

Jonnie Rankin: At that time my name, was ^{Ottewell.} I was married to Jack Ottewell, and I had three small children and I was about 25 years old, in 1943 when women started going into the yards, my name was Ottewell at that time. And I went in the shipyards because I needed the money. My husband, ^{and I} were really sort of separating, we had one of those crazy teenage marriages and he didn't make much money, and I ^{desperately} needed a job and that's the first type of jobs that anybody saw for ten years was war, we got into the war industries. I went in with the second group of women that were hired in Burrard drydocks.

Why I entered

Sara Diamond: It was obviously a big change for women to be in those kinds of industries. ^{INSERT} (A) How ^{was it} ~~were they~~ advertised that there were jobs there for women, and how did they do the hiring; was it through the union or ^{through industry?}

(A) Jonnie Rankin: No, we just hired out in the hiring hall, I don't know how. I think they needed our labour power that's all and it wasn't like a women's lib hiring, and so you start working and so they opened up ^{but} and there was quite a lot of controversy from some of the men to work with women, they had a terrible struggle with some of them. But we were hired anyway and we worked through. and there was a woman ^{director,} who was the head of hiring women, did the interviewing and sort of had that department, I can't think of her name. There were 2 of them, but one in particular was quite a nice woman, and we just went in and were interviewed and they put us in different departments where they needed help and I got put in the sheet metal department at first.

Why I entered

Sara Diamond: So, did you kind of go in there because you figured you would make good wages?

Jonnie Rankin: No, there wasn't any choice. About good wages, I made 55 cents an hour and that was the minimum ^{rate} and that was what we were paid. No, we didn't have choice you see, what we had as wages ~~and what didn't...~~ people came from all over, ^(to work in the shipyard) from the prairies, ~~that's why they had Alice's thing in here~~ (picks up book on Marine workers), because it was work.

Sara Diamond: Yeah, and it was after the Depression...

Jonnie Rankin: Yeah! That's what brought it on, when they started producing for war, there was work, suddenly there was all this money for industry after the Depression when nobody worked any place, hardly. No, it's just that I got a chance of getting a job.

Sara: So, how many women were there?

Jonnie Rankin: Oh, I have no idea. ^I Can't remember, there were a lot of us anyways, there must have been a thousand of us in there, it seemed like it.

Sara Diamond: And were the women hired in groups?

Jonnie Rankin: Yeah, we hired ^m through this lady that I was telling you about, we went into a special office, and hired through there. And were assigned to different departments, wherever they ^{needed} took so many women.

Sara Diamond: What kind of training was there? ^{What jobs for women?}

Jonnie Rankin: No training, you just went in, it was like, it was just... if you'd been in the Depression and never worked, and then started raising kids at seventeen like I did, it was an entirely different world believe me (laughs) when I went in the shipyards.

Jonnie Rankin: I didn't know, none of us knew anything, half the men didn't either. We just worked, and I was put out on the water on the the boats right away and my job was with the sheet metal. First I worked with a fellow that was ^{called} Frank, that's his name, he used to be embarassed because my nickname's Jonnie, and we worked below the rivetters and we used to put the cowvents* in. And he was a real old-fashioned sheet metal worker, ^omechanic; very nice old guy and accepted women and was nice, so all the rivetters used to say "Frankie and Jonnie" and he used to die over it, but he was a nice man, and then I got assigned, shifted over to Kenny Sherry, ~~this little fellow that you read about~~, a Cockney. He told me a hundred times that he was born within the sound of the bells, he was a cute little guy ^{but} and he didn't like to work with women; he was really snorty when I came up. And I said, "well, here I am; You can take it or leave it." And so we used to argue all the time about politics...neither one of us knew a damn thing. and then, ^{R.I.} ~~I~~ ^{we'd speed up.} liked Kenny because he was temperamental, ^{it} he was more suitable to me, we'd work hard one time and not hard the next, ~~and he never did~~, he put me on one job...and where it was...at that time it was old fashioned, we had cow vents...that was the ventilation we worked on out on the water and we had to hammer these screens around, ^{the cow vents then} and hammer things around ^{them} 'em, and I couldn't hammer. I hammered my hand and mashed up the screen...I finally threw it across the deck. And he should have fired me, ^{but} and he said, ^{but} and he was an amateur psychologist so he said, "I understand your personality", so he had me all over the yard, burning ^{and on the gitney,} and I was all over the place. He was very nice. Yeah.

work experience

and that's

(4) SISTER ENTERS...

Sara Diamond: One of the questions I had was how the work was organized: was it an apprenticeship structure, like working with one guy?

Jonnie Rankin: No. ^{Most of us} We just were labourers. ^{that were welders} Women did go to training that were welders, you know, but I never went to that one.

They had six weeks training, whatever the training was and a lot of them were welders, they did light welding and they took training.

And I don't remember there was any apprenticeship, but there might have been. I don't think any woman ever was an apprentice; they

might have had boy apprentices because it was so many craft unions and that's their system. But I don't think any women were, ^{app. 10%} but they might have been. ^{apprenticeship system}

Sara Diamond: Was that ^{was?} do you think because they didn't see the women working permanently in the industry?

Jonnie Rankin: Oh, yeah, yeah, they didn't see it. And I was ^(which union?)

in that sheet metal workers union, and they had to bring us in the union and we had to pay a dollar or something, and we had

voice but no vote, in that union, ^{They never had women} in the sheet metal workers union,

and I don't know if they do yet, but we didn't then. ^{* (do ♀ have a vote now?)}

Sara Diamond: How did they explain that to you?

Jonnie Rankin: That was just their rule, we complained about it.

A lot of the workers felt that it was wrong, but that's the rule of that craft union but they never had women, we had voice but

no vote. That's all and some of us thought that we should have

^{some} a voice, or know what's going on, that's an old craft union, you know.

~~Jonnie Rankin~~: And ~~then~~ when I worked with Kenny, we used to
 uh, well, I like Kenny, and ^{sometimes} we played tricks on each other. He
 was a hard worker but he didn't ask anybody to do anything that
 he wouldn't do. ~~and~~..a lot of men would ask you to lift their,
 like you're supposed to be a helper, and lift their 80 lb. tool
 kit. ^{because} I remember, one kid, Johnny something, his name was, he
 was young, he said "Pick it up". I said, "I'm not gonna pick it
 up, I'm not strong enough". And he said, "What're ya workin for?"
 and I said, "You just get a gitney". We had some real fights
 with some of them. Some of those girls tried to lug it, they
 thought they had to, but I was one of the fiery ^{ones} I didn't.
 I just told them off. But Kenny never did that, he never asked
^{anybody} us to do anything that he wouldn't do, and he never asked us to
 do things that we weren't physically capable of. But I was quite
 slim then, and we used to have these long cow vents, those are
 long tubes, they used to shove me down in there and bucked up
 small rivets, they're just little light rivets, with a little
 dolly they put me in, and I'd buck up inside, and then they'd
 haul me out again. So, one time, you know, they ~~had lunch~~, and
 they played a trick on me, everybody ate their lunch, and they
 sat there and threw me a cigarette ^{in the vent} and sat there, and I sat in
 the ^{at} vent all lunch hour yelling at them. So the next day,
 Kenny was ~~always~~ having his damned tea that he ^{always} used to have, so
 I got the welders to weld his lunchkit on the deck and he came
 for his tea ^{at his lunch} and there he sat for his lunch hour ^{it was at} half-hour that
 we had. So, he never left me in there again. ^{But} I got ^{on} a job
 the yard, I had a lady come and live with me, to look after my
 children, a Mrs. Stewart, and that's how I got there, ^{because} she
 had been working in Shaughnessy as a maid and she had a room

*make
 with
 response*

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downstairs and she said, "Jonnie", she got fifty dollars a month and her board. She said, "Jonnie, if you can get a job in the yards, I'll come and live with you ^{for} twenty-five dollars a month", because with me, she was like part of the family. So that's how I could go, and she kept house and looked after my children for me.

*hold
on Jane*

Sara Diamond: Right, ~~cause~~ there was no childcare at all. *then?*

Jonnie Rankin: No, there wasn't. We were the first ones to start it, that was one of the things I wrote about, and the things ~~we~~ ^(where) we got upset about, and the things everyone worried about: what to do with the kids.

Sara Diamond: ~~Can you talk about that?~~ About how ^{did} you organized childcare?

Jonnie Rankin: Well, we didn't organize it, but we tried to. We worked at it, yeah, we worked at it. We were the first at that time, because that was a tremendous problem for us. And sometimes ~~they'd have~~ relatives, and sometimes the kids would just be left, you know, indiscriminately around, or they had to worry about when they came after school, and I was fortunate that I had Mrs. Stewart come, otherwise, I just couldn't have gone. I ~~guess my children,~~ my boys were ~~I guess Greggy was about four,~~ he was in school and I think was ~~about 4, 5 and 6,~~ ⁽⁷⁾ something like that anyways, Denny was in school, so he must have been 6 or 7. But they were little, I had three in a row; I had three by the time I was 21, which I don't recommend for anybody, *never mind* a Depression. ~~But,~~ ^{childcare} that was a big problem, and it was talked about all the time, because women worry all the time.

And I was on a committee, and I don't remember the name of the committee ^{be} cause it was too long ago, but on the committee that started ^{The} Strathcona Day Nursery, that was finally the only one we had in Vancouver ^{at the time} down here on Powell and Cordoba. And that went on for years and years. ~~I don't think we'd achieved that until after the War, it seems to me it was after the War before we actually achieved that one, and~~ ^{Later} there was one in the West End too, and it was in the community centre there, in the West End, and I forget the name of it, I should remember this, it's on the tip of my tongue. There was one there too, a daycare, but I they ~~weren't~~ ^{But they started} until after the War, because we ^{had been} were petitioning the government. We had Dorothy Steeves, and she was a CCF at that time, working with us. I think she was an M.P. She was something anyways.

Sara Diamond: I think, an MLA,

Jonnie Rankin: ~~She worked with us on that.~~ We had many committees, coming and going and petitioning and sending letters and delegations to the city hall and to Victoria to get funded. For a daycare, but we really didn't get it, it was a terrible problem for women. ^{lots of} women had to quit and they badly needed the money.

^{But} They just couldn't leave the children.

Sara Diamond: Alone.

Jonnie Rankin: And it's still a problem, it's almost bigger now because they have started these little daycares all around, and then this government has cut off the funding ^{for them} and the women, it costs ^{work} them more to put the kid in the daycare than go to work, and that was what the original idea was ~~for~~.

It's still a terrible problem. They talk about women having all this independence and careers. Somebody has to raise the kids, and that's it, and you can be ^{as...you can be} brilliant, you still can't let the kid die. And, there's very few men who are gonna take on that role, while the woman works. It's still your main job, and it's always been my main job, I always had to raise kids. But at that time I had Mrs. Stewart, and when she left me, ⁽ towards the end when I was working, I worked as a passergirl ~~too~~, catching rivets at another shipyard ⁽ And I got another lady came and stayed with me, ^{and} a Norwegian lady, ^{and} we called her Bobbi, and she wasn't as good a housekeeper, but she was sweet with the kids. And I didn't care anyways; I was big and strong and could do it all. It didn't matter to me, I could do it at night, and do ^{the} shopping. As long as she was good with the kids I didn't care about anything else. So I was fortunate.

Sara Diamond: It must have been really difficult for women working at that kind of ~~hard job~~, industrial job...

Jonnie Rankin: ^{You know,} I didn't feel tired, ~~it was just like,~~ it was a whole education to me to go in those yards. I was about 25 years old and I'd known nothing but, you know, just going to school or raising children, or struggling in a depression. And I had already a lot of feelings, you know, about society. You don't live like that, ^{without anything} by 25 I had a good idea that something was wrong someplace, and I...I was pretty left, too left, left-left you know because I hadn't related anything. When I went in the yards, it was just a whole total education to me because I had so many men talking to me about the struggles, the old Wobblies talked to me, then the organizers that were working and those that had

children

work at that

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helped organize the union, they started forming a union. And right at the very first the Marineworkers were trying to form a Federation and I got the idea of the CIO and industrial unions, and the importance of it. ~~And I just, it was that,~~ In those two years I got more of an education than you could get in three colleges or universities, and understanding society, and understanding people. And so many people came from every place in those yards, and boats were coming in and out. They even had the flat tops, when I was working...I got yellow jaundice out there. I had to quit for three months and then when I went back; I went in as a passer-girl in North Van ship repairs. The passergirl's the one that stands up on the siding and catches the hot rivets in a little cone, and they're big rivets, And she works with a bucker on one side, the rivetter works on the other side, and you've got to catch ^{her} them and feed the bucker. And, I worked on those flat decks, they made those great big flat decks, they made those great big flat decks for the aircraft, and they used to send them, they made those great big flat decks for the bombers, for the aircraft. And the British sailors were afraid to fly them back because they were all welded in the Kaiser shipyards and they split in two in the North Sea. And they wouldn't go down below deck, so they finally brought them in, into us in Vancouver, and we would burn them out and then rivet ^{the} ~~them,~~ ^{rivet} the decks and I worked on those, underneath the deck, and the riveters were on top, we were underneath. But I worked on those, And I met a lot of the British sailors that came to sail them across and they were really good fellows, a lot of them are merchant navy.

And they had been through bombings and different things that had happened in England and going across the seas and in those convoys, you know. A lot of them used to come up to my house because they needed a home and they all loved my kids; I had all those kids. And they are homesick for people that had kids. And so I used to know a lot of them.

Sara Diamond: You talked about getting an education in the shipyards, did the guys talk to the women a lot?

Jonnie Rankin: All the time. And we were in there, as soon as we went in we were accepted and pals. It was an education to them

too. The ones that fought against it, the most like my little Kenny Sherry, when I got yellow jaundice and I had to leave

Kenny cause I was quite sick, I was practically orange

When I finally

because left, I didn't know what was wrong with me. And, I said, *Well, I'm going to quit."* And *he* had tears in his eyes, *And I said,* "now look *at* Sherry,

here you were the one that didn't want to work with women and you're crying when I leave." He says, "Well, Jonnie, in a million years you'll never make a mechanic, but you're more fun than anybody, so..." Then I went. No, no. We were very much accepted after they got used to the idea and they liked to work with women, and everybody learned something; it was an education.

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And ~~mostly~~ *because* women, they learned to, you see ~~most~~ *let us* women had to, ~~were~~ *you* so dependent all your life on a man's salary. It was a tremendous thing to earn your own money. And a lot of marriages, ~~some~~ broke up over it, because she wasn't going to go back and ask any more, ~~and~~ other ones, ~~a lot of them,~~ were better because the man understood and ~~her~~ more ~~as~~ a partner, so it was actually, more than theory, at that time, besides being unemployed, men really controlled the purse strings and most

*no more
break-up*

families and some women really had to beg for their cash; I did. ^{that was part of my problem.}
I was supposed to be begging, I had a husband like that. But you never went back to that. Never. And when we used to get on those old street cars, we used to be filthy dirty. I worked in the deep tanks when I was a rivetter and I was slimey. I used to hang off the back of the streetcar, ^{he} wouldn't even let me sit down on it. He'd say, "I can't understand why you like to do this!" and they couldn't understand that besides earning the money we were sort of buying back our self-respect. And that's something none of those men really understood, and I don't think they understand it today.

Sara Diamond:—On yeah, I don't either.

Jonnie Rankin: I don't. No, and I didn't mind how dirty it was and how rough it was. I just felt great. ^{As all staging. The rivetter I was working with was up the shell-} And when I first was a passergirl going up that shell, ^{my first day} and they shoved this bucket in my hand and started throwing hot rivets at me, I was just terrified, absolutely terrified and I saw everybody else doing it and I thought "Oh God, you know I'll never make this", ^{* "Oh God" saying "I'll never make this"} And the heaterboy, they pitched (with 2 tongs), they pitched the rivets, and some of them are so good that they can lay them in that bucket, right up, I don't know how many feet, as high as this house, you know, I don't know how many feet or anything; ^{work report} but it was high. This kid starts throwing to my face to scare me, and he sure did, and he scraped my cheek, ^{with this hot rivet,} and I was down that ladder and after him, I was gonna kill him, you know, I thought I was scarred for life. And he ran, and I was ^{and} everybody... Anyways, they took me to the first-aid and ^{he} said, "no, it's a surface burn, it will go away," so that kid kept out of my way for a long time, and then the rivetter

that I was working with said, "Jonnie, if you can't go up there don't worry about it because a lot of people can't and we'll get another job for you in the yard", and he says, "You try it, but.. if you're nervous, don't do it". Well, I went up and I was terrified, but I did it I just couldn't (face everybody and go down again.)
 I stood it out and hung on to the bucket, ^{because} you work with a bucket, and the next day I went up and I felt a little better and all of a sudden I wasn't afraid at all. And the bucket showed me how to catch, how to move my bucket, and I got so fast at it and so good at it that I was one of the first called when I walked in the yard, and that was the highest egoism I ever had, I would work any place. But I did a wrong thing too there you see, how you learn! I used to like to work fast, and sometimes you'd work 2 passers and sometimes ^{another} passer wouldn't show up, and I'd say, "Oh I'll do it, I can do it," ["]because I was pretty fast, and I worked two passers, and then, they had this big thing going on, which at that time I didn't understand at all. They used to work for piecework, the rivetters gangs, the whole gang worked that way. Well the head guy, if he was in favour or he got the job, he'd get the whole surface, ^{then} than some other person...and he'd make quite a bit of money. And then some other person would do the pick-up, that's everything that's missed, and they'd maybe do 50 rivets and he'd do 5000 or something, so they wanted to put it on wages, and not piece work, and I never did understand about piecework, but I went to the union. That was my first union meeting, I was at the Marine and Boilermakers Union, at that time, I'd changed unions and we could vote, in that union, I had a vote.

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And, it was a much more progressive union, and not a craft union. And so I went to vote for piece work because I wanted to work fast up the shell, but boy, I tell you, I sat through the meeting, it was a Saturday and Sunday, and I went back on Sunday and I listened and I had a real education because some of those fellows that worked on heavy construction and had bad arms they told about piece work, they told about the profits ^{that} the company made out of you, they told about everything, and then I went out and I fought against piecework ever since, Because I didn't know, but I went to all the meetings, and I sat right through them and listened and I had a real education on.. ^{they} told how they formed the union, the basis of the union, and how they fought for and how hard they worked to keep this union and how they were fighting against piece work and contract work of any kind, and that we should have part of the profit of the whole, and not cut each other. And so on, and so on. So I don't know, in 2 days I probably learned more than I'd learned in 20 years, someplace else. So I went out and fought hard against piecework, and that's why I'm sorry they lost the Main Deck ^{*} because at that time there was a lot written in the Main Deck about it, we were having a real struggle. And we never did win it completely, because there were so many small craft unions. It was a series of small craft unions at that time...Machinists, this that everything, every department was a different union. And they tried to form a Federation and I don't think they ever really made it. But it should have been.

Sara Diamond: How did you move from one union to another?

Handwritten notes:
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Jonnie Rankin: [Oh, I just transferred, they always transferred you.] You had to be a member of the union to work. And at that time you didn't stand in line, they needed your labour, so you automatically signed in on whichever union was in the department you were working in. They had to take you.

[Sara Diamond: In that period of time during the War there were some real struggles going on between different unions, in particular the labour federation, the CCL and the Boilermakers. Were you involved in any of that?]

Jonnie Rankin: [I wasn't involved personally, but] I was involved in talking about it and reading about it and arguing about it, because the Boilermakers Union wanted to form a Federation, the question of industrial unions against craft unions. And at that time the dream was to industrialize, like the CIO was at that time before they affiliated, - from the girls in the office, down to the rivetter. ^{should} have been one industrial union, instead of all those little craft unions. Some of those were old, old union, ^{lets} and they felt that [they were...] it was hurting their jurisdiction, [and they had some things on their side too, that it was an industry that they were working within, so it was quite complicated, and I don't remember all the ins and outs of their discussion now, I don't know how I can, it was 35 years ago.] But, oh yeah, we talked about it, and we argued this way and that way, and for the first time started thinking about it for the first time in our life, [you know, but I certainly wasn't involved ever,] I was never a shop steward, I just worked and had my little column and [was,] I just loved working in the shipyards because I met everybody and ~~for~~ me it was a release from being almost

servitude to a marriage which was no good and too young and ready to go.

Sara Diamond: What were the other women like who worked there?

Were most of them in the same position as you: they came into the yards needing money and they...

Jonnie Rankin: Yeah, that's it, most people worked because they needed a job, and there might have been a few, but mostly they were just people, and they were from all over. You know, people could start getting their stove fixed. I fixed my kitchen.

domestic work

I lived in this awful kitchen with the clothes dripping over my head, and I finally got enough money to remodel my kitchen and I talked about this damn kitchen every day, and we used to have coffee in the Sugar Bowl, a little place in North Vancouver. And every day I bored everybody to death about this kitchen. Thank God this kitchen that I was rebuilding and I had some money, and even on those wages in those days, it was a wage, I know one fella ^{who} was an oldtime leftwinger, called me bourgeois. I didn't even know what bourgeois meant but I didn't like the sound of it. *So I looked it up*

Sara Diamond: Because you were fixing your kitchen?

Jonnie Rankin: Because I was fixing my kitchen. And I really went after him, I said, "I work for this money, I live in that kitchen and I cook and I have a right to a nice kitchen. and then he was always telling me about, this is a funny thing, about the Soviet women. The Soviet woman as far as he was concerned was always in love with a tank as far as I could see. The Soviet women this, and the Soviet women that. And ~~I used to put,~~ we used to wear these awful overalls, and so I used to put a big ribbon over the top of my hat, because it was more feminine, and so he used

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to call me frivolous because I wore this ribbon, bow, on my hat,
And to sort of doll up this overall a little bit, and I was only
25 years old, and I didn't feel like any man just because I was
working. So anyways, he was always telling me about Soviet women
fighting on the Front, which they did, and organizing the factories and
everything else, but they were never frivolous according to him.

Sara Diamond: They did not wear ribbons on their hats.

Jonnie Rankin: No, no, no. No, no. They were much more dedicated
than I was. And they were...and kitchens were immaterial. So
one day, we were all standing there and they bring in a Soviet
ship. They had dug this thing up from out of the North Sea, and
the whole crew was bringing it in, there was a lot of women on this
boat. And we were, I guess we were maybe six or eight feet apart.
We were all hanging onto the decks staring at each other. We're
on our side and they're on their side. Everybody's staring at
each other and all of a sudden the women would come up and they'd
all have these fancy kerchiefs, suddenly putting on their hair
and I said, "Do you notice the fancy kerchiefs comin' up on deck
on women's hair?" ^{And I looked to Ada and} I said, "Maybe they aren't so much in love with
the tanks after all." I said, "I just couldn't believe, I don't
care where they come from," that...that ship was there, that was
really interesting, because that ship was there quite awhile,
they had to dredge her out and so on, And they had children on
it, a lot of little children on it. And when I was down in the
ladies' toilet I used to go punch in and finish fixing my hair
and dressing. ^(Laughs.) And, I was taking pin curls out of my hair, with
bobbie pins, and this woman was there, about 4 or 5 of this
Soviet crew were down there and they were watching me and they
kind of had perms but they looked frizzy; they weren't set.

domestic work journal

So she asked me, this woman knew a few words of English, and I said, "Bobbie pin", and I showed her the one curl I knew how to make. So we went at lunchtime and I was giving them lessons on the pincurl, and it turned out that this woman was the doctor on the ship. She learned English quite well and I used to talk to her a lot about things, and I asked her one day about the children, and she said you know, it was it '43 or '44 at that time, in there, and she said that there were so many bombings that they just had to pick up the children, the orphans, and put them on farms, or behind the Urals, or on boats, or anywhere where they could keep them until they could *have* places for them, they just...they just picked up the kids and put them *anywhere they could be looked after and hope they would get them* through the convoys on the boats and so on. They had a school there, she was a really fine woman, and she learned English pretty well in the time she was there. And we got quite friendly with them, back and forth, with our boats so close.

I forgot to say when I was
JR. *one* thing *^* talking about piecework. When I used to work fast *finding they* thought I was so good, *when* the two passers *didn't* show, *I'd say, "oh, I'll do it, I'll do it!"* After I went to that meeting I never worked two passer, one passer again. I sat down. I said you get two passers. I learned that it was a union deal not just the fact that I could, you know, I hadn't thought of it before. But I never did that again. I sat there until they got two passers and I learned not to do that.

piecework

SD: It was a way for them to institute speed up ...

JR: That's right. That's right. That's all I was doing. And I didn't realize it because I could say "oh, I'll do it." But I learned to sit there and demand and so you learn as you go.

[SD: So that was like a question of union consciousness. Were the unions and the guys I guess really concerned with insuring that the women had that kind of consciousness.

JR: Well all the men didn't because *some of them* had to get it to, you know. But *concerned with involving P.* the leadership in the Boilermakers was. Not in the Sheetmetal Workers at all. They just had to put up with this. *women.* But in the Boilermakers Union and in any progressive unions they certainly were interested in political education [and that's why I'm sorry they lost the copies of] the Main Deck [because that] was full of political education, you know, [it was geared] and so, [yeah] there was a lot of concern. And a lot of *them* too *when they* said, "Don't try to hold our wages down, *it came*

women

and that paper and wrote that up ^{too} and explained and a lot of men took the position, not all of them, because lots figured, you know, when you're home you're going to look after the kids, and... but equal pay for equal work, which is still going, That's 35 years, I think that was the beginning of it at that period although I think in history it was a long long time before with women in ^{the} sweatshops. And it's still going on. [But equal pay only,] all they did was cut the men's wages, if they didn't give us the same and some got it through their heads, equal pay for equal work. [And that's still a problem. That's not finished with.] But we had a lot to say about that, that they gave us less and all it did was cut the men's wages if they could hire us for less. And a lot of men began to realize that right within the craft union, right within the Sheet-Metal Workers Union as a matter of fact, they began to see that. Even the most conservative began to see that.

[SD: What kind of role did the stewards play? Were they really important in terms of...]

JR: The shop steward is the most important key figure in any union. And they weren't all good. They're just people. Some of them were excellent, some of them just collected dues, it depended on the person and their political understanding. But some were excellent and alot of the women were good, you know. [I can't even think of their names but, they, you know, just even remember their faces; but it just depended on the person.] But actually the shop steward is one of the most key, because this is the direct

-equal pay

shop stewards

contact with the working people. This is the person that helps with the negotiations, that takes the immediate problem to the union and still is one of the key people. The shop steward shouldn't be just a dues collector but they often are, [you know,] they often are. But any problems that arise, ^{or} any infringement on union or anything else go through the shop steward. He or she is the first to find it out and to negotiate. It's a very important union job.

[SD: They were elected in the Boilermakers and the other unions, weren't they?]

JR: The shop steward is elected, I believe through the union, off the floor. [But I'm not sure how they did it because I never was one. But it seems to me they were.]

SD: Were there many women stewards?]

JR: There were quite a few. ^{♀ stewards.} [Yeah.]

[SD: Did they deal primarily with women?]

JR: I think they just dealt with women. [I'm not sure but I think so.] I think they dealt with women because [we were still sort of,] we were hired out of a different hall with a woman leader, [and I think that they dealt..] when I talked to them it was always women they dealt with so I think they dealt with women. [But] I'm not sure but I think so.

SD: Did the union generally deal with women and women's issues separately from other members of the union? How did women get integrated into the union?

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JR: Oh, they had to be in the union. You had to join.

SD: Right. Because it was a closed shop.

JR: Yeah. And in the Boilermakers you had right of voice and vote not just voice and so you participated much more freely and fully and had much more impact. You're pretty equal in a union like that. But in the craft unions, I don't think, I think you just took your body there. Most of them didn't even go to them.

SD: How did the women react to that?

JR: Well, it all depended on the person. Just like men. Some women just joined the union because they had to and they never thought of it at all passed that and other women began to understand like I did. So I guess it just depended on the person. There were a lot of active women in the union.

SD: There were eh?

JR: Yeah. Very active. And there was some to do, I remember when I was in the Sheetmetal Workers, when I didn't know anything about dress and I can't remember what the issue was. This woman named Bonnie was our shop steward and I know I didn't understand what she was getting at, I was only in just a few months, and it was something to do with out dress and I can't remember but I think it had to do with not just safety measures because that was all-over safety measures; you had to wear your hard hat and your hair bound in a bandana so it didn't get caught in a machine or

indust. unionism

*W/low
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catch on fire, because it was dirty and hard work out there. But it had to do with something that they felt infringed upon [and I can't remember what it was; that] we all ~~took~~ a delegation up [and you know I can't remember what the issue was now. But I know] she was a pretty smart and she knew what she was doing. She had some political understanding.

SD: [So there were women who were active in the union and then there were other women as well, as well as the men, who were just sort of there. How did the men relate to the women activists, did they encourage that?

JR: Oh, no, no, no. ^{Once we were in} it was very easy. ^{from the 8.} At the first there was all this grumbling. As soon as we were there, no pretty hard stuff. You know, there maybe the oddball. [No, no,] we were very well accepted and worked nicely together. In fact the men liked working with us.

SD: [One of the questions I asked about the union was because there were sort of all these debates and struggles going on around the CCL and the Boilermakers and so on. And one of the things I wondered ^{is} if maybe ~~some of the men~~ would get upset around the women being able to determine policy and stuff like that if they weren't seen as permanent workers.]

JR: I think that there were men like that argued that, [that] we were all going to go back and do the dishes anyway but in the Boilermakers Union that wasn't any

policy at all in that union. In fact their whole thing was equal pay for equal work. That you only cut your own throat.

[SD: Which is true.

JR: Yeah.

SD: So the issues that the women were concerned with were child care, equal pay for equal work, and were there other central issues, oh piecework, which was a general union concern.

JR: Yea. I don't know how many women were on that, understood it actually, because a lot of men didn't understand it. But it was a union issue but I don't know how many, you know it was dependent upon the person, the understanding of that. It wasn't a big cry of women. It was just a general thing. One of the issues was that we talked about a lot, was after the war, and industry and developing industry and chance for jobs to continue; and a lot of women were concerned with that. Because after all *there's work* now and as I said a lot of women were buying back their self-respect. Some were just able to pay off stuff. A lot of them had made *better* arrangements with their husbands. There were some separations over it. But you had a new status. It was the beginning of the change actually in this decade of being accepted equally in industry; which is still going on. But I mean, it was the beginning of it and we really had a lot of worries about

Women
Post-war

post-war

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work and at that time we thought we were going to build a big merchant fleet. Of course the government sold ours to Panama or whatever they'd got and we don't have one, which is to me absolutely unthinkable with two big coastlines and all our raw materials that we're dishing out, that we don't even have a merchant navy. We also had and I think we even wrote a column once about the secondary industry. How things could be, like the aircraft factories, we could be making other things. And I don't remember all the things that we thought up that we could be doing but we did have some ideas on it. And that was quite a concern, of both men and women actually, was continuation of jobs that weren't just wartime jobs. That we didn't need a war to work. And that was, I know that I wrote, even I wrote my little column on it. And it was a lot of discussion. We used to talk about it a lot because everybody remembered ten or twelve years with no work. And people wanted to feel that there was a continuation of jobs and that we were, and we had the feeling that things would change now, that if they could find all this money for war industry then ^{surely} they could find it for peacetime. And we talked about industrialization of the country and raw materials. We hadn't talked about ecology at that time, that came way after because we hadn't thought about ecology. We were still just worrying about building, you know. So that was the concern of both men and women

post-war

pretty strong, it certainly was with women. ~~Who~~ didn't want to go back and have to beg for their living. And wanted to continue working, and wanted to fight for, wanted daycare and wanted some independence and equality. *post-war*

And it was pretty, alot talked about, amongst the women.

SD: When did they start laying off in the shipyards.

JR: Oh I guess, the end of the war.

SD: So how did that process happen?

JR: I don't...

SD: Who went first?

JR: I guess the women went first you know. Oh yeah, the women would go first when there were lay-offs. And at that time I had quit the shipyards. Before the end of the war I quit the shipyards because I got, started to get this yellow jaundice again and it was hard on me to work and I'd hurt my leg. And it was hard on me to work out there. *lay-offs*

And at that time you were frozen on your jobs too.

SD: What does that mean?

JR: They froze you during the war. When you worked you couldn't go from job to job. You had to go through, well, we were then fighting for unemployment insurance about that time *unemployment insurance*

too. That was one of the issues. That had started a little bit before when everybody got a box of groceries or their kids were put out in camps. But during the war it was one of the big fights through the unions^s and everything, for unemployment insurance and security. In fact, some people *66*

in some places went to jail on picketlines for unemployment

insurance. And we had and I was on some demonstrations or meetings, big meetings on the question of unemployment insurance. And it came up legally some time ^{around} in there, but I don't remember when. That was one of our issues too. Some sort of social security if there wasn't employment.

SD: O.K. So unemployment insurance was one of the big issues. And women were concerned in the industries about losing their jobs. I know you weren't working there, but do you have any sense about what began to happen and how people reacted in the shipyards when the lay-offs started? And whether people at all tried to fight back. Did they mostly fight back around social security?

JR: Yeah. There was alot more,] I don't know precisely how but there was a whole change of attitude. ^{during the war.} They weren't accepting anymore. There was a whole change, ^{it was} both men and women. You know its just, people work and, no there was a whole different attitude in general ^{against} being shoved ^{any more} into a depression with no work. And unions really developed through the war, were able to organize. That's ^{when most} of them got so much strength. They say that poverty builds unions and as a matter of fact I think poverty demoralizes people. They developed more when people felt secure and had ^{some} power. [The unions really developed during that period.] They had that No-Strike Pledge of course that went on. But after the war when they stopped the No-Strike-Pledge-I worked on the strike of the IW of A in 1946. And that was for the forty, was it, the forty-four hour week at that time. And

that was one of the first big strikes after the No-Strike, when they wiped out the No-Strike-Pledge. And when the unions started then to take some form of action against the governments, ^{Against the wage controls} and the right to negotiate, and the right to strike. [They're still at it but because you know, it depends on the pressure, back and forth on the government. But, they withhold their labour power and so on. And that was a big strike. In '46.]

SD: I'd like to ask you about that. I'm going to try and finish off the shipyard stuff first and then ^{maybe} we can talk about that. How did people relate to working in a war industry? Was there and did you feel conflict between wanting to produce for the war and then also defending union rights and fighting around wages and that? Was that an area where...

JR: There was no conflict.] We never thought about it too much that it was just war industry and is this the kind of big business that we should be in or anything. It was a different attitude of that war and it was an anti-fascist war in our mind. It wasn't like the question in Vietnam which has opened up a new idea ^{about} war to the general public. And we didn't understand big industry or monopoly capitalism particularly. We just wanted peace-time jobs, and to industrialize the country. And ^{felt} that if they could supply for war they could supply for peace. But there was no feeling that this was, against the war.

[SD: To fight against piece-work and that kind of thing?

JR: Oh, that came up with the union, piece-work. And that wasn't

in every union. That was the Marine and Boilermakers Union and maybe others but that was the union I was in and that's the one I remember. And most of the craft unions, I don't think, took up such a fight against it. And alot of them were of course against the Federation because they were old, old oldtime craft unions and they didn't feel like incorporating themselves into an industrial union.

*union
federating
in
yards*

SD: So people in the unions and also the shipyard owners and the government didn't attack you for trying to establish union rights within a war industry?

JR: No. Well they did really. There was alot of conflict. But it wasn't direct because there was a No-Strike-Pledge. But there was negotiation and propaganda. But I don't remember, exactly. We didn't have any conflict because there were no strikes, in the first place. During that time you didn't withhold your labour power which is when you start fighting. But they had, certainly worked against it, particularly the shipyard owners. But I don't remember all the different ways.

*union
no-
strike
pledge*

That would have been written up in the Main Deck, but I can't remember now. Certainly it wasn't popular with the shipyard owners.

SD: You talked before about a fight to establish daycare. Was that mostly outside of the framework of the unions?

JR: Oh yeah. That was right outside. The union, the Marine and Boilermakers Union backed us up. I don't know whether

daycare

they did it physically or just morally but I know they did morally. But they didn't participate as I can remember officially. It was mostly women, women's committees. And I forget the names of those committees, you know. They had different committees.

SD: Were those committees-was that a union committee?

JR: No. Oh no. I don't think so. They were just committees on childcare and other womenscommittees. And there were other women that worked in aircraft and other women that just worked, it wasn't necessarily in the shipyards. *childcare*

SD: And were they mostly working women who were involved?

JR: Well, yeah, yeah. And then other women too that understood. And we had other women in it. And I don't remember them all. I just remember going with delegations, and sitting at meetings and discussing alot. But I just can't recall all the things that we did, but it was along, long time. We kept at it and kept at it. It would pop up and then sort of die down and then pop up again and we'd have halls, and we'd send in resolutions to governments and we'd send in documents and we's send in data and we did research and it just seemed to go on and on and on., *on the* the necessity of it, and I think they're still doing it. *document*

SD: Yes, Britain and the United States had daycare programmes during the war.

JR: They had something, but we didn't. And we had some little things that were independent. We started, we had, *just* before the war, and during it, before I worked in the ship-

yards, in the neighbourhood-in an old neighbourhood house-
 some of us got together and we did these little mother's
 daycares in the fifties. [And we got together,] and I
 worked on that, because my littlest boy was still more
 or less a baby, three or something. And I worked on that
 committee. And we ran it ourselves. The mothers would
 hire a teacher, or one would be the teacher and we'd all
 take turns and we rented part of this hall and renovated
 it, but it was like a playschool more. It wasn't a daycare
 so people could work. *Hidbea* two hour morning affair.
 And it was from that that developed a lot of committees.

SD: Did you work before you went into the war industries?

JR: No-I never worked.

SD: So that was your first job?

JR: Yeah-it was my first job and I was *unknowing*. There wasn't
 any work and if there had been I wouldn't have been able
 to. I was seventeen years old when I started having children.

And just eighteen when my boy was born. And I had three at
 twenty-one. And so if there had been I wouldn't have worked.
 And there wasn't any work anyway, nobody worked.

SD: O.K. And so after you left the shipyards you go involved
 with the IWA? Were you working in the wood industry?

JR: No. After I left the shipyards I got a job as a reporter
 on The People. From my column. And this was a left-wing
 paper.

It was the Labour Progressive Party paper. And I had, you

working class
* Cultural activities

see, while I was working in the shipyards I got the idea for a review, because of all the different people. And I couldn't write it. And I went up to this paper. I hadn't met all of these people, but I was reading this paper in the shipyards and it was pretty bright. And I talked with a woman, a girl, named Cynthia Carter who was a writer there, and then there was her boyfriend, who was Freddy Wilmot who was a Black fellow, he wrote poetry. And I got people from the shipyards, one fellow named Stan Randall that was a musician and Kitty Carson was someone else I met and she was a musician. Anyway, Cynthia and Elsie put it together, I thought up the ideas and they were very clever with dialogue. And we put on a review and it was something like Pins and Needles. They say, and I think that Kitty Orchestrated, wrote the music for it, and we had John Goss, this fellow that conducted choir came down and helped us, with the singing. We actually put the damn thing on, in a little hall on Homer Street that has now been torn down a long time ago. And Dorothy Summerset from UBG came down and finally pulled it together. She knew how to produce it. And they say that it was as clever as anything, you know, as Pins and Needles, had we carried it on. And it was all short skits. At that time the United Nations was the big deal. And the big song was the United Nations with flags, something, with flags unfurled to what the hell were the words to that thing... to victory anyway. That was sort of the overall picture, was the United Nations. That was our theme of the whole thing. So I worked on that. And after

I met them and I got sick [] well they said, "Maybe you could be a reporter, and rewrite on the paper." So they published an ad, and I had to go through. I quit the yards when [I was - as I say,] jobs were frozen. So I had to go through the unemployment office and apply for it and go up and interview them. And so that's how I was allowed to change jobs. So I worked on that paper, I worked on that paper for about a year. That was still during the war.

[SD: You were a journalist.

JR: Well, I can't say that I was a journalist. [] I rewrote and covered stuff, I went out and covered things. And sent into the City Hall column. But I covered the Labour Council sometimes and never quite understood what was going on.

SD: Were there women delegates to the Labour Council in that period?

JR: Well there must have been but I can't remember.

SD: Do you remember running into any stuff about women unionists? And stuff going on in other unions or other sectors other than the shipyards?

JR: [No, but] I remember alot of stuff going on with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers because women led that union. And I know those women and they were left-wingers. And that was right during the war or shortly afterwards. And that union was very right-wing in the States and we were affiliated, you know, with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers. You know cause I worked in a restaurant for awhile too. I did alot of little things. I know that when [the delegates] we sent our

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Union

delegates to the States some of them were refused and they had a terrible time -- it was almost gangster-like in the States -- and our delegates came back just terrified.

* They said one woman was shot at, this is in Chicago.

Actually, that union was raided in Vancouver and I don't know exactly how it all went out but I can think of a woman's name for you to see about that, she was an organizer.

I'll think about it, I just saw her a while ago. She was in with the other woman who's dead, but this one woman, May ~~Lenuchek~~ ^{Lenczek} Lenuchek (?) is her name, and she lives in North Vancouver, she's an older lady now but she was an organizer at that time.

SD: That's great.]

JR: Yeah, I'll find her for you. She was an organizer at that time. That union was raided and I think they even came up with guns. When that happened, I was working at the Loggers' Union so it would be about '46. But before that they had long struggles. We were raided and our executive was thrown out. But I don't know how and all that. May could tell you, because she was a union organizer at that time. I was working on the paper, ^{on the progressive paper.} and I know one thing I did, I covered the first trainload of wounded that came back. And I never covered it again, I was never too good at that. And if you want to hear about it I can tell you about that because it's imprinted on my memory forever. Well, we all

went down to the , at the foot of Granville Street, And ^{at the Canadian Pacific.}

they had us in a room down under there, with big pillars.

And they had sort of platforms. The train came in and they had the families of ^{all} the wounded, and they all stood around quietly with quite a bit of dignity. And they started bringing these kids ~~off~~ on stretchers and laying them up on these pillars, and we were then supposed to get our story, from all these kids. I was really almost devastated. I remember one boy, he couldn't of been over 19 years old, and he had ^{reporter} both his legs and one arm off, he was a stump, just a stump.

And he had married. I sort of stood back and watched his face. ^{He was from Italy - he'd been in Italy.} He was frightened; he had a young wife standing there, and he was frightened. There was no way that I could go up and ask him questions, his family was composed and I was weeping behind the pillar. Another reporter that I knew ^{very well,} Ray Gardner, who was working at that time on the Sun, very quietly went to him and he gave me the information that I wrote on this boy. ^(Simma Holt) And there was another reporter, she's very prominent now and I won't say her name, and she was a 17-year-old reporter at that time and she pounced in and she said, "Well, how did you like Italy?" I never forgot her. ^{And I won't mention her name.} And there were others.

I remember there was one boy , he was Australian, he still had rosy cheeks. To me his parents looked old at that time, or elderly, and the mother was quite composed but the father

actually crawled up to talk to him. Anyway, I wrote my story and I never went to watch another train. It still upsets me to watch that, bringing them back and I said, "I can't, I can't go up and intrude on people like that." It brought the war really close to when you see them crutches and the eyes out and the legs off. Before, it was something far away. That was the first time it really, emotionally, hit my gut, what was happening to people, and what are wars for, and what are we fighting for, and so on. Why?

SD: Were a lot of the women who worked in the shipyards during the war married to soldiers?

JR: Quite a lot were. And after the war there was a lot of problems. The kid had been sleeping with the mother for four or five years and one of the big problems that was quite prevalent was how to get the kid out of the bed. Because you've been sleeping with mama you don't like this stranger. And there was really a lot of problems with these men coming back and a four or five-year-old kid who didn't like him and was so used to sleeping with mama and didn't want this stranger around. That was quite a problem. It was very prevalent. And it really caused problems because the mother and father hardly knew each other anymore, never mind this little brat that wasn't gonna have this guy around. It was a very great problem in many cases, it wasn't funny. You really struggled to adjust the man to the kid and the kid to the man and your=

post-war
adjust.
to men

self to the man and move the kid out and it was very hard. A lot of women were just almost torn in two, between what to do. Really, emotionally just stuck, you know. And the man never knew the kid, it may be his, but, you know . . . so, it was a real serious problem. But, of course, my husband wasn't in the army, and I had already left him anyway.

*Conflict
with
men*

SD: I bet there was conflict also around the women working.

JR: There was some conflict with the husbands, quite a lot, I think I wrote a lot of my columns on that. I can't remember, I used to just write what came to my mind, what we were talking about at the sugar bowl, or whatever. But some men they really palled up and divided their money and figured out how they could get the damn house fixed finally, fix the plumbing, and get their teeth fixed and a few other things that's ^{been} sitting around for ten or twelve years. But some men resented their wives' independence, so lots of them ended in complete separation. Oh, yes, because we had gone a step up, we had, and that was it, you don't go back. It worked both ways.

*Working
during
war*

SD: You kept working and you stayed politically involved. Do you know what happened to other women who lost their jobs after the war? Did you stay in touch with any of them?

JR: No, I didn't, because I became much more of a left-winger. And by that time I was pretty dedicated and I've involved myself right there in the left wing ever since. By the time

I got out of the war I was a definite left-winger, and I had real political understanding, and I worked that way. And so from then on I met people, women, who were similar. And after that I don't know what happened to the general public because I worked almost totally, in everything I was ...

Tape 2, Side I.

SD: 1946 and the IWA. You were working in a hiring hall.

JR: No. When that strike started I was working as, I had taken a course in Duffus school as a stenographer, and learned to type. I never took bookkeeping. I took shorthand and learned it and never used it. And I was working for Vern Yaeger (?) in a venetian blind place, and he was struggling along with my shorthand -- I had a little job to learn the trade -- and ¹⁹⁴⁶ when the strike came along Austin Delaney, who'd been the editor of the Main Deck, was put on as a pamphleteer, they had a pamphlet a day on the strikes, and he says--they needed help--and he says, "You find Jonnie, I'm not working with anybody but Jonnie." So they found me.. And I went on and I worked with Austin on the pamphlets, during the strike of '46. We put out a pamphlet a day and ran it through the picket lines and sent it out and soon--- you end up doing everything. Even on the canteens on the picket lines, and so I became heavily involved in that strike in '46. [Then I went down, when they had the march on . . . I was down, now let me see, what's after the strike, and] I went down about that time into the hiring hall. [And I cut out the pamphlets because they had the . . . V. anyway,] ^{1948 or 9 - not then...} at the time of the delegations to Victoria, and we hired the boat, ^{working for IWA} when we marched into Victoria, about ten thousand of them, [I was in the hiring hall already, because I went downstairs, and] I worked in the loggers' hiring hall. The woman who worked

there had quit and so they asked me to go down there. I was the only girl dispatcher from Portland to Alaska, in the hiring hall at the Loggers' Union. At ~~that~~ time of the strike, I was going with them on the delegation and Don Barber who was my boss said, "You'll have to stay here and run the office," and I said, "What for -- everything's closed down," and I've been mad ever since at him. Course he's dead now but I told him when he was alive. So I went down and watched them march onto the boat and ^{you know} it was a wonderful thing, they all walked on quietly, and then the girls, the girls that come from all these mills all over New Westminster and *so on, and* those girls were just ordinary working girls and they walked on that boat singing. There must have been four or five hundred of them and they were singing "You Can't Scare Me I'm Sticking *by* the Union." I was just standing there crying with pride watching those girls walk on that boat. They just lifted the whole thing when those girls walked on that boat singing, you know, *and* militant. They took this boat, they hired the boat, and then they marched from all over the island and came down over the Malahat (and they camped all night, *around* and chanted around the apartment buildings to end that strike and negotiate. It was quite something, that strike. We didn't win everything and afterwards we had long discussions on where we'd gone wrong on the strike, where our negotiations should be, and how to handle the strike

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1946

although we'd done it physically pretty well. They had the boat back and forth to keep all the locals and close the camps down all over. It was quite a period, and it was the first major strike in B.C., after the no-strike clause. And on the questions of the 44-hour week which is very hard in that local because a lot of people were not in ~~in~~ **camps** and they'd just as soon work straight through and come home. It was hard to enforce, that type of **clause, ,** because they sit around for two days. It's a very different type of union.

SD: That was the period when the IWA was essentially still being built?

JR: Oh, they had built it pretty big, it built up during the war quite strong, ^{the IWA} [you know,] and it was a very strong union.

Harold Pritchett ^{who} was the head of the union was at that time ~~elected~~ ^{to} head the whole International. But he was a Communist Party member and they wouldn't let him across the border, so he had to stay in B.C. as president of this local. That union had a radio broadcast every night, **Al Parkin gave it,** called the Greengold broadcast, the Greengold. It was a news broadcast that went on all the time and they had a paper out -- it was pretty militant at that time. And at that time too the wages went right up, it was one of the leaders in gaining wages and conditions, ^{the} conditions in the camps, that was one of the big fights too, the con-

IWA -
CP
Leadership

ditions in the camps. They were pretty lousy, and they at least had to ^{furnish bedding,} have decent food and clothing and machinery.

SD: [There were women who still worked in the mills, then?

JR: Oh yeah, ^{women} they were all over the mills, in the sawmills.

SD: [What kind of work did they do?

JR: Oh god, I don't know,] they worked on all those graders. They didn't sort lumber but there were a lot of things they did. They're still working in the mills,] they're a big labor force in the mills.]

SD: [Did the union hire women as well as men?

JR: Yeah, that union did and] they had union hiring, right through the industry at that time and they had the check-off.] They worked hard to get the check-off but sometimes it back-fired too. With a check-off you've got to be in the union to work but they did stop organizing. People to this day they suffer from it because a lot of kids get in and it's just a job trust to them they don't realize the fight that went on for these conditions. They have no concept of the terrible fights. But you see, when I worked in the hiring hall lots of times in the winter or in the summer, fire-season or winter, I'd sit there and a lot of the old loggers, and I never thought about it at that time, but they told me stories, if I'd just written them down. Stories that I heard from old Wobblies in the early days of organizing in the '30's, when they sneaked into the camps and had to sneak out to

organize and sign up their members, and they'd find sometimes an organizer dead, hanging by those ties in the railroad tracks, and they organized on both sides of the border, there wasn't much difference at that time. And when the camp finishes, when they were still packing everything on their back, the old lumberjack they came from, and their tremendous struggles to organize that union. I listened a lot to stories, they used to tell me a lot of things, what happened in the east. I was listening to history but I didn't really realize it. Then afterwards, ^{when I recognized it} I couldn't remember exactly, just in general the stories. They had a lot of fun with me when I first went down there, too, because I had to write the jobs on the board and I had never been in a logging camp and I got everything backwards. I used to call ~~to~~ slinging ringer and all kinds of things, you know, and nobody told me because that was their entertainment, me making my mistakes. But I got so I could recognize when they came in -- it's funny, you learn people -- I'd know if they were from a falling gang or what they were when they walked in, you get so you know people. I used to handle cash, they used to give me all this money, everybody gave me their money because they'd spend it or get drunk and I had a whole drawerful of all these little envelopes with everybody's money, and it used to worry me to death all this damn money. And then they'd come and get a little

bit of it and I'd mark down what they took and I was always worrying about this money.

[SD: Sounds just like being a credit union.

JR: Oh ^{that} was me, I was just handling the money. They said, "Jonnie, will you hold this so I don't drink it," you know, "you keep the money," I'd keep it. And then when I'd dole out the money to them, never was I insulted by anybody, nobody, they never insulted me by counting that money. Never once. A lot of people said, "Oh, wasn't it rough, working with all those rough men," and I want to tell you it was like being a queen, just like a queen, I was never treated with such respect, or any of the other girls that worked in the union offices. We were treated with such respect. We were union girls and pure as the driven snow. (Laughs) We used to send them out, we had these big jobs and we had the plane fares and all this stuff lined up and I used to go down to the beer parlors to call them out and they say, "Oh, what a terrible thing," It wasn't -- if Don went down he had to fight 'em out. I just got down, I never went inside the beer parlor, I had my list and I'd tell the waiter, to call my list to see if anybody's in there, and I stood outside with my list. I think they called me 'she', "She's out there," and if they were in there they'd come up sheepishly, and whoever else was in there, and I'd give 'em all their instructions and their tickets and get 'em in a

working for L.A.

taxi. They all came out like kids for me, so I had to do it because Don had to go out and fight 'em out of the beer parlor to get 'em. But I did nothing. I just stood outside and held the tickets. And I had my children down there, you know, my little boys were getting bigger, at Christmas they'd come down. They'd all like to draw like kids do, and sometimes the big blackboard would be empty. A lot of these men never had families, they'd never been married, and they'd live in those old rooms when they'd come down, and they were very sentimental about children and families because they . . . most of them were of Scandinavian descent. So they'd sit there and they'd say, "Draw us a mural," and my little boys would draw pictures for them and so on, and then when I'd come to the job season and start erasing the board, they'd all get mad at me. They'd say, "That's our picture!" And I'd say, "Well I have to put the jobs up," I'd start writing it around the pictures, finally I'd erase it, sometimes they'd get really mad at me for erasing out the pictures. And every Christmas, my whole counter would be filled with gifts for my little boys, and I never knew who gave them. They just would appear there, I never knew who gave them. And I'd finally just write a thank-you note on the board. One time, two of my boys got polio, and I was just desperate, and my doctor, I didn't have enough money, and they put my boy in, *that was Kenny,* decided polio that night, and they took him and put him in the hospital, and they had that Sister Kenny treatment, *where* they drained the fluid from

the spine, and then they'd keep them flbating in water so they wouldn't stiffen. And then my other little boy was sick in the morning -- they were never sure whether he had it or not but they took him anyway. That was within twelve hours. And I was pretty frantic, and I didn't know whether they were gonna be all sick, crippled, you never knew. So my doctor put me through this Crippled Children's Fund, and I still support it because they covered me^{on that} except for the doctor's bill. I went in the next day and I saw on Molly's desk a letter going out to all the camps, "Jonnie's boys have polio, she'll need the money," and I knew that they would raise thousands of dollars for me. I went upstairs and on the third or fourth floor there was a little restaurant and they had a collection already of hundreds taken up in that restuarant for me. And I stopped them. I said, "You know I think it's gonna cover the crippled children's hospital." So I stopped the letter and I gave back the money from the restaurant and I said, "But if I need it I'll let you know." So you can't buy that, you know. That was the best job I ever had in my life. It was interesting and I learned a lot and I worked with the union -- that was the time we were struggling so hard for . . . it was a fight for pork chops and political education. And in the union actually pork chops won out, unfortunately, because in the next 25 years you can see that a lot of these kids, you just can't fight for wages without political understanding. We did have it in that union. Anyway, it went out through the Greengold and through the paper. And they still have this type of

education that goes out through the Fisherman's Union paper and a few isolated unions. But at that time, the left wing was in control of the labor council, and then when they had the disaffiliation, because of course they raided the IWA, here, from the International, the International was the right wing, and we had a split and it was quite a leftist split in the IWA, And actually, they should have just let themselves be thrown out and take the membership with them but they formed another union, which was of course impossible with a powerful International. They tried to survive but it didn't work out. But, the union at that time -- and they've never been as good a union since, either -- the men that built that union, and worked all those years and they were the leadership at the time.

SD: You know it's interesting, because the unions in the '40s that were the most politicized and militant were the industrial unions, and those are the unions now which opt for tripartism, and all these *incredibly* sort of collaborational strategies.

JR: Or they're sittin' on their jobs, and they're not moving the membership. In fact the post office and everything else is way ahead of them.

SD: Public sector unions, *CUPE, CUPEW...*

JR: And even CUPE now isn't taking the role they did at the first, cause I know the first organizers at that and it was really militant but now it's taken over with such a lukewarm, *little philosophy*. No, it's gonna be a struggle to bring the unions back, I see that there's a struggle within the

Teamsters, which has always been a terrible job-trust union and a right-wing union. Within the Teamsters there is now a movement, coming through from the bottom to remove the top and that's gonna have to happen in most of these unions. That's why unfortunately it shouldn't have been the pork chops issue, ^{it} shoulda had the political direction, of the role of unions and the *role of...*, the whole political position. And also the power that they have, ^{if} the political power it's used, which they didn't win. So it's a long struggle, sometimes when I hear these kids I think they're starting all over again, and I remember those old boys from the Wobblies and how they organized and how hard and how ^{many} fought and died for the union, and they'll have to start all over from scratch almost. But still, there is an organization now to start with. And I *see its* entirely different and I see the *Teamsters* wondering - *that union has hope if* they want to remove the top, then it'll happen. And it'll certainly have to happen in the CLC, believe me because that's pretty close. And they're too rich.

SD: About the IWA: Did the IWA in the '40's have any position for equal pay and equal work?

JR: Oh, they always were for equal pay for equal work. That was particularly with the women in the saw mills. That came up in the negotiation. Those women had shop stewards, and that was always an issue, and I don't think they always got equal pay for equal work anymore than the Fisherman's Union still do today but it was never negative and it was probably one of

the few unions that did work towards it anyway.

SD: Because it was an industrial union, were the women also who worked in offices organized as the IWA?

JR: No, we were at that time organized in the Office and Professional Workers Union, CIO.

SD: OPIEU then?

JR: Yeah, it's changed, now. And the shipyards, too., but that was the union I belonged to, when I worked there.

It was a very small local here, they had only organized us and a few other people. I know at that time they were considering organizing the banks into it, but they didn't get very far, but I think that this new union, what's it called . . .

SD: SORWUC?

JR: . . . yeah, they're doing this twenty years later, twenty-five years later.

SD: Yeah, they're going to go on strike.

JR: Yeah, well we did start that in '47, but it sort of fell apart. So it's been in the air. And the offices . . . there's very few, there's the union offices organized, and my husband's office. Well, they didn't have much trouble organizing his office so it's no big victory but they really haven't done the job and this SORWUC or whatever you call it, they're better.

They're really out to organize.

This relates to OPIEU in 1947.

SD: SORWUC really tries to do rank and file organizing, they try to set up union committees at every bank local, so instead of the union going in and saying, "We're organizing you," they say, "Yeah, we're here, and we're gonna do some education

but you have to organize yourself, and we'll give you the resources," so it creates a really different attitude.

JR: Yeah. It was a little bit like that in the Hotel and Restaurant Workers when I worked there, still during the war. We had some struggles in there we were working for. At that job I was a busboy, and I had separated from my husband and I had these kids and I was in a terrible state of insecurity. Really incapable of working on the paper anymore, because I had to think and write. I just had to have a job where I didn't think ^{just} slug it out. So I got this job in a restaurant, it was ~~the~~ Fish and Oyster Bar on Granville Street and I was a busboy. My children, they had put 'em in a boarding school, I was in a bad period. We weren't organized, and I started talking about the union with everybody in the women's toilet, and they said, "Oh, well," it's very transient, waitressing. And I talked to so many women, and it really made me quite healthy because I had become very subjective and demoralized at that time. You know, about my kids and everything. And ~~then~~ I saw all these women, they had worse troubles than I had and I had much ^{more} understanding of them, and I'm sittin' there giving everybody else advice. One thing, there's no harm in work, it's a great therapy. I went to work and met everybody else ~~most of them~~ worse off than I was and had the same damn problems with their husbands and kids and insecurity as I did. I certainly didn't feel alone. So I started talking. We were getting this small pay and split shifts, and talking up the union. And they would say, "Well, alright, it's alright for you to say," and this and

that, and they didn't like the organizer that came in, they didn't care for her. So, one time, it was the craziest thing, we had an issue over the pie. We had a baker called Johnie in there who made the pie ^{and we were supposed to pay} and we had to eat certain things ^{and} we were supposed to pay for the pie. Well, I figured I wasn't gonna pay for any pie, ^{So} I took my pie out and I sat down ^{down and they be all watching. I said,} and I sat "Oh, I'm not gonna pay for it, " I'm not gonna pay for this piece of pie, we should have whatever's on the floor not just the dumb food, the fresh tomatoes and the best, particularly with our wages, ["] So we were allowed one meal a day and coffee, which I managed to always eat three because with those wages I couldn't buy anymore. ^{anyways,} So I sat outside and ate this damn pie. And the boss sat ^{right} down and he said, "Well, are you enjoying your lunch," and I said, "It's delicious." He says, "Are you enjoying your pie," and I said, "Yes," He said, "You gonna pay for it?" and I said, "No. I'm not." So they're all kind of ^{looking} around, you know, and he didn't know what to do. So then he came up, ^{then} he brought a lawyer in and he pins on the wall of the women's toilet, the Minimum Wage Act, which was whatever it was at the time, 55¢ an hour or some terrible thing. We were getting a few cents more than that, I forget what it was now, but it wasn't very much. But we were getting ^{they said,} over the minimum wage. So they read the thing and "look, we're already getting over the money, they don't have to pay us any more," and I said, "that's the lowest they can pay you, it doesn't mean they can't pay you any more." And I give em my ^{speech} [^]. So I went to the union, her name was

Emily Watts, that's the one that died, I went to the union, and I said to Emily, "Have you got any copies of the minimum wage act," and she said, "Sure, take as many as you want." So I brought about a hundred down, when I had my split shift and I started handing the dumb things around, I said, "Here's for you, here's for you." Well, they laughed like hell. Here he **brings** along with a lawyer and he puts it up like it's a government declaration and I **come** in a few hours later and hand 'em all the same thing. So I said, "Now what about the union?" So they said, "Allright, join us up." "We'll join, you be the **shop steward**," So I said, "Well, allright," so I signed 'em all up, into the union. **But** it takes three months to ratify it, you know, through Victoria, so anyway I signed up everybody, just over the issue of this damn pie. That's what started it. And me handing them all the same thing as he **importantly** brings the lawyer in, **for** they're scared of lawyers, handing them this thing saying, "its a lot of baloney!" I signed up the whole . . . just about every shift. Then, I was signing 'em up, I had all the forms and I was signing 'em up, and I didn't sign 'em up quietly, **They were all gonna sneak around the toilet -** I just signed 'em up and let 'em **look**, you know. And so one of the bosses, **it wasn't Mr. Geroux**, I forget his name now, he called me up to his office. One of the girls, a busboy, she had gone and negotiated for herself for the same wages as the waitresses, and she did it alone because she needed more money. And I was hollering and I said, "Look, that should be across the board, you can't". . . Well, she said, "You're

not gonna get it," and he gave her a little more, cause he was nervous about all this union business. He was figurin out how to stop me, you see. No, did he call me up or did I go by myself? Oh, no, I went up by myself, that's how it was. So anyway they said, "You can't get anything," and I said, "We'll get it, even if we haven't been ratified or certified, *you've got to...*" and I said, I couldn't explain to them about collective bargaining. So I said, "Allright, this is a dumb job, anyway," you know, who cares about being a busboy? So I went down and I said, "I'm going to go up there and I'm going to negotiate for wages for the busboys across the board for all three shifts," and I said, "If I come down and put my apron on we've got it and if I come down and walk out the door we haven't." So everybody's watching me and I went up there and he was nervous and he said, "You know, Jonnie, you're smart enough to be a waitress," and I said, "Look, I'm smart enough to run this restaurant if I had the money, so are a lot of people." He said, "If I give it to you I'll have to give it to everybody," and I said, "Naturally. That's why I'm here." And everybody was just . . . you could look through the window downstairs and everybody was just ^{stopped,} _^ waiting, and he knew if I walked out, that whole crew would go behind me, because it was sort of dramatic, and they kind of liked me, including the Chinese cooks, and because I called this poor Mary who just did it, sneaked around on herself and the others never thought of it,

some of them were, but they . . . so anyway, it was during the war, so he says, "After the war there's gonna be a lineup and you'll be in that lineup," and I said, "Why, if after the war there's no money you'll be in that lineup too, because who's gonna eat in your restaurant?" And so we had this big fight, he says, "Allright, how much do you want?" so I put it up I said, "I want equal with the waitresses." I said, "I don't care if you put the plates to carry them on clean before or take 'em out dirty," he said, "You can be a waitress, we'll make you a waitress," and I said, "It doesn't make any difference to me, whether I take the plates out full or take 'em back dirty, anyway I don't care, it's just a job." So anyway, I negotiated for someplace around up in there and made him sign it. So I came down and put my apron on, and I went like that (claps). And then *They knew*. I said, "Now that's collective bargaining." That's right, that's when they signed up, right after that, the pie, I forget whether it was *the pie* or this that signed them up anyway, I signed up the whole damn thing. So then, the union, they said, they needed an organizer out at the airport, but you have to work out there, and it's on shifts and they asked me to take it. They said, "We'll make up your wages," but I said, "No, I couldn't, because I *had* my children," I had those little boys and I simply couldn't work, you know an organizer's 24 hours a day. You've got

to go and you've got to work. You can't just walk in from the outside, you've got to work with people, they have to accept you, you have to be a part of somebody. That's why it was in the union, I was a part of ~~them~~. Anyway, I went to San Francisco, my mother lived there and I took my children with me to see my mother who was quite sick, and I worked down there in a restaurant and had to rejoin down there. And I wrote back and we lost it because in that three months, the staff, the turnover changes, you know. [And then when I came back I took a business course at Duffis and what I did, I didn't have any money so I got a job, they let me work, they were pretty nice. And I think I took a three months or six months it wasn't too long, ^{because} I had to do it fast. And I got the job of marking the papers, unfortunately, but what I wanted was a job cleaning the desk cause you're out in a half and I was stuck with all these papers, it took me about two hours. Everybody else who did the cleaning up was out in about half an hour, and they wouldn't give me a clean-up job. Anyway, I took it, worked for Vern Yaeger and it was after that I was called into the IWA office. And after that I worked in the loggers' hiring hall.

SD: So were you involved with the organization of the IWA women's auxiliary at all?

JR: No. That was, I wasn't even in it, because that was wives and workers. I did things with them and attended their

stuff, ⁱⁿ fact I used to do their typing for them, but I wasn't a member of it.

SD: Were the women workers in the auxiliary?

JR: No. Well, they might've been, somebody married to somebody couldn't have been a worker, but actually it was a wives' organization, and a women's auxiliary is very, very important, it's absolutely essential. And it doesn't have the prestige it should have because because in any fight, a man can fight as hard as his wife will fight. If his wife doesn't understand the issue and they got no money and she needs this and she's got kids there, you know, he's gonna have to quit someplace. You can't hold out unless your wife will hold out. And I think ~~that~~ a women's auxiliary is one of the most essential things of any union and it's more than a tea party, and even in the fisherman's union today it's very small when it should be large. And just a few dedicated people, and they're very political, in the fisherman's union, they're political on the resolutions, and they're political on their activities, but they have a hard time organizing those women and actually, I myself think that it shouldn't be left, that the men should help organize them, and any union that has a strong women's auxiliary themen know it in any strike situation or negotiation, how important it is, one of the most valuable parts of the union.

SD: In the IWA they did a lot of work.

JR: At that time it was quite strong, but still never large.

They were highly political and , because of the leadership. ^{If} The leadership was left-wing, the auxiliary will reflect it.

SD: I was reading some stuff about the '30's, and how some of which the unions were predominantly women, asked to be able to pay lower dues, and lower dues to the main labor bodies like the Trade and Labor Council and so on, in order to be able to participate, just because their wages were so low. And I wondered if in any of the unions you were involved with, the women paid different union dues, than the men.

JR: I don't know. I have no idea. I know nothing about it.

SD: In that period of time, which we talked about, which is essentially the '40's, were there women who were really predominant in the labor movement that you can think of?

SD: How were they seen by people?

JR: Well, there were. But not as much as now. I know Emily and May were, from the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, and attended the labor councils, and I know there were other women, too, but they weren't that dominant yet. They were accepted, all right, the ones that were in it, but they weren't that prevalent. In the organizing, in the fisherman's in the IWA, ^{of} course there were women shop stewards and they were thoroughly accepted, and they were ahead of unions,

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it was . . .

(Beagle)

Mickey was one of the first women organizers in the fisherman's union, and she lived in the states during the war and she was a shop steward and worked very strong in the union at that time, in the states. And she's probably one of the most militant trade union leaders there is in this province. She's the one that they sent out into camps and on the boat, they sent her out on all the fishcamps, and she organized it. She just didn't organize women, she organized. And she was a troubleshooter. She could go in places, they sent her on a troubleshooting, sometimes, when no one else could handle it, Mickey could handle it. For heaven's sakes, get an interview from her, she's probably one of the best and the most prominent trade union leaders we have in this province.

SD: Yeah, around four or five different people told me to see her.

JR: Oh, yeah.

SD: Incredible. She's very well-known, and she sort of crops up everywhere.

JR: Well, she's quite modest and she probably thinks she never, oh well, she

SD: Yeah, she also is worried about being taped, and having things misrepresented, which I really understand, people's

fear around that, because she . . .

JR: Well, she actually did things, and she knows all those negotiations and all the fights that fisherman are always in, now they're in the combines Act now, they're trying to smash 'em up, . . .

SD: Yeah, I know people on the Vancouver local executive.

JR: ^{You see,} Gee, my husband is the lawyer for them on that . . .

3628-2 TAPE CONTINUED

Side II:

SD: We were talking about women who were [] prominent in that time. Were there any women (or unions, which which) posed "women's issues"? Things like daycare and equal pay for equal work, particularly, or did women mostly work around general union issues?

JR: Oh, ^{the} women's auxiliaries did, and I think in unions like the fishermen, and so on, they would back resolutions and send resolutions but they didn't really work hard at it. But they weren't against it. But they would certainly in the IWA or Fisherman's Union or any left-wing union it would be on their agenda and the resolution would go and they'd back 'em up but they didn't actually organize it. There was a lot done from the women's auxiliaries on it, too.

SD: Right, like the Housewives Leagues.

JR: Yeah, they did it, and also . . . in fact it's still on in the Fisherman's Union, Auxiliary - know resolution against the recent cutback. in childcare. ?

SD: Was maternity leave an issue at all?

JR: I don't remember. I think it must have been because we put everything we could think of.

SD: And did people do any work around protective legislation? Was that a question when you worked in the shipyards, did women work nightshift?

JR: Oh yeah, worked all shifts.

SD: Was it the norm for most women who were very active in unions to be left-wingers?

JR: Yeah.

SD: Why was this so?

JR: Well, because those women were political enough to understand the issues, and there were a lot of women who would agree with them who didn't belong to anything but they wouldn't have taken the lead in it, so it was usually women with some political understanding or some background that would take the lead.

SD: The women got support for doing that?

JR: Oh yeah. But a lot of women agreed with them, it wasn't like they came on cold. Women who didn't have this sort of background wouldn't think of organizing or bringing it

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forward so it was usually women who were quite highly politicized who would take the lead. They taught me a lot, I followed. (Laughs) Right in.

SD: The last kind of things ~~are~~ ^{are} general stuff: what kind of major changes do you see in the union movement since the second world war? Also, if you think there were major kinds of things ^{that you'd} people learned during that period of time, the war period, and ~~that~~ period of high activity, that are important for people now.

JR: Well, I don't think I'm qualified to talk about the changes. They certainly, the unions have become, the Internationals in particular, have become more right-wing since that time, that's quite obvious. And also that they're considered almost as job-trusts, and they're certainly controlled too much from the top, and I think that's gonna be a struggle within the union eventually, it has to be, there are unions that ~~are~~ aren't . . . like the Fishermen and the Carpenters, the locals, and the so on, but that's my opinion anyway, that they've become sort of monopolies, and the young people in them don't have the understanding of the role or the power ^a trade unions should have, and they certainly don't understand the terrible fight to build them, and I think that there's gonna have to be a change in the trade union movement. Political change.

SD: A lot of educational work.

JR: Yeah.

SD: Around some of the issues like equal pay and equal work
do
and the acceptance of women into the union, you feel that
there was some difference between the attitudes of the
craft unions and the industrial unions?

JR: Well, at that time it was like black and white. I don't
know how it is today cause I'm not around them, but at that
time certainly the craft unions fought against women members
and voting women *in they were pretty close*, but the
industrial unions were always, at that time, anyway, wanted
equal pay for equal work, were the ones that promoted it.
They've kind of joined together since . . .

SD: Now it's hard to distinguish.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

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