

on the toilet. laugh er.... And so we got rid of that. And oh, if I could just remember all those miserable little things they used to do. Oh yea, like sometimes instead of going up to the cafeteria, we'd eat our lunch up in the, like the upstairs place where, well it wasn't really a lunch room but it was something like a lunch room, and it was where the bathroom was too, and as soon as the buzzer went then the everybody was supposed to file down like a bunch of cattle, or rush down madly, you know, as soon as the buzzer went, well then, within a minute, you were supposed to be standing in your spot ready to do your thing, and the men would come dragging back anytime they wanted to. So they'd have a guy standing down at the foot of the stairs, watching to see who was coming down late. And, oh yes, this is true. They did an awful lot of things then and apparently some of them still try and get away with it ~~but~~ they don't get away with it now, not the way they did then, because as I say the men were not really in our corner. They didn't give a hoot what anybody did to us, because they didn't want us there.

SD: Sounds like a particular kind of harrassment.

JJ: Yes. But after they found out the, it must have taken at least five years, to get it through their heads, that we were there to stay and they were hiring more and

more women, all the time, and when they found ^{out} well OK, they're here to stay, nothing they could do about it, so.

SD: Were the women militant?

JJ: Only a few. Only a very, very few. As a matter of fact, when I was there, well of course, there was only a very few of us. Well that's very true. Well let's say, there was Dot McPhee and I, in the beginning, and then later, did we get another one...there weren't too many. In the whole eleven years I was there, I can't remember too many militant women in the union. Of course, as I say, there should have been, there should have been a lot more than there were. But there weren't. They seemed to get militant after I left. (laughter.) Maybe they just hired more women after I left. I don't know.

SD: Do you have any idea why they weren't more involved?

JJ: Well, I think its, well because they were, you remember when I said in the beginning, there were people I couldn't understand or I'd never seen those kind of people before, they weren't too bright, let's face it. I mean, they were the kind that would fight equal rights, right now, for women.

SD: You mean in terms of their own needs.

JJ: Umhum. And a lot of them, they didn't feel that they were being unduly...I don't think they even knew what rights were, really, and they certainly didn't have the guts to fight. They were scared. If someone said 'boo' you know, they didn't, like I told them, I said, "you don't have to take that," I said, "march right in that office and take a shop steward with you." And you know, just tell them that you're not going to take it," cause, as I say, I was there just six months and I knew I could have lost my job over it, but I didn't care I said, "because you're not gonna do this to me. I know what my rights are and I'm gonna fight for them." But there weren't too many at that time that...either they knew and they were too afraid to stand up for themselves or they just didn't give a hoot. But I found the younger, the younger, just before I left a lot of younger kids came in, young women, and they had it together. They knew more about...but I found women my age, the older women, when I started there I was 33, but some were quite a bit older than I was, about ten years older, and I found the older they were, the less militant they were. For some reason.

SD: Were you a shop steward?

JJ: Oh yea. I worked as a shop steward for, two years, three years. As a matter of fact I gave up, I might have stayed there for the rest of my life because I got a, if I hadn't taken it, but I'd already said I would and then this, I put in for a transfer to work in the substations, you know, like where you sell stamps and things like that. I thought, "ahh, enough of this place." And so it came through and like, you had to take an exam for that too, and I passed that, so, "fine, OK, you can go." Well the two things came at once. So I was between the devil and the deep blue sea. I said, well I was supposed to report to, I think it was substation A, on Monday, or stay there and do what I said I was gonna and do and be the shop steward. So I stayed there/like an idiot I became a shop steward. But I worked hard and got a lot of things for the women that they didn't, they were afraid to ask for, we got an awful lot of comforts and different things that I had been wishing about for years.

SD: What kind of things?

JJ: OK. Well the first things we got were fans. (laughter.) Big deal. Of course, just before I left they got air conditioning. (laughter.) But we got fans, we got stools

we got women's equipment up in the lounge, you know, nappies,
stuff like that. There were a lot of things that
they just didn't take into account at all you know.
And let's see, I'm trying to...

SD: Did you really have to fight for that stuff?

JJ: Oh you'd better believe it. Those like, if you sat on a,
if they saw you sitting down, peacefully sorting your
mail, and they thought that you'd been there for too
long, they'd get you up and they'd shoot you off
somewhere else where you'd have to stand. They're
miserable, mean, rotten, no-good, ignorant, I think this
is, I think you find your meanness from people who
are ignorant. Because I think only an ignorant person
can be, you know, just really rotten like that. Yea.
So, I don't know, like the two years I worked as a,
or was it three, I can't remember now, that I worked
as shop steward we got quite a, well anything they asked
we'll
for, I got it. So/put it like that. laughter.
I mean some of the things seem to be small, oh yea,
there were some big things, like about shift work,
I forgot about that, and they were going to witch a
lot of things around without us having any say about it.
And the men had all agreed, oh yes, I'll never forget
this, how could I, all the shop stewards had agreed—men—

and oh yea, well it's not gonna affect us because we've been there a long time you see, but it would have affected the women. And the newer people who had come in, this rule of how people could change their shifts, when women wanted to. So I said, well, I don't remember anybody saying anything to me, asking me whether I liked it or not or asking...I said, "you can't pass anything," I said, "and management can't do anything about it either until we have a plebiscite." I said, "you have to ask everybody on this floor, get their opinion," I said, "you've got no right to to represent those people on that floor without finding out what they say about it." So this is what, this is the coup de grace, the death blow. I'm sure this is why they wanted to kill her at all costs. laughter. It didn't pass. There were more of us at that time, more new people and more women there just enough to wipe it right off so that they couldn't do it. And as far as I know they never have been able to put that clause back in, shift, you know, because of shift changes. And I don't know, I guess if I stopped, and thought about it, actually I try not to think about the Post Office. (laughter)

I think it's one of the most rotten things, times I ever had in my life. But at least I learned a lot

more about people than I would have if I, you know, was with the small circle of people I knew before.

SD: Were you a steward *primarily for women?*

JJ: No, I wasn't. I was supposedly a shop steward like anybody else, but the fact that I was a woman, and that women would talk to me, ^h were they would not talk to the other guys, they didn't like... Well let's put it this way, the women didn't like me, but they knew that I wasn't afraid to ask for whatever it was that we needed. I won't say they didn't all like me, but I guess I'm just not a likeable person, because I'm too quick to speak the truth and truth isn't very easy to digest, especially, you know, if it's not good. But I think that's why the women came to me, because I was a woman, you know, rather than to *beef to* the men. *Because* the men they just say, "oh tough stuff" or something like that and walk off. And actually the union is one of the reasons why I finally quit. Because I had a hassle with a clerk there, over a racial issue, and the union leave alone back you up that's, I didn't ex..., so I knew better than that, an all white union, well, no way, but I said, "well Look." They said, "well why don't you guys just forget about it." I said, "that's all very well for you to say but I'm the one who was being verbally abused, not him, why should I forget it?"

I said, "make him apologize." Oh no. They didn't make him apologize. They promoted him. He's a supervisor, and he was such a dumb S.O.B. He never passed an exam. He got in on the tail end just before they cut the exams off, but he'd been given two case exams and he was so stupid he couldn't pass either one of them. And for justice...I don't know, you just forget it. And then of course there was some sort of tacky thing but, well not tacky anyway, but if you wanted to brown nose or go around with a supervisor, of course you'd get a few more benefits, one way or the other. (laughter.) I won't say that's how the other women got promoted, because I wasn't there when they got promoted, but I do know there was a lot of that going on at the time too. But apparently this happens in all offices. Yea, it's not just there.

SD: Were there other women who were shop stewards?

JJ: Yea. Let's see, I'm trying to think while I was there...

Tape II. Side I.

now let me think. There may have been, yea, I think there was one. I think I remember one other woman, while I was there, that was a shop steward. But now there are lots of them. It's been so long, I think Dot McPhee was a shop steward for awhile, it's been a long, long time, I can't really remember. But I know now, that they have a

lot more women, working as shop stewards, and working in union positions. You know, on the executive and all the rest of it, than they had then.

SD: Was there prejudice in the union around women taking on union responsibilities, amongst the leaderships or rank and file?

JJ: Well, they didn't elect them. Let's put it that way.

SD: Did you run?

laughter. Well, we would have if anybody would have nominated us, and I think we would have done a better job in a lot of cases, but we were just sort of ignored period until, well, until, well I don't know, well just before I left and then they elected a woman on the executive.

SD: Did the union at any point organize ^{any} discussions around the specific issues facing women, or...

JJ: No, never, they didn't even understand what that meant.

I mean as far as they were concerned, we were supposed to be in the kitchen. We shouldn't have been there in the first place, we were taking a "man's job" and, actually it's a woman's job, because no self-respecting man would be a postal clerk. laughter. It's that easy. I mean other than the bull work, I mean you know, heaving sacks and that, which is a lower classification anyway. That's what they call the fellows who do that mail handlers. But I mean, the actual work, of the post office is better suited I think, to a woman's stick-to-it-ness. I mean, because most

of the women I've found can work at boring jobs, they hate it, but they can stick to it longer. They can take more, you know. It's just that, well, I don't know, I think it's just, well with me it was pride. There was no way anybody's going to tell me I'm dogging it. With other women I don't know what it is. But I do know that they make much better workers, and that everything, any job/^Iever worked on where there were women and men working, the women were better. Except as I say, where you've got to life up an 80lb sack, or something like that, you know. And I worked in all the divisions. They never had women down in the "foreign" anyway, so. Like as far as/^{them}considering us, like our specific problems, or wants, or needs, forget it. As a matter of fact, I don't think they even, you know, well they didn't know anything about things like that.

SD: When the government recognized the union after the strike, did that make things better inside the post office in terms of being able to file grievances or organize?

JJ: Well, you could file your grievance, but I don't know too many grievances that got, you know, that were satisfactorily resolved. I mean there were always grievances

you know, it used to be a game just to see how many grievances you could collect. laughter. How many were going to be collected, that week, on what floor and they used to put these, some of the men used to put in some very silly things, you know, things that really make you look dumb. But, I think that the only change that happened, although that was a good one, they lightened up. They had to kind of, all this stuff about 'achtung, stand to attention, five minutes on the floor', all this horse manure, stuff, you know, that had to go. And they lightened up a little bit, but as far as real, real improvements, I didn't notice any, other than the air conditioning. The management was just as rotten as ever, dumb as ever, lazy as ever. The men were just as antagonistic towards the women as ever. There wasn't much of a change, unless of course you happened to be young and good looking. laughter. They thought they had a chance. laughter.

SD: Was there a lot of racism?

JJ: Well, uh, let's put it this way. While I was there I heard a lot of, a lot of white clerks talk about the Chinese clerks, and one even to his face. And I asked him, I said, you know, "Bing how can you take that?" And He said, 'ah, I don't pay any attention to it.'

I said, 'well, I sure as heck would.' I said "I'll tell you, you don't see them walking around here calling me a nigger because if they did I'd be on them.' And I did have to take one fellow to the office over a racist remark because I told him 'Look, you and I can stand here and argue all day long, and it won't bother me, but I'm not going to call you a dirty so-and-so and even though I think you are one, and you're not going to call me anything other than my name. But then just before, I think it was the year before I quit, I had this shouting match with this kid in Registration and he called me a black bitch and I said "oh no.' You know, because I mean, sure I could have jumped on him' I could have hit and there were plenty of things laying around to hit him with, but then I would, you know, I'd have been the one in the wrong. But as far as sticking up for you or doing anything like that, no way. And as far as racism is concerned, I would definitely say there was a lot of racism, because they resented the Chinese, because there were more of them, there were more Chinese there than anything else. I'm sure they resented the few blacks that were there. They just resented anybody that wasn't ^{nt} wasp.

SD:

Did the employer ^{feed into} racism?

JJ: The employers, actually it wasn't the employers, that,

there was one real dumb jerk, I think he's still there, the first week I was there he came up and he says 'what are you?'. I said 'what are you?'. You know, like that. He said, 'no, I mean, uh, uh, are you a Canadian?' I said, 'yea, I'm a Canadian.' I knew what he was after, you know, he wanted to know, you know, what am I. You know, was I an Indian, or this that or..as if what difference did it make. And I was just seething, you know, but I thought I'll just play a little game with him and then smack him down. ^B But actually it all boils down to ignorance. But now they're, like see like, I joined in '60. It's '79 now. There's been race riots all over the world. All the kids have been, there's been Vietnam, there's been everything, so that they know they can't get away with it. And they don't try. And I'll say one thing about the Post Office, they were very, very careful, to make sure anything they said, they, "now don't, we're not discriminating, we're not discriminating." I said, "well what do you think you're doing then?" You know, 'it's just that, we want you to know because...'

Oh, and here's another thing you might look up. It got so bad in some places, some post offices, that Ottawa had to send down, everytime I say send down an edict, that means their pieces of paper, hundreds and hundreds of letters and pieces of paper, saying that, to tell the

managers and the people in management to see, to see that all this racism, you know, was stopped, because... and this came in, I think this was in, what, in '69. And they actually had to send down, like we had a big book, you had to look at it every day when you went in, to see what the changes were and all of this, and in this book it had this: That, no way, no more racist behaviour you clerks, behave yourselves. But the managers, they were too smart. The supervisors were too clever for that. Whatever they thought, they were smart enough to keep it to themselves. But the clerks themselves, your fellow workers, your fellow unionists, (laughter) you know, you might as well be in the deep South. But of course, they were smart too, they knew that they, there were only two that made a slip, while I was there, and both of them got, well one of them got hell for it and one got promoted. Just a write off.

SD: Did the union or union members ever talk about racism?

JJ: No. Never, never, never. Well, what racism? This would be their thing. I'm alright so everybody else must be. Unless it's changed, since I left. I've been away for eight years now, so, and it probably has changed, in some respects, because there are a lot of younger people in it and when you get younger people in it you usually, well, at least, I found, you get people who are more

aware because the kids are more aware. The older people are stuck in their ways and you know, their heads are like stone, they're not going to change. But younger people are out there, living and seeing and listening and hearing and their heads haven't turned to stone yet. At least not all of them. But most of the kids I met, as a matter of fact, I like the kids a lot better than the older ones, because, you know, they have some respect for themselves as people.

SD: You said that your family was a pro-union family.

JJ: Oh yea. My aunt in Calgary, I grew up in Calgary. Spent most of my childhood there, and then I went to high school out here, but all my family, they belonged to what they call the old CCF, I think it was. And they understood what it was, probably because they were black, what it was to understand the differences, you know, between workers. Although they were discriminated against terribly, in those days. I mean, the only job a black man could get in those days was as a porter, or shining shoes, and the only job a black woman could get was a cook or a maid and so, actually I really admire my aunts, and my mom, and all my uncles too, for still believing in unionism and that type of thing. So I was brought up in that kind of a climate. Where,

I knew what it was all about, and I believed in socialism when I was a kid before I could pronounce it right.

(laughter.) And things like that. And so I had a different upbringing than practically everybody I worked with at the Post Office, because, a lot of people, if you said, socialism, they'd back off and think I was getting ready to throw a bomb, anarchy, you know, they were ignorant. The ignorance was unbelievable. Just absolutely unbelievable. And there were people who had probably never read a book in their life, other than their primer in Grade One. They really had a strange lot, but now I think they've got a different, I wouldn't even be able to begin to tell you what's going on in there now, because now they tell me that they're getting kids in there with Masters, and university grads, and all the rest of it, so probably you've got a better climate.

SD: Before you worked in the Post Office and were involved in the union stuff there: had you done any other kinds of sort of political work?

JJ: Well, I suppose you could call it political work. Let's see, well when I was thirteen, I was going to this, well they called it the most cosmopolitan school in Canada, at the time; it was called Strathcona School, and there was just about every nationality under the sun going there

and I ran for office on the student council two years in a row and got in, and again, as I say, not because I was very ^{well} liked, but ~~they~~ knew, they said 'Janet's got a big mouth and she'll say something and do something and she'll get it done'. And as a kid, I always spoke. I remember speaking with, just before they interned the Japanese, ^{with} my best friend Elizabeth Yamashida at the Hotel Vancouver and we spoke then on the, you know, everybody ^{was} very interested they'd say 'how can all you kids of all you different nationalities get along?' We said 'we don't, we fight alot' and we did, but we learned to respect each other, and each other's rights because of a very wonderful man named Mr. Patterson, who was our principal, and he would give us so much. He would yard us into his office, and really lay down the law, and that man opened my eyes because I was quite a bit of a racist myself, in those days. I mean I felt an affinity with the Japanese kids, the Chinese kids but anything white, forget it. (laughter.) But it was really a good thing that I went to that school. because it was through Patterson's eyes, and through the way ^{that} he used to talk to us, I realized that by thinking and acting that way, I was doing the same thing they were. And it was wrong. And I worked, oh, I forget all

the clubs, the organizations. Yea, there were always different ethnic groups, you know, forming, over one thing or another, and I was always involved in those, and if I didn't write the speeches I gave the speeches. (laughter.) Naturally that's been going on all my life; as a matter of fact the first time I've had a rest will be this year, and technically that's not a rest because I'm still working with Sepia, that's a black theatre group. And I'm still laying down the law on Canadian content and using Canadian black actors, instead of yarding them up here from the States. It bugs me to no end. First of all they wouldn't use black actors, period. Then when they did decide to use them they, like their idea of Canadian content, cause I just went through this the early part of the year, they'll hire about a hundred Black extras, or less probably, and then all the meaty, juicy parts and it's not because there isn't talent here cause there is, lots of it, great talent - like whoever is going to sing or dance or whatever it's some American. But before that I was working with the B.C.A.A.P. for years, off and on, off and on, and you know, you have to go here and there and speak on this and that, and people still, for some reason, in

this country, they seem to, Canadians find it very hard to believe there's any discrimination against other races and to me it's just, are they living in a shell or, you know. Don't they know anything at all? But it's either they don't want to believe it, or it's just, it's nice to point and say, "oh well down there in the States they're doing all this." But believe me it's just as hard for a black person to get a job. Unless they need a token. If they need a token, if it's a big enough outfit and they want one for show, they'll get one. But unless you're part of a large minority, like the Asians, or East Indian people, or, you know, because there are an awful lot of those people and naturally their business means money, well they'll hire them, but it's very, very hard for a Canadian black to get a job. It's not nearly as easy as say a Canadian white. So there's plenty of discrimination where it hurts. I don't give a hoot about living next door to a white family or anything, but I do think it's very important that your child gets a decent education and that you have a decent job so that you can afford to give them that education, and those are, like, the housing and employment are the most important things there is when you're a minority, because if you don't have, you know, if you have to live in a rotten area

and you don't make enough money to help your kids get through school, then the whole thing is perpetuated, that, you know, you never get off that level, unless you can teach them at home that, you know, bust your brains out, read, read, read. And educate yourself, because you're just not going to have the money to do it.

SD: I'd just like to go back: you mentioned that you had a Japanese friend who was interned.

JJ: [Even now, you know, oh...well the whole school, we took the day off, I can't even talk about it not even now it makes me, oh. ^(Pause) Well anyway, everybody in the whole school, ^(whole) we just shut the school up and everybody went down to the train [and you know,] with gifts [and stuff like that,] and said goodbye to the kids. I saw some of them after in Greenwood, I was singing with my cousin's band and we played a dance there, but a lot of them I never saw them again.

[SD: Must have been incredible.

JJ: It's really...

SD: Do you remember what the school told you? Did they tell you, like, ^{that} they were agents of the Japanese fascism?]

JJ: No, ^{The school} they didn't tell us anything. As a matter of fact, at Strathcona School, we didn't know what the heck was going on, and all we knew was that [they were going to,] all these people had to move and, but nobody in school.

said anything to us about them probably being spies or agents. [or anything like that, because I mean, I'm telling you,] I think that school was one in a million.

Because of all the teachers and the people there,

[everybody was,] they had all their stuff together;

they weren't crazy at all, like some of the teachers that taught my children. [We had some good teachers

and I think they felt as badly about it as the

kids did because even the Chinese kids, they were

always fighting with the Japanese kids, but they [were

all,] you know, [because we] realized it was wrong.

[Like, we just couldn't, you know,] we said, "surely to

god anybody with any sense would know whether a person

was spying or not, or a danger." These people had lived

here all their lives, [you know,] had businesses and

everything. It was horrible.

[SD:

And also, did it strike you that ^{if} they could do that to one group they could do that to another?

JJ:

Well the one thing that was, it was an all out effort

there it wasn't just the minorities, like, the whole

school] even the white kids, it got them down too because

we could see the injustice of it even though we were just

kids. Seemed so obvious to us.

[SD:

You performed in one of the towns where the Japanese were.

JJ:

Yea, my cousin, it was his band, and he realized, when he

realized that we had played at someplace, I don't know,] we were all over B.C., Penticton and Vernon Ashcroft, all these little tiny places, and somebody said, 'hey, why don't you go to Greenwood, [there's a bunch of,] that's where the Japanese people are. [And] Virgil said, "oh my goodness," like cause he went to the same school too. [So] [he made a special trip,] he sent a fellow on ahead, to see if it could be arranged, for us to hold a dance there for them, and we went there and did the dance and everybody crowded around us [just like,] just as if it was some big name band and here's this little, you know, well it was a sixteen piece band out of Vancouver. [But] I was looking for friends, to see if I could see any of the kids I knew, and we saw a few, but this one girl was working in the so-called hospital. The hospital was a ratty old house. The house was so old [and it,] but you could see they'd scoured it and tried to keep it clean. While I was there, there was a woman having a baby [right, you know,] while I was visiting, and I said, well where's the doctor. I'm looking around for all the fancy stuff that was in the hospital when I had my baby, and it was just a house, and the woman was having her baby, and if she'd had a breech birth, or a hemorrhage, or god knows

what could have happened, it was just tough, because that was the hospital, and I'll never forget that. [And of course,] naturally going there [was almost as bad as,] it was just like saying goodbye twice, because when we left [it was, you know,] we were crying all over again. [But] they appreciated it so much, [I guess, well, probably nobody even gave a hoot, you know, as far as,] they said they hadn't had any entertainment of any kind, up there at all. I can't imagine what it was like for them to live there.

Well there had been a lot of discrimination against ethnic groups in Vancouver for many, many years in housing, employment and lots of other, admittance to public places and finally all the ethnic groups in Vancouver got together, some of them that I can remember offhand, most vividly, because they were most vocal were B'nai Brith, the Ukrainian people's association, and our association; the one I belonged to at that time was called the Negro Citizen's League [and as I say, practically every ethnic group I can think of, was part of this. And] we all prepared briefs, from our own communities, [you know, giving as I say affidavits, and signed, sealed, delivered, [no hearsay, or anything like that,] and when we brought it to City Hall, the lawyer that was there, had boxes and boxes and boxes of

all these briefs and affidavits and everything, so that they couldn't back down under their old line, because they always try to make you believe ^{that} it is not happening here, and at one time British Properties, they would not rent to Jewish people, or to blacks, or to anything that wasn't lily white. I don't know what it's like now. In '52 that's what it was like. So, to make a long story short, all the ethnic groups got together, we charged City Hall and demanded they put a change in the City Charter to say that any public establishment that refused admittance to a member of the public, because of race, or creed, or colour, that their license should be removed and the city tried to temper it a wee bit with mercy and say 'and/or fined'. But whatever the technicalities, or however it was written in there, it was put in there and when this disco business happened, I spoke to one of the members and I explained it to her. I said, 'I know what this is about because I was part of the group that got the thing put in the Charter in the first place,' I said, so...

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...first you would send a white couple to apply for the apartment and they'd say 'oh, sure' you can have it.' And they'd say 'well, OK, we'll let you know' and they would come out. They would be members of our association,

Then we would send a black couple in to apply for the same apartment and they would tell them that it's already been taken. And then we would send a mixed couple, and every time each couple, whether they were going to rent a house, or whether they were going into a restaurant, or wherever they were going, everything that would happen to them, it would be written down, notarized, signed and that was evidence that this had occurred. And we never lost a case. Never.

SD: I'd imagine you would have a white couple going in and asking for an apartment after the blacks.

JJ: We used to sometimes send the black ones in first and they'd say 'no' and refuse and then the white ones would come in later 'oh, yes sure you can have it' and that's always the beauty of it you see, because, you've got them right there. I mean there are ways to work within the law to protect yourself against discrimination, if you know how to do it. But you have to, a lot of times, a lot of people, you know, probably they know what their rights are but they just don't know how to fight to get what...Yea, I think a lot of people just don't know, or they figure ^{that} nobody will do anything about it. They just say, "oh well, they're not going to do anything about it."

END TAPE

Side One

Janet J: My name is Janet Joyce Judd. I was born in Seattle Washington.

S.D.: When did you come to B.C.?

J.J.: When I was two years old.

S.D.: So, what kind of work did you do when you first worked in Vancouver?

J.J.: When I was first hired, I was hired as a parttimer, what you call a parttime postal worker and then when my number came up, as they called it, because I had applied for fulltime work as a postal clerk, I, then I was, my category was postal clerk.

S.D.: When was this?

J.J.: This was 1960.

S.D.: What were the conditions like in the postoffice?

J.J. The conditions were horrifying.

The heat, there was no air conditioning. They didnt have their stools for sortation, so you stood on your feet. For the complete eight hours of work. After about six months, when I was getting ready to quit, because my feet were broken down, they finally did bring in the stools. They were using them, as they said, testing them, and they would take them from one floor to the other. But most of the time, when I was in the forward division, because that was where I started and that's where I stayed, we didn't have them, we didn't have the stools. So when they'd bring the stools in it, made the sortation a little easier, but not much, because it's a boring degrading dehumanizing job. The noise was horrifying, I found that I even lost part of

my hearing. Its not as good as it used to be. You know when I was in there. Because of the noise, the belts, the conveyors, the machines. It was just unbelievable. And you really had to work, You couldn't get your raises unless you passed two very, very difficult exams, and these exams required alot of, what I would call... Well alot of people say, well if you have a photographic memory you can make it, but not too many people have that, so you have to have a little bit of brain power too. Now, you could hire a two-year old off the street they can do the job. But in those days you had to pass what they called a guide exam which entailed knowing all of your rates, weights, measurements, rules and regulations and recite the postage and anything, you know, about postal services. In other words, no matter what part of the floor you're working on you're supposed to know what postage is supposed to be on what, and all the rules and regulations, because there's alot of things that you can't send through the mail etc. And the other was the real bad one, which was called the case exam and it involved memorization of about two thousand post-office points, and the services by which they were serviced. And the points continually were changed during the years, you know, so that you would have to memorize, unmemorize, and every year you had to take your exam and you had to make a certain passing level before you could get your raise. Every year, two exams a year and you had to pass them to get your raise. Well, I was smart, I got a hundred the first time and I never had any problems with that. Of course that didn't make me too many friends. But, no one likes a smart woman.

They didn't want women in there in the first place. I don't know whether I was the fifth, but apparently they had only been hiring women as postal clerks for a year previous to when I came in, and they didn't...the men didn't like us at all.

S.D.: Why did they start hiring women?

J.J.: I don't know why, unless some woman had applied and they couldn't figure out any reason to dissuade her from taking the job, because I'll tell you, when they interviewed you and give you your aural examination...you have to do a written examination and, to get in, and they were tough then. And you also had to do an aural and you sat there in front of all these mean looking old men and they told you how terrible the job was. And "Oh, you don't look quite strong enough to lift 45 pounds, or whatever it was. And I knew all the, well, when you're Black you know all the answers, so whatever it was—they said, "Can you do it?" "Yes. Yes, I can do it." Or, "Of course, I can do it, I'll have no problems whatsoever, I can do it!" So they gave me the job. They tried to ship me off into the secretarial pool and everything else. They said, "Well, this isn't the type of job you want." I said, "Yes, this is the type of job I want because it's the most money." (Laughs.) Though I regret it.

S.D.: What were your reasons for needing the money?

J.J.: Well, I had eight children to support on my own and no money to do it with, so. That's why I went to work there in the first place. I had a choice of working, as a matter of

fact I was accepted at both places, at the unemployment insurance commission, that come in about three days after I got the one from the post-office, and I'm still sorry I didn't take the one with the unemployment insurance, because while at that time the money was much smaller, the chance of advancement and the working conditions were, I understand, much better,

S.D.: What sort of work did you do? Did you sort?

J.J.: Yes, when we first went in they used to use ^{women} the [^] for sorting, that's sorting letters into little pigeon holes hour after hour, after hour, after hour. Or they would put you on what they call a cancelling machine where, maybe... it makes a noise like a machine gun. Constantly. And that was where, how you cancelled letters, piles and piles of letters. You, all this was done standing. Women would stand in long, long lines just like in canneries and at a table that was, where you know, mail was dumped on it, and you'd sort the letters down into this little pocket thing that would travel all the letters down to the machine and whoever was on the machine would dash them through and then somebody else would cart them away and then they would take them over to what they called a primary where lots of women would stand there and..women and men, would toss them into the pigeon holes to be taken somewhere else, to be resorted again and then finally tied, dumped into a bag and off they went. And, you know, to wherever they were going...the dispatcher's office, So that's what I started doing, but needless to say, if it sounds monotonous it was more than that, so I got out of it very, very quickly and

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asked to go on dispatching. And they gave me alot of static about that because there were, they had never had a woman on dispatch before and I said, "Well you have now!" "Because I'm not a woman, I'm a postal clerk, I have the same status as you have, and I want to go on dispatch. Now I knew that the dispatcher's job was dirty, it was hard, but it wasn't so boring. And at least you did get a chance to walk around, to move, you know, and so they put me on, rather, I preferred graveyard shift because with the kids, I was able to be home during the day with them. And, oh yes, one thing I forgot to mention, this is the most important of all, I was pregnant when I first started at the post-office and I was so afraid that they were going to find out about it, because there were alot of miserable women and men there, that really didn't want me there period. And I, well, it was probably because I was the only Black person there and probably because I was very, very big at the mouth. I mean I will tell anybody anything any time and I don't back up and if I think you're wrong I'll tell you and I'll tell you why I think you're wrong. If I think you're ignorant or stupid I'll tell you that too and it doesn't help. Not when, not when you're outnumbered! And it doesn't help when you tell your bosses that either. So anyways, but if you're right, you're right, what can they do. They found lots of ways to do it to me. But at any rate, the supervisor, the head supervisor on my floor asked me if I was pregnant and I told him, "No!" because I knew that if I said that I was, they would fire me. And I couldn't afford not to work because I had all the kids

to feed. So needless to say, I worked and I was dispatched, making a final dispatch in the morning. I was on graveyard shift I don't know, shortly before eight o'clock, and I could feel the labour pains starting, about two hours after I left my job, my baby was born in Vancouver General Hospital. And then of course they all had their, they couldn't believe that I'd had it, you know a baby. They thought I'd had, you know, a miscarriage or something like that, and my doctor was very, very kind about it and he, I said, "Please don't send this medical report in until you have to," I said, "They're going to be asking you for it right off the bat. I said, "Take your time. I said, "Don't send it in until I'm back at work. Oh yes, and before Angel was born, let's see, you had to pass what they called an efficiency exam as well, as well as your two, uh, written exams, that I told you about before, and this efficiency report would say what kind of worker you were. They never said that you were a superworker, no one ever made that although believe me there were super workers and I was one of them. And, but um, they would give you a pass, you know, or whatever and the one that signed my efficiency report was the head of the department so I didn't feel so bad about that. So when I did come back, after having the baby and they started giving me some static about, "Well, you could have been hurt and you could have..." I said, "Yes, I could have, been a lot of things. I could have had my kids be hungry," I said, "But I'm not gonna argue with you about it", I said. "If you want to take it to Ottawa", I said, "Fine. You take it to Ottawa. Because," I said, "YOU signed my efficiency report" , I said

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"My work was better than anybody else's on this floor." I said, "Pregnant or not." I said, "Now, my baby is here. I'm not sending her back." I said, "And if there's going to be any problems, we'll let Ottawa decide." Well, they didn't want...hands off, they didn't want, never want Ottawa to know what they're up to. So I needless to say, about a month or two months later, an edict was sent down from Ottawa that was so funny. Up to that time as I said, you see, they hadn't been hiring women as postal clerks, only men. And they hired women as parttime helpers, but they did the same type of work. So, then this edict came down saying that now postal clerks were allowed to have babies. And the men all congratulated me, "Oh thanks, Janet, you've really done us a big favour, we can all have kids." I said, "I bet so." So...Men don't have babies. And so they had to recognize the fact that women were in there to stay. I think that was one of the worst things that happened-just before we had a real union, we had what we called an association which was just like a union. And everyone belonged to it, all the women. But the men, they wrote to Ottawa, and demanded that no more women be hired in this position.. And behind our backs...And I read alot, and I came across this thing they used to send us from Ottawa and I read it and I noticed that it said something about the postal, the Western, our group of people ^{here} had asked that no women be hired in the postal services, you know. So we went to the union meeting,

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Dot McPhee and I, and I as usual Big Mouth. Anyway it got resolved. I said, "O.K. You're taking our money, You're supposed to represent us, and you're telling me that you've got the nerve to tell us that you're going to take our money and say that we're members and all the rest of it and then you're going to go and say that you don't want Ottawa to hire anymore women?" "Oh well, we did that, you know to protect the rest of the women, because there are alot of tough jobs in the post-office, and you have no idea of what's entailed and all the rest of it." And I said, "We won't have any of that." I said, "Whoever's responsible for this." I said, "Stop it right now." I said, "Because, believe me," I said, "Even if I thought the government would listen to you" which they didn't. They sent them a reply saying that they thought the women were better workers than they were, and that they had no intention of firing any of us, the women, or not firng, but any intention of not hiring more women, and they have, in the eleven years I worked there they hired more and more women because the women were more efficient. And definitely alot smarter. So, because, when I started, you didn't have to have any specific level of education, if you were a veteran you could be a moron and still get the job. And, I think Grade Ten was about it and even less, really. And, but now they hire alot of university and people with Masters, and the job doesnt require that type of knowledge. The job, is, face it, its menial. And its boring. And its dehumanizing. Its really hard, rough, tough, boring dumb job. And the clerks in the sub-postal stations that sell you

your stamps, they have a little better time but not much.

Its, its pretty boring. So let's see what else can I tell you...

S.D.: Did women get equal pay and benefits?

J.J.: Yes, everything was the same, except for one thing which I never understood because it didn't apply to me. There was a woman there that was quite a bit older than me. She had been working there for years as a...parttime person..And they didn't take as much money from us for our pension benefits as they did from the men. Now ~~that~~ that's the only difference.

Other than the fact that

^ they didn't promote you. No way, at least not until I left. Somehow I guess they thought it was safe. (Laughs) No, but that was the only difference that I can remember, because I think that they knew that they could not go too far, because all the women weren't mice. There were quite a few mouths besides mine.

S.D.: Were there many women working there?

J.J.:No. In 1960 there were only seven of us. And there would have been probably about two hundred on the floor in the Main post-office downtown in the forward division. And as they say women were used basically for the boring, well, you know, they're ^{all} boring. But the most boring of all jobs in the beginning. But then after I went on dispatching and then I went... Well actually I worked in every division of the post-office except the foreign division before I left, even out at the airport post-office there, Everything. Because, you know, I thought, there's got to be a place. Of all the places, registration was, I think the most interesting because you did have to use a little grey matter, a little, but not much, a little, (Laughs.) And I stayed there quite a bit. But, they didn't take too many. As

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I say the women ^wre discriminated against. There's no doubt about it. I mean, because we were hassled, if they. I mean you can be hassled. Some people can be hassled, some can't. And like I said, "I don't get ulcers, I give them." I mean, but deep down it was very annoying to me, that, you know to see people getting away with... To see these men getting away with running up to the john every fifteen minutes and sitting on their tails and then having myself, or some other woman that could sort really quickly, clean up their work for them. You know that, really gets to you. And seeing these damn lazy so and sos promoted, you know, when they could barely, you know, pass their exams.

You know, this is, very, very annoying, but as I say, when you have a family and alot of kids and you have to eat you stay.

S.D.: Can you talk some about how the union was organized?

J.J.: Well, we had what was called an association, but it was like a union. ~~It had~~ been. The first six months that I was there I had gotten in trouble with the head honcho, the big boss, because I had asked for switch of shifts, I started on afternoon and I wanted to go on graveyard, so I could be home during the daytime. And he said, "No!" And he gave it, he gave this change of shift to another woman who hadn't been there as long as I had, and so it was a seniority thing. And he said, "Oh, but Emily's been here for years." And I said, "Yes, but she's been here for years as a parttimer, but not as a postal clerk, and this is a postal clerk's job and this is a postal clerk's shift, and you have done it to me and I said, "As far as I am concerned, you are discriminating against me personally." And so the head of our association

went with me to the office and I had it all typed out, like why I figured. Well, it wasn't a matter of figuring out. It was just the case. The Case was first come first serve. If you've got more seniority than I have than you the first choice of shifts. And I had the seniority so once, he saw. He's dead now, I shouldn't talk about him... But anyways, once he realized that I wasn't gonna back down or anything then I got the shift that I wanted. There was a lot of that stuff going on. But like I say it wasn't called a union, but it was a union. As a matter of fact I think it was a better union than the one they've got now. Because we certainly did a lot more things, or lets say that there ^{were} better people at the head of it. I don't know what they've got really now, except for the fact that my husband is still in the union, so I certainly am not out of touch by any means. But, other than this one booboo they made when they decided that no more women: "we can tolerate you guys, but we don't want anymore." Well, other than that they were pretty good.

S.D.: Were the women active in the union?

J.J.: Oh yeah. Everybody had to be, everybody was in the Association as it was first called, then in the union. This was just a matter of. Well to me there would have been no other way, because You see, I was brought up in a ...very politically conscious family and so naturally unionism is something that I believe in. you know. Until they go crazy...but I mean 99.9 per cent I understand the need and the wisdom of having a union and belonging ^{to} a union and supporting it. Because I mean workers don't really ^{have} much protection without it, but there can be abuses. But, at the time there weren't

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too many abuses.

S.D.: Had you been in a unionized job before that?

J.J." No, no. Most of the work I had done before that had been working for relatives and entertainment, like. Acting, singing dancing. Things like that. I never had to work...this was my first experience working with a large group of people, like that. And it was different, it was so different, I don't even know how to describe it. Because I don't know, I thought that somehow, I got the idea in my mind that if you were a civil servant, you had to be supersmart. And then it was very degrading to find out that you didn't have to be much more than a moron. To get in there and that's practically what I was working with, it was not pleasant. It was really, Oh Boy. I didn't understand the people. They didn't understand me, but over the years as I say. You know, you shrug your shoulders and shake your head. Yeah right, go to work...punch the time clock.

S.D.: Was the demand of maternity leave taken up by the union?

J.J. Yes, they finally established it for us. After I had my baby, they gave us the same type of maternity leave as they had in some other branches of the civil service I don't know what it was. But anyways you were required to quit, I think in your seventh month. You had to quit, whether you felt well or not, you had to quit. And I realize that nowadays, the women have a choice. They can work until they... Oh yes and you weren't allowed to come back until the baby, was, until a month after or something like that. Because I remember after Angel was born, I went back to work about two weeks after, and they didn't get the medical report. That was another thorn in their side. When they found out I had come back to work

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before a month was up. Because you know, I had to. And they still didn't know because they didn't get the medical report until I had been back at work about a month, you see. So that was too late for them to send me home. But at that time they did have specific regulations. I'm pretty sure that you had to quit in your seventh month, and you couldn't come back until the baby was a month old. They made the decisions. They know. But, really.

S.D.: How about equal pay?

J.J.: Oh yeah, well here it is. They has to give us equal pay, they knew that. There was no way they couldn't pay us what ^{ever} our scale was for that year. Like each year, you know, you got your raise, if you passed your exams. Until they got a bunch of dumbbuns in there that couldn't pass 'em and then they wiped 'em out completely. That's when we got the union. UNION. They decided that the exams were too hard so they, ^{de-} too humanizing ^{to} memorize all this stuff, so they got rid of them. But like as far as pay was concerned, pay was equal. Work, work, I would say that, its true: we worked harder than they did, we didn't have to. We could have dogged it too. But I don't know. I think there's something wrong with a woman's head, she believes in earning her money. (Laughs)

As soon as we can learn, as soon as we can learn to dog it like they do, we'll be better off.

S.D.: Was it possible for women to get into the higher ^{paid} job categories?

J.J.: No way. Forget it.

S.D.: So there was a real stratification of the workforce. Between men and women.

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J.J.: Yeah, well, in other words. You could apply, and you could be smarter and you could pass more exams and you could be just superwoman. But it doesn't make any difference. You wouldn't be...the men they hired, for supervisors during the period of time I worked there, with the exception of one man and that's just one, and I will say that man was smart. I don't think there was one of them that was my equal and or the equal of a great many other women who applied, because we had some very smart women in there.

S.D. How about childcare? Did women ever talk about problems with children and childcare?

J.J.: Oh yeah. I don't think that many of them were as bad off as I was - I had the most kids. But also some of them talked about it, but unfortunately there were a bunch of hausfraus there that thought that they could run the family, and cook and clean and do every thing in the house, and do a good job at the post-office. And you know just sort of carry on normally. Unfortunately a lot of them cracked up. Well I won't say cracked up mentally, because I think they were cracked to start with. You know, to even attempt that. Because I found it was much, much too difficult for me. If I hadn't had older children, you know, to help out. And family and friends to help out - there's no way that I could have worked and looked after my kids at home. You know, but these women had husbands, you know. That were at home. And some not even working, and they were still doing that. They complain and cry and bitch about it. And I'd say, "well, why do you do it? You don't have to." I said, "Your husband's got a job, you've got a job, why don't you..." I said, "Good grief,

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I said, "People out there are dying to get a job. You two guys are working to get a boat," I said, "Of course, somebody else is out there working to try and get a job to get some bread." I said, "It isn't fair!" And it wasn't fair. And they're still doing that to-day. Not to mention the nepotism, I hope you get to that, soon. Yeah, o.k. If you happen^{ed} to be a supervisor's wife, or child or friend or relative of any kind, you're in and don't ask me how they do it. I don't know how they manage it but they did, There was more nepotism in that place, in the forward division, in the post office, during those eleven years I worked there, than a person would believe. As a matter of fact, one of the supervisors that I totally despised, of course it was mutual on both sides, his son is now a, way, way up in the management structure and he started out as a clerk, about seven years after I'd^d been there, But the mere fact that he was a supervisor's son and they did, ⁺ the supervisors and most if the management there, they always saw that their, even at Christmas time. Would you believe that a supervisor would bring his wife in to do Christmas work. Oh yeah, believe it! And their kids, and everyone, and its still goes on. And not mention, their personnel officers, of course that's something. You can take the tape off and I'll tellyou about it after, I'm not really sure you want to hear it. The personnel people who hire you, who see who is coming in and who is coming out. Because it is a little sticky, but its true, its merely the fact that a certain ratio^o nality of personnel officer was in the driver's seat for about two or three years, and all of his people were hired. And all of the other people who applied were I guess, dumped in the waste

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basket because during that period of time, no other nationalities other than his own were hired. So they got rid of him. They never fire anyone in the post office. They just, I don't know where they hide them. But they get rid of them anyways. They, you know, because they can't admit, they can't admit that anyone in management is ever really wrong. So the only thing that I can ever remember anyone ever getting fired for was that they were just caught red-handed stealing something, or something like that. But, to make it worse, apparently they've hired another fellow the same nationality to do the hiring and the firing again. And I says, "Oh boy. There's not much hope to get back into the saddle, because I was so desperate." I said, "God, rather than go on welfare, I'd rather die. I'd even go back to the post-office." So I did apply, and two or three times and each time on my application it came back, what did it say exactly? I think I kept them, but God knows where they are. But anyways, I didn't have enough knowledge to do the job.

S.D.: After eleven years.

J.J.: After eleven years. And doing the... Really memorizing the tough stuff. Working on every division. Every floor there was. I didn't have enough knowledge to do the job. I wasn't suited. You know. So I, some people say, "Are you bitter?" "Oh more than bitter! I could kill." Because its just so unprincipled, its so bloody unfair. So,

S.D. Why did people decide to move from an association to a union?

J.J.: Well, we went on strike when we weren't supposed to...

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S.D.: Oh, can you tell me about that?

J.J.: Yeah, right! This is the first strike they ever had. I (1965)
don't think we were a union then. I think we were still an
association. And everybody was saying, "Jan, what are you going
to do, you've got all those kids to feed." I said, "What do
you think I'm gonna do. I'm walkin' out with everybody else."
I said, "The kids have eaten before, they'll eat again."

And you know, my supervisors, they ganged up on me and they
said, "You're not going to go out with the rest of them
are you? Think about your job. You might have a future here."
And I said, "Oh come on, I know what my future is here. Its
working like a damned dog for no money and taking it home
and trying to make it stretch. I said, "That's my future here,"
And so needless to say, when everybody started walking out,
like, we all walked out together, and we did our tour of picket
duty, and we found out what all the things they were up to.
They used to have this obsolete tunnel, that went all the way
underneath the ground, down to the CNR or CPR, yes CPR Railways.
And some smart joker decided that he thought he'd sneak some
cheap labour up through this tunnel. But when one of the
supervisors, I can't say who, but he was a good guy, deked
out and told me while we were walking around the building. He
said, "Hey, Jan. Tell some of the guys to get down to CPR
right away. They're trying to sneak some people in through
the tunnel!" So there actually ^{were} some good supervisors, they were...

END of Side One

Tape I. Side 2.

...on the lower level. But they had you know, been workers themselves and they knew what it was like, and they had wives and kids to support, so I guess they figured 'oh well, what the heck' you know you gotta make a buck. So that's why they were supervisors. But they were, they felt like we did and it wasn't too much longer before they got wise and got themselves organized too, so they could get a decent wage, because they weren't making you know, that much at the time, *of course* they weren't doing anything either.

SD: So what was the strike around..?..

JJ: Yes, it was because of the working conditions, the conditions were horrible as I say, like on a day like this when you can't breathe, it was even worse than this, and you had to work in it. You know, you were inside this huge huge building with cement floors and there was nothing, not a fan, nothing and the water's pouring off you and you can imagine what its like standing in a...like there'd be a long long line of women all standing, sorting or men, and the men I think were the worst offenders for B.O., but when you get cheap perfume and body odor all mixed together on a hot, hot day, you not only want to faint, you

almost throw up, and the...Ok, like coffee break time
OK, the guys as I say, they would take their coffee
breaks whenever they felt like it or their hoo-hoo
breaks and they weren't too, they didn't crack down
them much like they crack down on the women. If
the women wanted to go to the bathroom between...when
it wasn't on a coffee break, there'd be a supervisor
standing down at the end of the stairs. Oh, and don't
let me, I must tell you this. They had the mirrors and
I, dummy, I didn't know what the mirrors were. I
thought gee, that's a strange place to have a mirror,
They were up over the seats and I knew what they meant
on the floor, you know, somebody was up there spying
on you, to make sure you weren't walking off with something.
It didn't bother me but it didn't dawn on me until I'd
been there about a month, that these things, you know,
like right in the cubicle where you're at you know,
somebody could be down there spying ..(laughter).. and
I had a fit. They said, 'you must,' I said, I didn't even
think about it, and I didn't. But as soon as I found
out then I started raising Cain. I said, 'oh no, no.'
Everytime I had to go to the bathroom, and I knew we
weren't supposed to do it but I'd do it anyway, I'd
just take a paper towel and tape it over it. And they
said you're not supposed to do that. I said you're
not supposed to be looking at my... when I'm sitting