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Interview no. 1604

William W. Compton

Ginny Compton

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: William "Bill" W. and Ginny Compton

Interviewer: Kristine Navarro

Project: Farah Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: May 21, 2010

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Transcript No.: 1604

Transcriber / Summary: Patrick Driscoll

William "Bill" W. Compton was a Marketing and Sales Manager for Farah in El Paso, TX; He was born in Boise, ID in 1943; English and Cherokee ancestry; fourth of five children; His father was an abusive alcoholic and died when he was young; he served briefly in the U.S. Marine Corps; His first wife died of a blood clot; He describes interaction with Mormon missionaries and his conversion; He recalls learning sales and marketing skills at General Motors school, details later decision to leave car sales; he explains how he got into the clothing industry after he applied for a job with Jockey; he describes his interview for a position at Farah after working for Wrangler Jeans; he recounts his training in Billings, MT, issues with his trainer; reveals a story about Farah's debacle with corduroy pants in 1968 when he was a manufacturing malfunction, explains chemical process and what went wrong with it; reveals that Farah never took the blame for defective products and had a no return policy that hurt sales after this. He details his move to Salt Lake City, UT for Farah before his eventual move to El Paso; reveals some of the design and production errors at Farah, how he had to work around these issues to retain customers; he describes Willie Farah's personality and antagonistic relationship with some of the sales and management employees; covers the time period in 1976 when Mr. Farah was forced out of his company by the banks; he gives his opinion on why Farah suffered business reversals in the late 1970's; reveals that when Mr. Farah was forced out the banks selected the managers for Farah, he accepted Marketing and Sales Manager position. Mr. Compton recounts an episode where the president of Farah at the time tried to intimidate him after accusing Mr. Compton of going around him in business affairs, he reveals that the issue had to do with fraudulent practices; states he sent a letter to Willie Farah and investors explaining what was happening, investors did nothing as they selected the board members and he was later fired; reveals that Willie Farah offered to pay him to appear as a witness but refused the money due to the issues it would have caused at trial but offered to testify for the president position if Mr. Farah regained control of the company, which he did; he describes issues he had with Mr. Farah for degrading employees and

poor etiquette when meetings with customers, eventually got rid of the return policy; he credits Mr. Farah as an engineering genius when it came to producing automated machines for belt production and other apparel. He explains why he left Farah, Willie Farah's son Jimmy took control of the company and wanted him out; next describes taking a job with Faberge and Elisabeth in New York, NY, and trouble with the Mafia over embezzlement attempts; covers his purchase of Tropical Manufacturing in Florida in 1989; he recounts his purchase of Farah in 1998, plan to mass produce generic pants so that large retail companies could put their own label on them; he reveals that Willie and his wife Betty were left bankrupt by the last group to run Farah, he took care of them financially after he bought Farah. He explains changes he made to Farah; he mentions the reduced qualities of the products at the time, and decision to move factories to Latin America; shares that Mr. Farah was part of a lawsuit that changed laws preventing banks from taking over businesses and running them. Mr. Compton concludes by praising Willie Farah's loyalty to his workers, highlights the free medical care and meals he provided to them; he talks about the strike against Farah in 1975, states that unions hired people to strike against the company; details his own battle with unions when he took over.

Length of interview 105 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a