I can understand that.
- J: I just am not sure. It seems to me at one time I was a little disappointed in some of the activities they were sponsoring yet it was not that I did not think the activities were worthwhile but I felt like maybe there were some other things that might have been more important to do. I was not real sure but I do not even recall the activities. I was not sure whether the members were really interested

more in educational projects from the point of view of, not that I object to that, but I felt like with the University of Florida here and other people doing somewhat the same thing, that maybe we could branch out and do some things that were better, were more needed. But I do not remember why I took that attitude or what caused me to feel that way and I do not think I felt that way for very long. But I do think the objective of the Junior League is not quite what we started out with as the Junior Welfare League.

L: Well, it has been over a period of more than fifty years so I guess maybe you would think it...

J: Right, bound to change. And I am sure that the objectives they have and the projects they have are needed. I am not criticizing at all, but I think it has just slightly changed in its objective. I do not know that I should even make such a comment since I am not that well informed on the current organization.

L: Well, I thank you for talking with me this afternoon. I have really enjoyed this chance to get to know a little bit more about what the Junior Welfare League was like in the early years.

J: I do not know that I have been too informative.

L: Well, I think you have been very helpful.

J: As I say, I was out of town so much of the time but I certainly have enjoyed being a member of the League and I feel that we have filled some needs in the community which might not have been filled otherwise.

L: I know that is a good feeling. Thank you again.

J: Well, thank you for an interesting conversation with you.

L: I have enjoyed it too.